

1 1997 saw significant political achievements for Europe's employment aspirations. The task for 1998 is to translate the Amsterdam Treaty employment provisions and the Jobs Summit commitments into action to reduce unemployment significantly, raise employment levels and modernise Europe's workforces and workplaces.

The employment strategy agreed at the Jobs Summit is now being translated into national action plans. Their task is to support the efforts of people, companies and workers, to make the processes of job creation, restructuring and skill development work better than before.

It is now for Member States to marshal all necessary forces, not least the Social Partners, to engage with their action plans. Only in partnership can they meet the commitments they made to the Jobs Summit priorities of encouraging enterprise and job creation, and creating a culture of employability, adaptability and equality in working life across the Union.

Allan Larsson
Director General DGV

The main story

Luxembourg Summit: the spotlight on employment

The special Luxembourg Summit, held on 20 and 21 November last, was the first European Council to be devoted exclusively to the issue of employment. Concrete results were obtained with the adoption of a new co-ordinated European strategy for employment based on three elements: guidelines for employment, a method which draws directly on that adopted to achieve economic convergence, and increased dialogue with the European social partners.

The Amsterdam European Council of June 1997 already gave a strong political signal in incorporating a new employment chapter in the Treaty. The Luxembourg European Council then took the initiative through the application by consensus of the principles provided for by the Amsterdam Treaty.

It first defined the guidelines for employment (the commitment) at Union level, including the main thrust of a policy intended to produce a sustained fall in unemployment. It then defined a method which draws directly on that applied to achieve economic convergence. In addition, the European Council awarded a significant role to the social partners in implementing this new co-ordinated European strategy for employment, involving them in the monitoring of that strategy and inviting them to contribute in their particular fields of responsibility.

The undertakings

Four new guidelines for employment were approved.

• Employability

Objective: to prevent long-term unemployment and improve the employability of job-seekers.

Tools:

- all unemployed young people must be given the chance of a new start within six months of becoming unemployed (in the form of training, retraining, work experience, a job, etc.);
- unemployed adults must also be given the chance of a new start within 12 months of becoming unemployed;
- the percentage of unemployed receiving training or benefiting from other active measures must increase from under 10% to 20%;
- the quality of the school system must be improved in order to substantially reduce the drop out rate;
- **the social partners are urgently requested, at their various levels of responsibility and action, to rapidly conclude agreements with a view to increasing opportunities for training and in-company training, work experience and other measures designed to facilitate the ability to return to work.**

Entrepreneurship

Objective: to make it easier to start up and manage companies.

Tools:

- to pay particular attention to significantly reducing the overhead costs and administrative burdens of companies in general and of SMEs in particular; .../...

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- to encourage the development of self-employment;
- to make the most of opportunities to create new jobs;
- to make the taxation system more employment-friendly.

• Adaptability

Objective: to permit flexibility for companies and workers.

Tools:

- the social partners are invited to negotiate at the appropriate levels, that is principally at the sectoral and company level, agreements designed to modernise the organisation of work, including flexible forms of work, in order to make companies more productive and competitive and to achieve the necessary balance between flexibility and job security;

- Member States must modernise their labour laws in order to permit various kinds of contracts, job security and career development;
- Member States must examine the obstacles - and fiscal obstacles in particular - which could discourage investment in human resources and where appropriate provide tax or other incentives in order to promote in-house training.

• Equal opportunities

Objective: to increase employment rates among women and reduce imbalances in the representation of women or men in certain economic sectors or certain occupations.

Tools:

- to reconcile the family and working life;
- to facilitate a return to work.

Method

- The guidelines must be incorporated in the national action plans for employment which will be submitted to the Council and Commission every year.

- These plans will be discussed at the European Council in Cardiff in June 1998.

- The Commission will propose employment guidelines for 1999.

- The Commission and the Council will look at how Member States have transposed these 1997 guidelines into national policy and submit a report to the European Council in Vienna in December 1998.

- The European Council in Vienna (December 1998) will assess the implementation of guidelines by the Member States in 1998 and adopt guidelines for 1999.

- The social partners at all levels will be involved in all stages of this process and contribute to the implementation of the guidelines.

In addition...

- In its conclusions, the European Council of 21 November decided to set up a high-level group of experts to investigate the socio-economic effects of industrial restructuring.

- The guidelines were adopted by the European Social Affairs Council of 15 December 1997, thereby giving the go-ahead to start transposing these guidelines into national legislation.

- A Social Dialogue Summit on 13 November 1997 brought together high-level representatives from UNICE, CEEP and the ETUC. On this occasion, the social partners adopted a joint declaration expressing their support for the Commission's proposals for employment guidelines. At this Summit, the social partners also announced their intention of completing their agreement on part-time work by "looking at the need to initiate further negotiations".

Contact: Michèle Thozet, DGV (299 22 79)

Interprofessional

Adoption of the Part-Time Work Directive

The Directive on part-time work was adopted unanimously by the Social Affairs Council on 15 December 1997. This Directive gives legal force to the framework agreement signed by UNICE, CEEP and the ETUC on 6 June last. The framework agreement aimed to prevent discrimination against part-time workers, to improve the quality of part-time work, to facilitate the development of part-time work on a voluntary basis and, in so doing, to contribute to a flexible organisation of working time.

The Directive on part-time work follows Directive 96/34/EC of 3 June 1996 on parental leave, also based on a framework agreement concluded by UNICE, CEEP and the ETUC on 14 December 1995.

Both Directives have been adopted under the procedure provided for by the Agreement on Social Policy attached to the Treaty through the Protocol on social policy which was incorporated in the Amsterdam Treaty.

Contact: Stefan Olsson, DGV (295 35 69)

Sectors

Banks

■ *The social partners in the banking sector have just drawn up their work programme for 1998.*

At the meeting of the "banks" working party of 10 December last, the social partners (Euro-Fiet, Banking Federation, GBC and GCE) set out their priorities for 1998:

- to draw up a common opinion on the new organisation of work;
- to undertake research into "non-bank" competition;
- to analyse the final report of the banking services study carried out by the consultant Bernard Brunhes.

Contact: Carlos Lopes, DGV (295 21 71)

Wood

■ *On 29 October the European Federation of Building and Woodworkers and the European Confederation of Woodworking Industries signed a joint opinion on sustainable forestry.*

In this opinion they set out concrete proposals to protect forests, not only in tropical regions but also in boreal and temperate regions. They undertake to support actions at three levels: co-operation with the producing countries,

technical support for better forest management, and international co-operation.

The social partners also invite the European Commission to develop a concerted European Union policy and action in this field.

Contact: Manuel Ruiz, DGV (296 22 63)

Footwear

■ *The social partners in this sector are mobilising to combat child labour. To this end, they have just drawn up a charter against child labour.*

This charter, the first version of which was signed in 1995, cites the UN and ILO conventions on child labour, as well as to the European Directive on the protection of young people at work. It calls upon governments to ratify international agreements and to take the necessary measures in order to progressively eradicate child labour.

The social partners are committed to helping implement this charter. In particular, affiliated enterprises must not employ, directly or indirectly, children aged under 15 or below the school-leaving age.

Contact: Ralf Jacob, DGV (299 04 83)

Commerce

■ *The social partners adopted a united front in their reaction to the Commission's Green Paper on commerce, expressing regret at certain shortcomings.*

In their reply addressed to DG XXIII (Enterprise Policy, Distributive Trades, Tourism and Co-operatives), the social partners welcome the Green Paper while at the same time expressing regret at certain shortcomings. They deplore that the Green Paper fails to respond to the new challenges facing the sector, such as the rapid increase in electronic commerce. They regret that the document almost totally fails to deal with the employment questions raised by developments in the European retail and wholesale trade. They also stress the importance of adapting vocational training and education to commercial professions.

Contact: Hilde De Clerck, DGV (296 67 63)

Fishing

■ *The social partners in the fishing sector failed to reach agreement on the Commission's White Paper regarding the sectors excluded from the Working Time Directive.*

It will be remembered that the Council excluded eight sectors (in particular fishing and the various transport industries) from its Working Time Directive (93/104/EC) because it felt these sectors include large numbers of mobile workers. In its White Paper, the Commission seeks solutions to guarantee the same conditions for workers in these excluded sectors while at the same time allowing for sector-specific considerations.

The European Transport Workers Union supported the Commission's option. But *Europêche/Cogeca*, the European employers' organisation, restated its opposition to any Community legislation in this area.

Early in 1998 the Commission will be publishing a document outlining a proposal for a Directive which would apply to the eight excluded sectors. The idea would be to extend the measures laid down in Directive 93/104/EC to non-mobile workers in these sectors, applying four basic principles to all workers (mobile and non-mobile): four weeks' paid holiday, sufficient rest breaks, compulsory medical visits for night workers, and maximum annual working hours.

Contact: Matteo Fornara, DGV (295 41 00)

Postal services

■ *The Joint Committee on Postal Services approved three joint opinions at a plenary meeting on 28 November last.*

The first joint opinion concerns the proposal for a Communication on the application of the rules of competition to the postal sector. The second concerns the studies foreseen by the

At the forefront

The social partners from two sectors, commerce and cleaning, made a direct contribution to preparations for the special Employment Summit of 20 and 21 November 1997.

Cleaning

EFCI and Euro-Fiet have also drawn up a joint contribution. This refers to the conference held on 9 and 10 October 1997 by the social partners on the subject of new sources of jobs in the cleaning sector. EFCI and Euro-Fiet are convinced there is the potential to create a million new jobs in their sector provided the various Member States take the necessary measures to support demand for cleaning services by private individuals. They want to see a reduced VAT rate apply in their sector. They also stress the need for the new jobs to be created in a context of increased professionalism with new national collective agreements in this sector.

Contact: Hilde De Clerck, DGV (296 67 63)

Commerce

EuroCommerce (employers) and Euro-Fiet (trade unions) addressed a joint message to President Santer in connection with the special European Employment Council. In this message, the social partners draw attention to the joint statement on the promotion of employment which they signed on 7 February 1997. EuroCommerce and Euro-Fiet both stress that any significant increase in jobs in Europe will be produced principally in SMEs (95% of commercial enterprises employ fewer than 10 people) and in the services sector.

Contact: Hilde De Clerck, DGV (296 67 63)

Communication for the second stage of the liberalisation of postal services. The third relates to the final report of the study on employment trends in the postal sector.

Contact: Carlos Lopes, DGV (295 21 71).

Public services

■ *The Council of European Municipalities and Regions and the European Federation of Public Service Unions have approved a joint opinion on employment in the public sector.*

In this opinion, the social partners stress the important role of the local and regional authorities in encouraging a spirit of enterprise and promoting employment in the private sector. They restate their desire to see the social partners, at local and regional level, involved in defining national and European employment policies.

Contact: Stefan Olsson, DGV (295 35 69)

Sugar

■ *The European Committee of Sugar Manufacturers and the European Union of Food Workers have given new impetus to social dialogue.*

On 12 November 1997, the two social partners decided to create a joint working structure entitled "European social dialogue in the sugar sector". Initially designed as a structure for information and exchanges, this instrument could develop into a forum for consultation. The social partners are also committed to deepening on-going activities, in particular on

the subjects of vocational training and health and safety in European sugar refineries.

Contact: Manuel Ruiz, DGV (296 22 63)

Telecommunications

A promising framework agreement

In view of the sector's liberalisation on 1 January 1998, the social partners of the Joint Committee on Telecommunications adopted an important framework agreement on working conditions in the telecommunications sector.

This framework agreement, concluded on 20 November last at the plenary meeting of the Joint Committee, lays the foundations for a major working programme in the medium term. It will permit a deepening social dialogue in a number of specific areas, such as teleworking, education and lifelong learning, equal opportunities, flexibility and mobility.

The agreement was formally signed in Brussels on 8 January 1998 by the social partners: IPTT-IC, Eurofedop and representatives of BT, Deutsch Telekom, France Télécom, Belgacom, Ireland Telecom and P&T Luxembourg, Telecom Italia, Portugal Telecom, Telefonica de España. The occasion was marked by an official ceremony attended by Allan Larsson, Director General of DGV, and Odile Quintin, Director of DGV/D.

Contact: Carlos Lopes, DGV (295 21 71)

■ *The Joint Committee on Telecommunications also approved three common opinions at its plenary meeting of 20 November.*

The first common opinion concerns a draft employment initiative for a series of national round-table discussions culminating in a European Round Table. The second is concerned with the Communication on the social and labour market dimension of the information society. The third relates to the Commission's Green Paper on the new organisation of work.

Contact: Carlos Lopes, DGV (295 21 71)

Maritime Transport

■ *After five years of negotiations, the social partners in this sector have concluded an agreement, at working group level, on working time.*

The Working Time Directive concluded in November 1993 (93/104/EC) excludes maritime transport. This is a sector with very particular working conditions: ships operate 24 hours a day, 7 days a week and often in areas far from the home port.

The consensus reached within the working party respects the key principles laid down in the Working Time Directive while at the same time adapting some of the regulations to the practical needs of maritime transport. Members of the working group recommend that this text should be adopted at a plenary meeting of the sector's social partners, the European Community Shipowners Association and the European Union of Transport Workers (FST).

Contact: Koen De Vos, DGV (296 25 90)

Multisectoral

Codes of good conduct

■ *Some fifty representatives of the social partners, governments and NGOs (both US and European) met on 20 February in Brussels to exchange their experiences on codes of conduct in the field of working conditions.*

The Americans presented their Apparel Industry Partnership Agreement concluded between major companies, trade unions and NGOs. The Europeans presented the initiatives of the social partners in a number of sectors: textiles and clothing (see European Social Dialogue no. 2 of November 1997), footwear and commerce.

Contact: Ralf Jacob, DGV (299 04 83)

Other notable events

Central Europe

■ *Over a year ago now, the European Trade Union Confederation - with support from DG V - set up a network of "Trade Union Advisory Committees on European Integration" in each of the Central and Eastern European countries which has applied for EU membership.*

The network co-ordinators met in Brussels in early December for a week's work during which they were able to get up-to-date on the latest developments in European social policy.

In 1997, the ETUC launched many initiatives in Central Europe. One of the most interesting was the meeting in Trieste in late October of trade union members of the five "Inter-regional trade union councils" (among the 37 at present recognised by the ETUC) set up in the border regions between Eastern and Western Europe.

Contact: Olivier Brunet, DGV (295 10 61)

Rumania

■ *A major conference on the "acquis Communautaire" in the field of community social policy was held in Bucharest from 18 to 20 November.*

Four workshops provided the opportunity for Rumanian participants to discuss the subjects of social dialogue, labour law, health and safety at work, and equality between men and women. At a time when Rumania has just decided to set up an Economic and Social Committee, discussions on the contribution of good social dialogue to the major economic and social reforms currently being implemented by the Rumanian Government proved particularly fruitful.

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Outermost regions

■ *A seminar was held in the Azores on 6 and 7 November in order to increase awareness of issues raised by the Structural Funds among trade unionists in the "outermost regions" (Martinique, Guadeloupe, Guyana, Reunion, the Azores, Madeira, the Canary Islands).*

Among other things, the seminar took the example of the Structural Funds as a basis for considering what resources would permit increased social dialogue in the "outermost regions" (whose status was recognised in Article 299 §2 of the Amsterdam Treaty) and allow it to better interlock with European social dialogue. On this occasion participants confirmed their agreement with the contents of a "joint statement" drawn up with the employers' organisations in Las Palmas in June.

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United Kingdom

■ *The West Midlands Employers Organisation held a conference in Birmingham on 5 December intended to raise the profile of European social dialogue among regional decision-makers.*

The West Midlands Employers Organisation is a member of CEEP (European Center of Public Companies), which has just admitted a British section which federates a number of organisations representing the local authorities. The local authorities in the United Kingdom play an essential role as social partners against a background of reviving regionalism.

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Information tools

All on CD-ROM

The full texts of the agreements, joint opinions and recommendations adopted by the social partners in the framework of European social dialogue between 1978 and the middle of last year are available on CD-ROM. Most of these texts are available in three languages (English, French and German) and are classified per theme and per sector. This CD-ROM runs equally well on Macintosh, PC (in a Windows 3.1, Windows 95 or Windows NT environment) and UNIX. It can be ordered free of charge by fax (32-2-299.24.66) from unit V/D/1 of the European Commission, as long as supplies last.

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