

# **Labour and Environmental Sustainability**

**Literature Review – Hungarian Texts**

by  
**Balázs Rossu**

# agreement!

*A Green Mentality for Collective Bargaining*

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A EU research project led by



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**Agreement – A Green Mentality for Collective Bargaining** aims at investigating how and why collective bargaining can contribute to embed the principle of environmental sustainability into labour relations, without abandoning but reinvigorating the ideals of justice, equality and democracy that justify the traditional and selective goals of the EU social model and collective bargaining regulation. The research project is based on the idea that there is no contradiction between environmental sustainability and the fundamental ideals and functions of labour law and industrial relations. The project covers 6 EU countries: France, Hungary, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain and the UK.

The Agreement project is co-funded by the European Commission, DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, under budget heading VP/2017/004 (Grant Agreement VP/2017/004/0037), Improving expertise in the field of industrial relations.

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## Legal Background

Hungarian legislation has undergone some major changes throughout the previous years which naturally affected the area of sustainability as well. Numerous experts study the new legislation and amendments of older ones still in force which occurred on various fields and branches of law. They do however agree on the fact that the most important of such changes is the Fundamental Law of Hungary<sup>1</sup> replacing the Constitution of the Republic of Hungary<sup>2</sup> in 2011. It is of high importance for a solid legal basis to exist for any and all questions that require some form of deviation from the practices the general public is used to and as such it is especially important on a field as innovative as the utilization of renewable energy sources (bringing with it a possible need for the restructuring of the entire energy sector) and sustainability in general.

According to Section (1) of Article M) of the Foundation(s) of the Fundamental Law of Hungary the economy shall be based on work which creates value, and on freedom of enterprise. Creating value through work in itself may be interpreted in a wide variety of ways but a following provision addresses the issue in a slightly different manner as Article XII states that everyone shall have the right to freely choose his or her work, occupation and to engage in entrepreneurial activities as well as everyone shall be obliged to contribute to the enrichment of the community through his or her work, in accordance with his or her abilities and possibilities. In later Articles the Fundamental Law also sets some major goals for the entire country, including but not limited to the following:

- protecting the living conditions of future generations by making prudent use of our material, intellectual and natural resources; and
- ensuring the protection of the environment.

The Fundamental Law also clearly states that:

- everyone shall have the right to a healthy environment; and also that
- anyone who causes damage to the environment shall be obliged to restore it or to bear the costs of restoration<sup>3</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> 25 April 2011.

<sup>2</sup> Act XX of 1949 on the Constitution of the Republic of Hungary.

<sup>3</sup> J. SÁRI, B. SOMODY, *Alapjogok: Alkotmánytan II*, Osiris Kiadó, Budapest, 2008, 46-47.

It is clearly visible that even the fundamental law makes some very important connections between the freedom of choosing one's job and keeping the importance of preserving the environment in mind<sup>4</sup>.

### Policymaking and Trade Unions

The reason for setting up a clear understanding of the legal provisions and their wording is that currently, political lobby activity became a necessary (if not the most necessary) tool of a trade union (confederation) in order to achieve anything on a wider scale (nationally speaking) according to trade union activists and experts alike. Throughout the years, trade unions (and more importantly their stronger confederations) have become increasingly dependent on the social dialogue institutions of various governments as well as the funding flowing through them and different lobbying opportunities that arise throughout the process. They are aware of the fact that this practice naturally makes the influence of any trade unions involved fragile<sup>5</sup>, but they also know that in the same time this serves as the only gateway (in numerous cases) towards effective work on sectoral level as well as national level<sup>6</sup>.

There are also practices on the field of influencing the public indirectly and actually leading by a good example. Some of the more influential social partners in Hungary, for example the Confederation of Hungarian Employers and Industrialists (MGYOSZ, Business Hungary) apart from engaging in political lobby, commented on the national action plan on both national and European level as well as partnered up with companies supplying green equipment and green products domestically<sup>7</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> Országgyűlés Hivatala (Parliament Office): Irományszám (Document No.): T/2627 Érkezett (Issued): 2011 március 14, available in Hungarian at: <http://www.parlament.hu/irom39/02627/02627.pdf>.

<sup>5</sup> A. SZABÓ-MORVAI, G. BORBÁS, M. VONA, *Szakszervezetek a gazdaságban - A szakszervezetekkel kapcsolatos közgazdasági elméletek és kutatások összegzése*, "A munka világába tartozó érdekképviseletek" című kutatás résztanulmánya, COMPLETEO, Budapest, 2010, 55-58.

<sup>6</sup> L. NEUMANN, *Szakszervezeti dilemmák az ezredforduló után*, in *Közös jövőnk, a szakszervezetek jövője*, c. konferencia kötet, ed. Kozák, László, Szakszervezeti Kiskönyvtár, 2005, Budapest, 46-52 (HU ISSN 1787-1824).

<sup>7</sup> Magyar Gyáripar c. folyóirat, L. évf. 2010. 7. sz. p. 8, available online (in Hungarian) at: <https://www.mgyosz.hu/gyaripar/2010szeptember/tartalom.pdf>.

## Fields of Supporting Scientific Research

In many cases Hungarian experts try to find the answers to practical environmental and economical questions on different fields of science. Countless literature focus on fields such as the chemical study of fuels and the possible effects caused by abandoning them or moving on to alternative ones. Such studies go to the extent of comparing the economic stability in the case of active mining activities being carried out in the country and the case where the need for fossil fuels is no longer a high-priority issue<sup>8</sup>.

Other fields of scientific research include the analyzation of the past on a socio-geographical level. In most cases such researches paint a picture of failure due to the fact that our country might not have the geographical setting required to fully operate in a sustainable manner envisioned by the European Union due to not only the possible lack of natural minerals required<sup>9</sup> but the social and cultural customs taken up by our society throughout history<sup>10</sup>. These include the tendency to overuse resources in a manner proportional to the potential increase in welfare that would arise due to the successful application of policies<sup>11</sup>. This would naturally result in a short-term success only. To counter this, there is not only a need to achieve a paradigm change in the energy sector itself but also in the way of general thinking<sup>12</sup>.

## Effects on Employability

According to various authors, it has become obvious in Hungary during the past few years that environmental protection has become a key sector only by looking at data about GDP growth ratios. Both the investment in technologies that would lead to decreasing the amount of carbon dioxide emission and those required for

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<sup>8</sup> C. GÉVAI, *Nagyon zöld könyv*, Pozsonyi Pagony Kft., Budapest, 2011, 41.

<sup>9</sup> R. DOMJÁNNÉ NYIZSALOVSKAI, L. JUHÁSZ, *Magyarország természetföldrajza*, Mezőgazda Kiadó, Budapest, 2010, 48.

<sup>10</sup> N. PAP, *A területfejlesztés földrajzi alapjai*, Lomart Kiadó, Pécs 2006, 96-102. The same issue is also tackled by another expert listed lower regarding a different issue (I. GYULAI, *A fenntartható fejlődés. Ökológiai Intézet a Fenntartható Fejlődésért Alapítvány*, Miskolc, 1999, 62-67).

<sup>11</sup> M. SIMAI, *Zöldebb lesz-e a világ? A fenntartható fejlődés szerkezeti problémái a XXI. század elején*, Akadémiai Kiadó, Budapest, 2001, 103-112, 120.

<sup>12</sup> E. FEKETE, *Energiáról okosan. Energiahatékonysági tanácsok a mindennapokra*, Magyar Természetvédők Szövetsége, Nyíregyháza, 2009, 49-50.

producing and utilizing renewable energy sources hold a great opportunity for creating new jobs and increasing national employability (not to mention the fact that achieving “energy independence” would greatly boost the economy as a whole). But for this to happen a lot of training is required as we lack trained workforce on this field. The first sector that seems to show incredible growth is sustainable architecture but even there seems to be a need for professional workers. This sector does not seem to be different from any other sector regarding the general competitiveness as there is a demand for highly trained professionals able to adapt to new challenges in a flexible manner<sup>13</sup>.

Some literature argue that understanding or defining the term “green” when it comes to social inclusion or employment still seems to be a major problem. The main reason for this however is not the lack of information available, but the exact opposite. There are too many possible definitions in existence, as most companies, authorities, etc. came up with their own versions focusing on their own unique viewpoints on the matter. Since such definitions and unique viewpoints sometimes serve as basis for policymaking, the danger of overlooking an important factor or falling for the same mistake multiple times may also occur as an undesired result<sup>14</sup>.

According to field experts, for general understanding, the term “green-collar workers” in Hungary are to be understood as people who do work in relation to the green economy and thus play a vital role in creating a sustainable economy and in guaranteeing its constant growth. A green-collar worker is someone who fully supports the green economy and pictures life in a sustainable and environmentally conscious society<sup>15</sup>. This means that to such people it comes naturally to live their everyday lives in a way that is conscious towards their environment and the economy be it at their workplaces or their respective homes. Any goods and resources created through said economy and lifestyle is also

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<sup>13</sup> See V. ÉRI, *A környezettudatos gazdasági átalakulás munkaerőpiaci hatásai, a zöld munkahelyekben rejlő foglalkozási potenciál*, Foglalkozási és Munkaügyi Minisztérium, Budapest, 2010, 50-57.

<sup>14</sup> B.R. ROSSU, *Zöld munkahelyek és az energiaszektor: A megújulók hatása a magyar foglalkoztatásra*, Szeged, 2011, 6-7.

<sup>15</sup> I. GELLÉRTHEGYI, *Az Európai Unió környezetvédelmi szabályozása fejlődésének hatása a hazai környezetvédelmi igazgatás fejlesztésére*, Budapesti Corvinus Egyetem, Közigazgatástudományi Kar, Budapest, 2011, 7.

utilized in a conscious manner, which seems to be the hardest part<sup>16</sup>. For this to happen one must possess a green set of values and an exceptionally high level of collective thinking as well as solidarity<sup>17</sup>.

It has to be noted though that no matter the actual amount, renewable resources alone will never satisfy the entire energy demand of the planet (or a given country for that matter) but their use undoubtedly helps easing the burden posed by carbohydrates (such as natural oil, natural gas and carbon). This also results in the decrease of greenhouse gas emission. In order to even strategize about achieving something on a global scale there is a need to come up with strategies that focus on bringing change to national or even local levels. The principle of subsidiarity shall be observed at all times<sup>18</sup>. This means no less than always trying to solve the problems closest to the place where they arose, leaving the decisions up to the lowest levels of authorities possible<sup>19</sup>. This will not only ensure the inclusion of the actual people affected by the problems but will also eliminate most (bureaucratic) factors which would make the process lengthy and unnecessarily complicated<sup>20</sup>.

In Hungary it has become widely known that investing in wind turbines is one of the fastest growing and most rapidly developing part of industry across Europe. This includes production, installation and sales and in some cases operation and providing maintenance). As a result of rapid development, newer and newer technologies were invented which began to gradually decrease the overall costs relating to wind turbines. This made it one of the biggest employers among all renewable energy utilizing workplaces<sup>21</sup>. It has to be noted though that the level of support the government provides has not always been sufficient. There has been a mandatory acceptance program for more than ten years now but the determined amounts and terms did not take the actual needs into consideration. Changes have been made though and the actual action plan has been set up to meet such needs

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<sup>16</sup> See D. SCHÄFFERNÉ, *Katalin: A környezettudatos fogyasztói magatartás többszintű értelmezése és modellje*, Pécsi Tudományegyetem, Közgazdaságtudományi Kar, Pécs, 2008, 5.

<sup>17</sup> See H. ABAYNÉ, *Enikő Cs. et al: Zöld társadalom, zöld gazdaság, innováció*, Károly Róbert Főiskola, Gyöngyös, 2012, 15.

<sup>18</sup> A. LÁNYI, *Fenntartható társadalom*, L'Harmattan Kiadó, Budapest, 2007, 52.

<sup>19</sup> I. GYULAI, *A fenntartható fejlődés. Ökológiai Intézet a Fenntartható Fejlődésért Alapítvány*, Miskolc, 1999, 26.

<sup>20</sup> "Van hozzá energiánk!" című Greenpeace ismeretterjesztő füzet, Szerk.: B. Stoll, M. Vay, 2010, 10-12.

<sup>21</sup> *Stratégia a magyarországi megújuló energiaforrások felhasználásának növelésére 2008-2020*, Budapest, 2008, 19-21.

while also taking reality into consideration<sup>22</sup>. The area does seem to develop but there will be a limit soon reached where such rapid development will eventually slow down or even stop. Considering the possibilities employment wise the situation does look promising<sup>23</sup>. Utilizing wind energy however is only the second biggest source of renewable energy in Hungary. Levels of using solar and geothermal energy have also been increasing slightly but biomass is still at the top. When comparing data from reports and investigative studies, strangely the numbers regarding wind-, solar-, or geothermal energy, the numbers tend to vary. The only somewhat consistent numbers found are that regarding the use of biomass<sup>24</sup>.

When examining the labour market, many experts immediately place focus on vulnerable participants such as the elderly, young entrants or women in general. Even though there are some cases where companies originally favouring men as their workers have demonstrated a huge shift towards gender neutrality and went as far as employing more women than men, (in some instances even up to a 65:35 gender ratio) even on fields “traditionally” dominated by men (eg. vehicle drivers or even engineers)<sup>25</sup>, according to recent studies, the so-called “glass ceiling” phenomenon exists in Hungary that actually limits the advancement possibilities of female workforce starting from a certain level of hierarchy. This is not uncommon in Europe either. According to the authors, the general situation is not worse in Hungary compared to EU averages except for maybe one field of employment that being politics<sup>26</sup>. Any other field of employment does not seem to be less available for women in Hungary currently. The attention of readers

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<sup>22</sup> T. TÓTH, *A megújuló energiaforrásból származó villamos energia piaci részesedésének növelésére irányuló támogatások Közép-Kelet Európában* (RES-E támogatási rendszere Lengyelországban, Csehországban, Szlovákiában és Magyarországon) Konferencia publikáció, Széchenyi István Egyetem, Európa-tanulmányi Központ, Győr, 2005, 4.

<sup>23</sup> J. BARTHOLY, H. BREUER, I. PIECZKA, R. PONGRÁCZ, K. RADICS, *Megújuló energiaforrások ed. Pieczka Ildikó, Eötvös Loránd Tudományegyetem*, Budapest, 2013, 99-101.

<sup>24</sup> N. KOHLHEB, G. PATAKI, A. PORTELEKI, B. SZABÓ, *A megújuló energiaforrások foglalkoztatási hatásának meghatározása magyarországon*, Negyedik, átdolgozott változat, ESSRG Kft. Budapest, 2009-2010, 32-41.

<sup>25</sup> J. HAJDÚ, B. ROSSU, *Hungarian case study: focus on the renewable energy Center of Hárskút*, in *Final Report Presented to the European Commission on the project called Women in the Renewable Energy Sector (WiRES)*, ADAPT, Modena, 2009-2010, 290-293, available online at: [http://www.bollettinoadapt.it/old/files/document/11145wire\\_report\\_03\\_1.pdf](http://www.bollettinoadapt.it/old/files/document/11145wire_report_03_1.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> A. BETLEN, *A nők munkaerő-piaci integrációja*, in J. BORBÁLA (ed.), *A Magyar Női Érdekérvényesítő Szövetség közpolitikai ajánlásai*, Magyar Női Érdekérvényesítő Szövetség, Budapest, 2016, 19-20.

however is brought to the fact by the author that even though the current level of legislation does provide a satisfactory level of protection against (gender-based) discrimination, there seem to be multiple cases out there that might never be discovered<sup>27</sup>.

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<sup>27</sup> See A. HONECZ, *Esélyegyenlőség a munka világában*, in A. ÁGÓ, E.K. FRISS, *A férfiak és nők közötti jövedelemegyenlőtlenség és nemi szegregáció a mai Magyarországon*, Egyenlő Bánásmód Hatóság, Budapest, 2013, 7.