

The Social Dialogue is in good health. This is becoming widely recognised, mainly because of our progress in improving the mechanics of the process.

This progress continues, with the help of the new Communication, and its scenarios for the future, and the Hague meeting, which examines these scenarios.

But, just as important is the nuts and bolts work of the European social dialogue, in helping to modernise the workplace, and face the challenge of restructuring, in all its complexity.

We offer, here, some examples, from the vitality of the sectoral social dialogue, to the partnerships developing in fields as diverse as territorial pacts and cooperation with Central and Eastern Europe.

The newsletter will continue to try to do justice to the range and responsibilities of the social dialogue.

Allan Larsson
Director General DGV

INTERPROFESSIONAL

What does the future hold ?

A conference to be held at the Hague will provide a forum to discuss the future of the social dialogue and will give social partners the opportunity to make their final contributions to the second Communication.

As part of the follow-up to the Communication on the development of the Social Dialogue at Community level [COM(96) 448 final - see Newsletter N°0], a conference will take place in the Hague on 28/29 April on the future of the social dialogue.

This forum, organised in conjunction with the Dutch Presidency of the EU, will give an opportunity to social partners to discuss the main issues of concern with regard to the social dialogue, and to make final contributions to the Commission in preparation for the second Communication planned for the end of this year. In preparation for the Forum, a synthesis report on the responses to the Communication has been prepared.

Some 250 participants and observers from all member countries of the EU have been invited, the large majority of them representing trade union and employers' organisations. Other par-

ticipants will include representatives of the Member States governments and of the European institutions, as well as independent experts.

Following the debate at the Forum and, of course, in light of the contributions submitted in response to the Communication, work will begin on drafting the second Communication on the future of the social dialogue. This will set out the Commission's recommendations for developing the social dialogue and, where appropriate, will indicate the Council and Commission decisions required to put them into effect.

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Employment & social affairs



European Commission

High unemployment threatens the very fabric of our society. With a view to combating unemployment, strong action is necessary. President Jacques Santer launched the concept of a Confidence Pact for Employment, designed to unite all the parties concerned. The social partners have responded to the Pact. ETUC, CEEP and UNICE adopted a joint declaration outlining their contribution to the Pact. In this declaration, the three partners give specific proposals concerning the macro-economic framework, the structural funds, lifelong learning and youth employment.

A special edition of Social Dialogue will be dedicated to this joint declaration.

SECTORS

Agriculture

Before the summer, the social partners of the agricultural sector could sign a framework agreement for the improvement of employment in agriculture.

The text of the agreement, issued by a long negotiation, is actually discussed by the Presidium of EFA (the European Federation of Agricultural Workers' Unions) and the Assembly of GEOPA (The Employers' Group of COPA). They will pronounce before the summer on the text. If ratified, the agreement will introduce, for the first time at European level, the classical items of the national collective bargaining: working time, working conditions, flexibility. It could be an excellent precedent for the future of the European social dialogue.

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Construction

The European seminar on health and safety in the construction sector took place on 10 and 11 October 1996 in Estoril (Portugal).

The purpose of the seminar was to take stock of the situation in the light of implementation of the general policy for

preventing occupational risks in line with the Directive covering temporary and mobile work sites (Council Directive 92/57/EC of 24 June 1992). This meeting was attended by representatives of the social partners within the F.E.T.B.B. (European Federation of Building and Wood Workers) and the F.I.E.C. (European Construction Industry Federation), coming from a number of Member States of the European Union and included many experts in the field.

In the communique drawn up at the end of the seminar, the social partners expressed the view that the interchange of skills among those involved in the construction sector is a key factor in bringing about change and helps to foster the development of new policies to protect against and prevent occupational risks.

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FURTHER INFORMATION

Most remote regions

For the first time trade-union organisations from the five most remote regions meet together to discuss their relations within the European Union.

Trade-union organisations from Martinique, Guyana, the Azores, Madeira and the Canary Islands met in las Palmas from 25 to 27 November 1996. For the first time they were able to discuss thoroughly their problems and the relationship between themselves and with the Union. Among their main conclusions they ask for a proper involvement in the appraisal, implementation and follow-up of the European Union programmes. They will seek also to create a stable mechanism to exchange and coordinate information, with the aim of setting up a Trade-union Committee of the most remote regions of the Union. They will, moreover, endeavour to obtain a permanent status for their regions within the Treaty. A future meeting with employers' or-

Commerce

The social partners agree that creation of employment is one of the most important challenges for commerce and distribution.

Today, the social dialogue between Euro-Fiet and EuroCommerce, the social partners in the commerce sector, is increasingly focusing on employment. In March 1995, a special working group on employment was launched and on 7 February 1997, they signed an important agreement to promote employment in their sector. In addition, a major survey on employment creation is underway, supported by the European Commission.

The partners believe that a broad discussion about the employment effects of developments in European commerce should be initiated upon the publication of the Green Paper on Commerce and Distribution. This discussion could be launched, within the framework of the social dialogue, at a major conference to be held in 1998 where measures to protect employment in retail and whole sale

organisations from these regions will, in addition, be geared to intensifying the social dialogue.

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Employers of Central and Eastern Europe

On 30 and 31 January 1997, upon the initiative of Confindustria and with the support of the Commission (DGV), a round table gathered, for the first time, the representatives of six Western European employers' organisations and of nine employers' organisations of Central and Eastern Europe.

A UNICE representative and an expert from the International Labor Office actively participated in the exchange of experiences.

The participants expressed the desire to establish a regular exchange of experiences in the field of industrial relations and vocational training.

The Confederation of Czech employers proposed to organise a second round table next year in Prague.

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trade could be identified. Such measures include initiating and supporting urban renewal projects in European city centres, producing and providing facilities in city centres and urban residential areas for service-oriented retail trade enterprises and increased attention to vocational training and education directed expressly at the specific needs of commerce.

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Electricity

A successful first step - EURELECTRIC - EPSU produce a joint paper on Health and Safety and Training.

This paper, signed in September 1996 in the presence of Mr. Pdraig Flynn, marks a first step towards establishing a dialogue between the two organisations. It lays the groundwork for closer co-

operation and collaboration, and according to Mr. Flynn, is very important for the development of the social dialogue in the electricity sector at European level.

EURELECTRIC and the European Federation of Public Service Union organised two workshops in 1995 where they discussed various health and safety issues and focused on training.

The resulting joint paper sets out general principles as well as specific training issues and is based on national experiences and European Union directives in the field of health and safety. It is not intended to prejudice national practices and legislation.

EURELECTRIC and EPSU believe training is important to sustain the high level of health and safety in the Electricity Supply Industry. They are hopeful that the document will contribute to the ongoing debates between the social partners on this issue.

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Territorial pacts for employment, a good example of partnership.

It is becoming increasingly apparent that employment-oriented policies should be activated at local level, thereby paving the way for the parties involved to work together constructively in combating unemployment and creating jobs, with due regard for the relative assets and requirements of each region.

The concept of territorial pacts for employment was mooted in the communication on "Community structural assistance and employment" adopted in March 1996, which outlines a strategy for utilising the Structural Funds more effectively on the employment front. Without impinging on the framework already in place, the aim is to maximise the potential afforded by existing programmes.

The territorial pacts result from a process of "bottom-up" consultation between the social partners and local authorities, highlighting the partnership dimension. All the partners involved will in fact prepare together general territorial diagnoses of the employment situation, as a prelude to devising the strategies to be implemented on a partnership basis.

With his initiative: "Action for employment in Europe: a Confidence Pact", President Santer stressed the importance of taking action at local level to boost employment. The Pact is giving rise to a first generation of ter-

ritorial pacts. The Florence European Council (21-22 June 1996) subscribed to this approach. The Dublin European Council (13-14 December 1996) welcomed the initiatives relating to the territorial pacts and requested the rapid implementation of the 60 projects proposed.

The social partners (ETUC, UNICE and CEEP), in their joint contribution "Action for Employment in Europe: a Confidence Pact", adopted in Dublin on 29 November 1996, have stated their support for the implementation of this type of initiative.

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Fisheries

The social dialogue in this sector has made progress following the plenary meeting of the Joint Committee on social questions in sea fishing, which took place on 6 February last.

This meeting did, in fact, lead to significant results. On the subject of working time, the Joint Committee decided to create a restricted 'ad hoc' group to examine the possibility of negotiating a specific agreement on working time, for this sector which was excluded from Directive 93/104. The Joint Committee also adopted a Joint Declaration in relation to the 5th North Sea Conference, on the subject of the relationship between the environment and fishing. Furthermore, two other joint opinions were ratified and sent to the relevant services of the European institutions. The first one, drawn up by the safety working group, asked the Commission to take measures to confer greater dignity on inspections related to legal compliance on board vessels, and to guarantee the incomes of fishermen. The social partners feel, in fact, that the fines imposed in certain member states are not proportional to the infringements committed. The second Joint Opinion, drawn up by the vocational training group, highlights the need to harmonise the current arrangements governing maritime training in Union Member States and to define common rules at European level.

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Postal services

During its plenary meeting of 21 November 1996, the Joint Committee on Postal Services adopted four joint opinions.

The first joint opinion concerns the Commission's Communication on the development of social dialogue at community level. It recalls that postal services are a strategic sector with a strong cross-border dimension. It calls for a strengthening of the role of the Joint Committee on Postal Services.

The second joint opinion deals with the Commission's Communication on services of general interest in Europe. The Joint Committee on Postal Services expresses the hope that the Commission submits its proposals concerning the organisation, the functioning and the funding of services of general interest to the

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European Parliament and the Council. The social partners adopted a third joint opinion on the regulatory framework of the postal sector. The opinion tables the usual positions of the social partners defending the universal service and the level of employment in a sector which employs 1,500,000 people. The fourth joint opinion asks the Commission to publish as soon as possible the final report of the study on employment in the postal services and expresses the social partners' reservation concerning the conclusions of the study.

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Public services

On 28 and 29 November 1996 a conference was held on "local and regional Administration and the modernisation of public services".

The conference was organised by the employers' platform of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and the European Public Services Trade-Union Federation (FSESP). Following the opening address of Mr Hywel C. Jones, Deputy Director General of DG V, a number of working meetings were held, focusing on "public service modernisation trends in local and regional administration", "the new social requirements and presence of users in the public services" and "the involvement of employers and trade unions in the modernisation process".

A round table discussion on "public service an employment : choice or conflict between budgets and jobs" also took place during the conference.

Two joint opinions were approved : one dealing with employment, the other addressing the need for "modernisation of public services".

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Railways

A Study Group on the interoperability of railway undertakings recommends criteria regarding access and standards of competence.

The Commission recently received the final two-part report of the Study Group

set up to assess the interoperability of railway undertakings. Key recommendations concern the criteria to be established regarding access to rail infrastructure and interoperability, and the need for standards of competence at EU level. The group, set up by the social partners from the Joint Committee on Railways, concentrated on the impact on drivers and accompanying personnel of the implementation of EU regulations concerning the granting of licenses and freeing of access to national rail infrastructure. These, together with the introduction of high speed networks, will have a major impact on current practises concerning interoperability, which were established bilaterally between national monopoly operators.

The group's research, financially supported by the Commission, included visiting six EU countries and concentrated on the training and aptitude requirements for personnel in interoperability, and the question of how they would be certified.

The social partners are considering extending the work of the group, particularly in relation to the drawing up of standards of competence.

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Telecommunications

At its plenary meeting of 16 December last, the Joint Committee on Telecommunications adopted three joint opinions and three recommendations.

The first opinion dealt with the Commission Communication on the development of the social dialogue. The second opinion covered the contents of universal service, the re-balancing of tariffs and the financing of the universal service. The third opinion concerned the study of "the effects on employment of the liberalisation of the telecommunications sector": a study from which the social partners wish to receive the report as soon as possible.

The first recommendation welcomed the decision of the European Commission to publish a White Paper next year on the convergence between telecommunications and audio-visual. In the second recommendation, the Committee warmly praised the Commission's decision to undertake a major programme of research on the health effects of magnetic radiation, and wished to take charge of

the implementation of this important action plan, based on procedures to be defined. Finally, the third recommendation puts forward certain suggestions on the subject of the 'European Year against Racism and Xenophobia'.

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Textiles

The "Bangemann working group" has been formed to bring the social partners in this sector together in working towards a sectorial employment pact.

The threat of globalisation facing this sector has sparked the creation of three working groups, and the social partners expect the discussions to lead to a sectorial employment pact and a code of conduct as soon as possible.

Following a discussion forum between social partners and governments last June initiated by Mr. Bangemann, three working groups (internal affairs, external affairs and competition) were created to facilitate an interdisciplinary handling of questions.

Meetings were dedicated to: social clause, social label, code of conduct; employment, vocational training, social charges, and clandestine labour. As social affairs will remain to be a topic in the context of the WTO, social partners and the Commission will reflect on the deepening of the survey on social labeling.

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Employment & social affairs

Social Dialogue and Social Rights



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