

Recent developments in European integration have confirmed the principle of a balanced approach based on economic and social considerations. The social partners therefore have a direct role to play, in implementing the Agreement on Social Policy and in co-ordinating employment policies.

This represents a formidable challenge for the social partners who must develop a contractual area which is able to satisfy the needs created by economic and monetary integration. The modernisation of work organisation, the reconciliation of flexibility and security, information and consultation are key elements in this commitment. Progress has been made. But we must go further, and faster. This will be the subject of the mini-summit to be held on 2 June next.

Odile Quintin
Director DGV/D

Multisectoral

Reconciling work and family life: time for the social partners to act...

Women continue to be disadvantaged in many ways, both direct and indirect, in terms of access to employment (recruitment, training, career development and advancement), pay or working conditions, including in the fields of health and safety. These are the principal conclusions of a study recently carried out by the European Commission, in close co-operation with around 20 European social partners.

This study examines the differences and inequalities between men and women when it comes to reconciling work and family life. It highlights widespread horizontal and vertical segregation in all sectors and all Member States, albeit to varying degrees. It also shows that women tend to be concentrated in certain sectors, industries and occupations in which their status and pay are generally lower than those of their male counterparts.

Women continue to bear most of the dual burden of work and domestic responsibilities and reconciling the two continues to be perceived as primarily a "women's issue". Women also continue to be under-represented in decision-making at the political and social partner level.

A global approach must be encouraged in order to promote equality between men and women. There is a need for cultural and political change which, among other things, acknowledges that reconciliation is not just a women's issue. Action must be taken at the level of European and national policy, the European social dialogue, European works councils and collective bargaining in order to

support the making, implementation and monitoring of policy on equal opportunities.

Equal opportunities (and not only in respect of sex) must be placed at the centre of organisational priorities, rather than being perceived as an "add-on". The level of data available on women's working conditions must also be improved in all sectors, and in some in particular.

The Commission's study provides examples of good practice which offer some initial useful indications. But more in-depth research is required to assess in more detail the conditions, obstacles, results and benefits of these good practices.

The Commission's aim in this study was to send a signal to the European social partners to pay more attention to the whole issue of reconciling work and family life. A number of sectors have already responded positively to this appeal. In a future issue we will be reporting on sectoral initiatives taken as a direct result of this study.

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Employment & social affairs



Negotiations

■ *A green light on the one hand, a red light on the other. The social partners have decided to initiate negotiations on fixed-term contracts. But at the same time, there is deadlock on information and consultation at national level.*

The ETUC, UNICE and CEEP have begun joint social dialogue negotiations on fixed-term contracts. This confirms their desire, as stated in the Preamble to the agreement concluded last year on part-time work, to seek agreements on other forms of flexible work. The European Commission welcomes this initiative.

UNICE, on the other hand, has decided not to enter into negotiations on information and consultation at national level. President Jacques Santer and Commissioner Pdraig Flynn expressed their deep disappointment at the news. "This is a serious setback for the social dialogue," President Santer stated, "as it gives the wrong impression of what joint action at European level is all about. The social dialogue does not rule out the possibility of disagreement, but it must continue". For his part, Commissioner Flynn confirmed that, in the absence of a negotiation, he will be presenting the Commission with a proposal for a Directive

on information and consultation of employers at national level.

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Follow-up on the Employment Summit

■ *The 3 February meeting of the Social Dialogue Committee was devoted to the follow-up on the Employment Summit. The Committee has thus become the steering body for contributions by the social partners to the Luxembourg process.*

The Social Dialogue Committee met for the first time in 1998 on 3 February in Brussels. It was devoted to launching the follow-up process to the strategy agreed at the Employment Summit in Luxembourg on 20 and 21 November 1997 (see Newsletter 3). Among other things, the summit had agreed that "the social partners at all levels would be involved at all stages in the process and would contribute to the implementation of the Guidelines".

The social partners present at the meeting expressed their desire to be involved in this process, thereby making the Social Dialogue Committee the effective steering body for their contribution to the dynamic initiated in Luxembourg.

On this occasion, the social partners also adopted a four-point work programme for 1998:

- they will begin negotiations on fixed-term contracts;
- they will be consulted on the activities of the high-level group on industrial change at a seminar on 1 April 1998;
- a seminar on part-time work will be held on 2 June 1998;
- the first meeting of an exploratory group on enlargement will be held during the first half-year.

For the rest, there have been three meetings of the working party on the employment of disabled people since the end of 1997. The selection criteria for projects to be included in the Compendium of Good Practices have now been agreed. The selection is to take place on 6 May 1998.

The next meeting of the Social Dialogue Committee will be on 18 May. It will be devoted to national employment plans designed to implement the Employment Guidelines.

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Open Forum

Bernadette TESCH-SEGOL
Euro-FIET Director in Brussels



In publishing this newsletter, the Commission aimed to facilitate the dissemination of the results of European social dialogue while at the same time promoting the Europe-wide exchange of information and ideas between the social partners. The social dialogue is ultimately a matter for the social partners. It is therefore only logical that this newsletter should offer a vehicle through which these social partners can make known their views. To inaugurate what is to be a regular feature, we hand you over to Bernadette Tesch-Ségol, Brussels director of Euro-FIET.

Optimism born of commitment

"At a time of far-reaching change in Europe, Euro-FIET (1) has the responsibility of helping to build a Europe which places competitiveness and economic activity in their right framework, that is, the framework of improved living and working conditions for all.

We are convinced that the social dialogue will be central to future changes in the labour market. It is in this general context that we place the sectoral social dialogue developed by Euro-FIET which, at present, concerns more than one worker in three.

In this way we want to lay the foundations for solid and significant social relations between the unions and employers at European level. The success recorded to date, in the field of training and employment for example, encourages us to strive for further progress.

To do so, requires daring. It also requires two essential strengths. The first is a vision of the future and an imagination to match. The second is an unflinching commitment which is swayed neither by delays nor possible setbacks along the way.

At its last congress, Euro-FIET confirmed that it has precisely this long-term vision and "opti-

mism born of commitment". We are determined to continue further down the road which we have already largely explored, namely that of a responsible and constructive sectoral social dialogue.

The social dialogue must be concrete and committed. It must lie simultaneously at the heart of the men and women we represent and, at the same time, at the centre of the economic and social debates which determine the future. It is a vast programme.

We naturally need interlocutors who acknowledge their social responsibility and the need to build a democratic, just and balanced democratic society. We are convinced that this is true of the employers' organisations with which we enter into discussion.

The Commission has fortunately reaffirmed the importance and sound basis of our sectoral dialogue. It is up to us to continue to develop it at every level."

(1) Euro-FIET is a European trade union federation which represents workers from the private service sector. Euro-FIET has 6 million members in 135 trade unions in Europe.

Agriculture

■ *The European social partners, EFA and GEOPA, are holding a European Forum on continuing vocational training in agriculture, on 5 and 6 June in Strasbourg.*

As for other sectors, vocational training is a priority for agriculture. The presentation of experiences carried out in the various Member States will help define possible common strategies at Community level.

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Commerce

Eliminating racism

EuroCommerce and Euro-FIET are setting up a social dialogue working party in order to combat all forms of racial discrimination in the commerce sector.

At the end of 1997, EuroCommerce and Euro-FIET adopted an agreement on the fight against racism. In this joint text, the social partners sought to affirm their commitment to the cause and to play an active role in preventing racial discrimination. To this end, they decided to set up a working party within the framework of their social dialogue. This working party will be charged with looking at the means of eliminating racism from the commerce sector. It has already begun its activities.

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■ *A study seminar on electronic commerce was held in Athens on 6 and 7 April last.*

To date, relatively little attention has been paid to the impact of the development of electronic commerce on employment. EuroCommerce and Euro-FIET, the social partners for commerce, have consequently adopted electronic commerce as a priority for action in 1998.

On the initiative of the two social partners, a study has just been carried out by an expert, analysing the principal challenges posed by the development of electronic commerce. The study identifies its impact on employment, including new needs in the field of vocational training. The results of this study will be widely circulated and acted upon in the framework of the social dialogue.

A seminar held on 6 and 7 April in Athens marked a first step. National EuroCommerce and Euro-FIET representatives, experts and Commission representatives came together in

a constructive debate on possible future strategies to be developed in order to meet the major challenges posed by electronic commerce. The follow-up in terms of the social dialogue will no doubt be just as interesting...

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The graphic industry

■ *A study has been launched in order to analyse the major challenges this sector will be facing over the next five years.*

New digital and multi-media technologies represent a major challenge for Europe's graphic industry. They are bringing changes in work organisation and working patterns needed in order to improve competitive performance. They are also having a direct impact on the development of new skills.

In this context, the Commission has initiated a study, the results of which are expected in June 1999. The study will be examining the economic, technological, social and environmental challenges facing the European graphic industry over the next five years. It will also propose strategies for improving its competitiveness and commercial performance. The completed study will provide an essential element of analysis for the social partners in this "young" sectoral social dialogue.

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Fishing

■ *A joint opinion on the need to introduce safety requirements on board fishing vessels - and the smallest vessels in particular - was adopted by the Joint Committee on Sea Fishing at its plenary meeting of 2 February 1998.*

The safety of fishermen and all workers on board fishing vessels is a priority concern in a sector with an accident rate far in excess of the average for other sectors. Many fishing vessels under 15 metres operate in Community waters, yet there are no minimum safety requirements for these vessels at Community level.

The social partners are highlighting this question following a recent Directive which introduces harmonised safety regulations for fishing vessels equal to or more than 24 metres. Their joint opinion is therefore particularly opportune. The Commission, in co-operation with a Swedish institute (SSPA), is at present conducting a study on the need to take further measures to ensure the safety of all other fishing vessels. Moreover, in the latter half of 1998 the social partners will be organising seminars on the subject of the prevention of accidents on board fishing vessels. The first of these seminars should be held in Denmark next October.

Safety requirements for workers in this sector also continue to lie at the heart of the discus-

sion on working time which is currently on the Joint Committee's agenda following the Commission's adoption of a proposal for a framework directive for sectors not covered by Directive 93/104.

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Postal services

■ *The social partners approved a framework agreement on "Promoting employment in the postal sector in Europe" at a plenary meeting of their Joint Committee on 26 March 1998.*

This agreement contains precise undertakings by the social partners on quality of service, work organisation, opportunities for a general reduction in working time and flexibility, new services, the recruitment of young people, training and retraining. All these subjects will be included in a work programme drawn up by the social partners.

The agreement also opens the way to discussions which could lead to an agreement on minimum social requirements for postal workers in the European Union.

You will find more details on this subject in the next issue of European Social Dialogue.

■ *A conference on the postal sector in Europe was also held in Brussels on 27 March 1998, entitled "For a universal European postal service". The conference was organised by the Joint Committee on Postal Services with the support of the European Commission.*

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Personal Services

■ *A European social dialogue has just started up in the personal services sector. It has already identified three major subjects of common concern.*

For more than five years now, Euro-FIET (trade unions) and the CIC (International Hairdressing Confederation) have been holding informal discussions in order to adopt a joint approach to subjects of concern to workers and employers in this sector.

On 17 March 1998 these organisations held their first meeting in the framework of a European social dialogue in the personal services sector. The meeting, held in a spirit of positive co-operation between the two partners, concentrated on the three subjects central to the social partners' concerns: employment, vocational training and health and safety at work.

This dialogue will be ultimately broadened to include European organisations representing other professions providing personal services. For this purpose, and with the European Commission's help, a study will be carried out

on the situation in this sector in regard to the three aforementioned subjects.

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Telecommunications

■ *The framework agreement for the sector now includes 13 European employers.*

At a plenary meeting on 23 March 1998 of the Joint Committee on Telecommunications, four employers' representatives - TELIA (Sweden), OTE S.A. (Greece), Tele Danmark and PT Finland - signed the draft outline agreement for the sector (see article in issue 3). This framework agreement has now been signed by 13 European employers.

■ *The social partners have approved a joint opinion.*

At this same plenary meeting, the social partners adopted a joint opinion on the Green Paper on the convergence of the telecommunications, media and information technology sectors and its implications for regulation.

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Other notable events

Social dialogue, regional development and the development of tourism

■ *On the Commission's initiative, a study has been carried out in order to analyse the way in which the involvement of regional decision-makers and the social partners can contribute to a harmonious development of tourism.*

At the beginning of 1998, the Commission's services asked the "Conference of the Peripheral Maritime Regions of the European Community" (CPMR) to analyse the contribution of the social partners, at regional level, to the development of tourism.

The project began with a survey in order to make an "inventory" of the social dialogue in six regions (Andalucia, Göteborg, Pays-de-Loire, Bremen, Scotland and Toscana). This then served as a basis for identifying "good practices", making it possible to assess to what extent the extensive involvement of regional decision-makers and social partners can contribute to a harmonious development of tourism. Conclusions will be drawn and prospects for the future discussed at a major conference to be held in Brussels at the end of the year.

This project will be conducted in close co-operation with the European social partners. The CPMR's analysis must result in account being taken at European level of the observations made at regional level. On the basis of the example of the development of tourism, the project must also make it possible to assess to what extent the "increase in power"

Social dialogue and enlargement

The beginning of 1998 brought many events in this field, four of which are of particular significance.

■ *29 and 30 January: second round-table meeting of representatives of the employers' confederations of Central and Western Europe, in Prague.*

This meeting, organised by the Czech Employers' Confederation in co-operation with UNICE and with the Commission's support, examined four questions: collective bargaining and the legislative process, health and safety at work, social protection and human resources management.

The conclusions of this round table illustrate the desire of the employers' confederations to continue to exchange information on a regular basis on various subjects relating to social policy (industrial relations and social dialogue, equality between men and women, social protection) and to information technologies. A third round table is to be held in 1999 on one or more of these subjects.

■ *19 March: Commissioner Flynn visits Tallinn (Estonia) for talks with the social partners.*

As during his visits to Prague, Warsaw and Budapest in 1997, the Commissioner devoted a considerable amount of time to discussions with the social partners, showing his interest in an active "social partnership" which must accompany negotiations with Central Europe's candidate countries for Union membership.

■ *30 March: official start of negotiations with the candidate countries.*

The Commission is at present engaged in an in-depth "screening" of the *acquis communautaire*. An extensive series of meetings has been scheduled before the summer in order to permit a detailed presentation of the body of EU law and to discuss this with negotiators from candidate countries. The inclusion of the "Social Protocol" in the Treaty is a crucial element which should lead candidate countries to pay particular attention to strengthening trade unions and employers organisations which sometimes lack autonomy and representativity.

■ *21 and 22 April: the International Labour Office is holding a major conference in Budapest on the subject of "labour relations and productivity in Central and Eastern Europe".*

Several ministers from Central Europe attended this conference organised with the Commission's support. Representatives from UNICE and the ETUC also attended in order to present the original experience of the two agreements on parental leave and part-time work concluded at European level.

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of a "Europe of the Regions" may or may not be causing the social partners to award greater priority to their regional or local actions in a European context marked by the contrasting trends of globalisation and decentralisation.

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European Social Policy Forum 98

■ *The European Commission is organising the second European Social Policy Forum in Brussels from 24 to 26 June 1998.*

Forum 98 aims to advance the debate on the future of social policy by mobilising all those involved to promote a stronger social dimension in the future development of the Union. It will provide an opportunity to discuss the most important social issues of today in a framework which brings together the key players in the European institutions and representatives of NGOs, social partners and

national authorities in the Member States. Three principal themes have been chosen for discussion in parallel sessions at Forum 98: 1) The future world of work; 2) Social protection: adapting to changing needs; 3) Promoting participation and citizenship.

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