

Introduction

Strengthening workers' rights in the Baltic Sea region is a strategic priority for the trade union movement in the Nordic countries and it has been so ever since the Baltic States gained their independence in 1991. Cross-border cooperation is becoming increasingly important for social and economic development in a globalising world where business and political decision-making have long ago transcended national borders. To counterbalance the globalisation of capital and labour markets, trade unions need to work together across national borders. This time, we have chosen to do so by looking at the very foundation of trade union activity, which is the same in all countries of the region and based on international human-rights instruments, such as the ILO conventions.

In the autumn of 2016, the Council of Nordic Trade Unions (NFS) initiated the project *An analysis of the Baltic States: Determining whether any given legislation or practice complies with the ILO Core Conventions and Convention 144 on Tripartite Consultation*. The aim of the project has been to assess the implementation and practice of ILO core Conventions and Convention 144 on Tripartite Consultation in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania and to develop a strategy for strengthening workers' rights in the region. This publication contains all the written reports and analyses produced within the scope of this project.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank our Baltic colleagues for their excellent cooperation throughout the project. The collaboration between Baltic and Nordic trade unions is as vital as ever, it is based on mutual involvement and a commitment to common goals. The project and its subsequent report are only a starting point for further deepening an understanding of the different contexts and realities in our region. It is one way of learning from one another and sharing experiences. The conclusions in the strategy part of the publication present many more options. This is what we will now continue to discuss and develop in our political contexts to find the best way to further our common trade-union goals and ensure a sound development of workers' rights in the Baltic Sea region.

I would like to thank all our colleagues in the Baltic and Nordic trade unions who have participated with input and knowledge, as well as government representatives and employers' organisations in the Baltic States for participating in interviews and sharing their views. I would also like to thank the Baltic members in our project strategy group, Aija Maasikas, Natalja Mickevica, Vaiva Sapetkaite and Kaja Toomsalo and our external authors Markku Sippola, Niklas Bruun and Kari Tapiola for their valuable input and expertise. Special thanks also go to the ILO Bureau for Workers' Activities (ACTRAV), Maria Helena André and Sergejus Glovackas for their contribution and support.

Last but not least, I would like to thank the project steering group – Anna Gustafsson, Jens Erik Ohrt and Maria Häggman – for their dedication and hard work in both developing and implementing the project successfully. They contributed their time and various expertise to ensure a good strategic basis for further discussion regarding the development of workers' rights in the Baltic Sea region. Finally, special thanks go to Maria Häggman in her capacity as project leader. She has coordinated the work and efforts with exemplary dedication and brought forward and highlighted the planning and implementation as well as the analysis and its conclusions with strategic clarity and superb goal awareness.

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