

## **The Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS) organised a workshop to discuss the issue of the “Role of labour unions in Latin America in the process of globalisation”**

### **Introductory remarks**

In his opening remarks **Helmut Wittelsbürger**, Director of the KAS Offices in Chile, presented competing definitions of the concept of “globalisation”. Furthermore, he pointed out that globalisation divides the world into winners and losers. As the latter are often clients of Trade Unions, those organisations tend to be opposed to globalisation. Mr Wittelsbürger underlined that countries in Latin America are reacting differently to globalisation. Chile for instance wholly participates in globalisation whereas other countries are renationalising.

### **First Panel**

#### “Social coherence and social dialogue in Latin America in the process of globalisation”

**Mario Morant**, Chairman for International Affairs at the “Sindicato Argentino de Docentes Privados” (Argentina) rejected the IMF’s definition of globalisation considering it as an one-sided neo-liberal approach. According to Mr Morant, there is an alternative to globalisation. In this context, the role played by domestic economies was highlighted. Moreover, he underlined that workers are strongly affected by globalisation. From a neo-liberal point of view, Trade Unions intervening into the free development of markets are often considered as an obstacle to the functioning of economies. Mr Morant rejected this approach stressing that freedom should be limited by justice. He concluded by stating that the strengthening of Trade Unions and regional co-operation in Latin America should go hand in hand in order to join globalisation without creating asymmetries.

Deputy Leader of the “Colegio de Profesores” (Chile), **Oswaldo Verdugo** explained the role of Trade Unions in Chile. Under the dictatorship Trade Unions were a crucial driving force of political opposition striving for democratic change. Mr Verdugo stressed that nowadays Chilean workers’ success is closely linked to democracy as human rights for example can only be respected in a democratic system. However, at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century Chilean Trade Unionism faces new challenges. In this context the tensions between a traditional and a modern concept of Trade Unionism as well as the problem of redefining Chilean Trade Unionism were mentioned. Mr Verdugo pointed out that Chilean society as well as the international context is changing rapidly. Therefore, he pleads in favour of a modern Trade Unionism based on the method of negotiation, independent from political parties and open to modern issues such as environmental problems.

In the discussion **José Baiges**, Policy Officer, Latin America, in DG Relex G1 of the European Commission highlighted two elements of the EU’s approach towards Latin America. First, he stated the importance of social cohesion within the dialogue between the EU and Latin America. In this context, the problem of social inequalities in Latin America was illustrated. Mr Baiges invited Trade Unions to play a more active role in this part of political dialogue. Second, Mr Baiges underlined the importance of regional integration in Latin America for the EU. From Mr Baiges’ point of view, Latin America should join globalisation through regional integration.

Chairman of the umbrella organisation “Unión de Trabajadores Nacionales” (Chile), **Diego Olivares** as well as **Rodolfo Daer**, Secretary-General at the “Sindicato de Trabajadores Industrias de la Alimentacion” (Argentina) pleaded in favour of a more inclusive globalisation.

Finally, **Gladys Sullon León**, Head of the Organisational Office of the “Sindicato Unitario de Trabajadores en la Educación del Perú” referred to Trade Unionism in Peru as being polarized between those Trade Unions strictly opposed to globalisation and those trying to prepare workers to global competition. Actually, she was worrying that workers in Latin America might not be prepared sufficiently to globalisation.

## **Panel two**

### “Democracy and Neopopulism – Position of the labour unions”

In his opening remarks **Denis Schrey**, Research Associate at the KAS Brussels focussed on the reasons as well as on the consequences of populism in Latin America. According to Mr Schrey, the central point for populism to grow is social exclusion. Furthermore, the problem of weak political institutions and parties was underlined. Concerning the impact of populism on Latin American countries Denis Schrey distinguished between short- and long-term consequences. In a short-term perspective populism may direct the elites’ attention to social problems, thus paving the way for reform. Nevertheless, the long-term consequences of populism may be very negative. The impact populism had on Latin American economies for instance was quite disastrous.

**Victor Déaz Sotomajor**, Secretary-General of the “Sindicato Nacional de Especialistas Aeronáuticos” (Peru) identified people’s disappointment with the the existing systems in Latin America as the main reason for populism. Moreover, he revealed that populists succeed by giving easy answers to complicated issues. Mr Sotomajor also pointed to the emotional elements included in populists’ political messages. Finally, it was highlighted that a majority of Latin American countries are still on the way to democracy.

According to **Diego Olivares** the central reason for populism to grow is the incapacity of the existing system to solve people’s fundamental problems as well as social inequalities in Latin America. In this context, the responsibility of Trade Unions was underlined.

Adviser Latin America of the European Union Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and member of the Euroean Economic and Social Committee (Groupe II), **Juan Moreno** opened the discussion by a critical analyse of populism. He made it clear that populism represents an old phenomena particularly present in Europe during the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Mr Moreno also referred to the heterogeneity of populism in Latin America. Moreover, he focussed on the Trade Unions’ possibilities to counter populism. First, it was stressed that the power of populists is often based on a lack of public services in Latin America. Consequently, Trade Unions should contribute to the strengthening of public services in Latin America in order to fight populism. Second, Mr Moreno underlined that leaders of social movements such as Evo Morales or Hugo Chavez rarely refer to workers. Therefore, according to Mr Moreno, the role of the Latin American Trade Unions should be. to demand more from social movements.

**Rodolfo Daer** defined populism as a deformation of popular democracy. It was stressed that democracy often isn’t popular in Latin America because of the governments’ incapacity to solve peoples’ problems. From this Mr Daer deduced that the EU should continue strengthening democracy in Latin America.