Seventy years ago, on 18th March 1945, the first unitary trade union was formed on German soil in Aachen, immediately after the liberation by the Allied troops. Hundreds more local and company-based unions followed, all intent on overcoming the ideological-political and social division of the workforce. The organisational concept was controversial, though: central unitary trade union or umbrella organisation with strong individual trade unions, those were the alternatives. The occupying forces were not without influence on the actual development: whereas in the Soviet-occupied zone a central federation was already set up in February 1946 in the shape of the Free Federation of German Trade Unions, the West zone asserted the concept of a decentralised trade union structure. In this way the model of the unitary trade union, implemented in 1949 by the founding of the German Confederation of Trade Unions (DGB), created an umbrella organisation with autonomous individual trade unions; they champion the principle of ideological independence devoid of party politics and are structured in line with the industrial association principle: one firm – one trade union, that was the motto. And the trade union movements that merged in the course of German Unity in 1990 put into practice these principles of the unitary trade union which, though proven effective over decades, still remain a constant task to implement.

The DGB and its trade unions now face major challenges: globalisation and Europeanisation reduce the importance of the nation state as an operating framework for trade union politics; the rapid technological, economic and social change – backed by the activities of the state and employers – is weakening the trade unions as collective players. Strengthening the unitary trade union and wage uniformity along with transnational trade union collaboration is now more important than ever.

Seventy years after the formation of the first unitary trade union in Aachen, the Hans Böckler Foundation and the German Confederation of Trade Unions wish to jointly take stock. In doing so they intend to focus not only on the successes but also the limits and problems of the development since, in order to come up with answers to present-day challenges. They aim to define ways into the future that are not limited to the development in Germany but are geared to the democratic and social shaping of Europe.
Thursday 19th March 2015

18:00 h  Greeting and introduction  
The unitary trade union in Europe  
Dr. Wolfgang Jäger, Director of the Hans Böckler Foundation

18:10 h  Speech  
70 years of the unitary trade union: an historical perspective  
Prof. Dr. Michael Schneider, University of Bonn

18:40 h  Podium 1  
The unitary trade union and its current challenges  
Andrea Nahles, Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs  
Ingo Kramer, President of the Confederation of German Employers’ Associations  
Karl-Josef Laumann, Chairman of the Christian Democratic Employees’ Association (CDA)  
Reiner Hoffmann, Chairman of the DGB

19:30 h  Podium 2  
The unitary trade union in Europe  
Edit Németh, FES Hungary  
Laurent Berger, CFDT France  
Josef Středula, ČMKOS Czech Republic

Chairied by Conny Czymoch, Journalist

20:20 h  Closing remarks  
Conclusion  
Reiner Hoffmann, Chairman of the DGB

20:30 h  Reception

Organizer:  
Hans Böckler Foundation in conjunction with the Confederation of German Trade Unions (DGB)

Venue:  
Kulturbrauerei  
Schönhauer Allee 36  
10435 Berlin

Registration Deadline:  
25th February 2015  
Registration is binding and will be confirmed with arrival details after the registration deadline.

Organization/Registration:  
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Note:  
Conference fees are not charged. The organizer covers the costs for food during the conference. Travel expenses cannot be covered.

Translation:  
The conference languages are German and English. Simultaneous interpretation will be provided.

Arrival:  
For an environmental friendly and inexpensive journey to and from the conference within Germany we recommend the Deutsche Bahn event ticket (“Veranstaltungsticket” from EUR 99.00 for second-class return). You will get more information with the confirmation of registration.

Hans Böckler Stiftung
Fakten für eine faire Arbeitswelt.

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