

This biennial report covers the activities of the Centre for Labour Studies at the University of Malta for the period 2007 and 2008. It also provides an opportunity for the reader to reflect on some of the contemporary issues in labour relations as well as on the work of the Centre. As Malta's main research and monitoring agency on industrial and employment relations for European Union institutions, the Centre has continued in its work of reporting the main events that have occurred in the field of Maltese Industrial and Employment Relations throughout the years under review.

Foreword

The Centre's reports are submitted to the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions in Dublin. They provide a critical description and analysis of ongoing and unfolding issues relating to restructuring, mass redundancies and closures of firms, the trade disputes in the transport sector, immigration and the protracted negotiations between government and unions about the water and electricity tariffs announced by the Minister of Finance in October 2008. In addition to these reports, the Centre provides a dispassionate and objective review of developments in the Maltese socio-economic scenario.

The Centre also continues to maintain its high profile in the field of adult education through its string of education programmes intended to benefit the actors involved in the world of work. These programmes have been organised since the inception of the Centre in 1981. The validity of the Centre's four diploma programmes have become firmly and widely acknowledged. So have the seminars and discussion groups which the Centre has been organising for the past 18 years, with the generous support of Friedrich Ebert Stiftung (FES). The focus on these activities in the report is to highlight the Centre's commitment to its ideals as espoused in its mission statement which is reproduced on the back page of this report.

This biennial report is being complemented by five articles written by the academic staff of the Centre. While dwelling on different themes, the articles stress the key point that in dealing with issues in the labour market one has to navigate between the ideals of the past and the bitter realities of the present and maybe even of the future. Some of the key challenges that need to be addressed in the near future are highlighted. The privatization process of the Malta Shipyards is the theme of the first article by Saviour Rizzo. This gives a brief description of the events that unfolded during this process and looks at the challenges ahead for the new operators of this enterprise. The second article by Godfrey Baldacchino traces the origins of the two leading Maltese trade unions - the General Workers' Union (GWU) and the Union Haddiema Maghqudin (UHM) - and invites them to look at the new realities beckoning in the Maltese labour market. The third article, penned by Manwel Debono, provides an evaluation of the available tools needed to forestall the looming skill shortages in the Maltese labour market. In the fourth contribution, Anna Borg argues that the developments in Malta related to gender issues fall short of the targets set by the Lisbon Agenda. In the fifth and final article, Edward Zammit engages in the ongoing debate about the precariousness of the working conditions inherent in most atypical occupations and the implications to the process of social dialogue and the amendments needed to be made to industrial law.

Saviour Rizzo
February 2009