

As part of its European employment strategy, on 14 October 1998 the Commission adopted proposals for guidelines for the employment policies of Member States in 1999. These guidelines generally confirm the political objectives, directions and measures agreed in 1998.

At the same time, they include a number of modifications and clarifications which the Commission believes will help Member States to draw maximum benefit from the significant progress already achieved in 1998. The proposals draw their inspiration from the assessment and analyses set out in the joint report on employment and the report on employment levels, both of which were adopted by the Commission on 14 October 1998. They also take into account the contacts between the Member States and the Commission throughout this first year of pursuing the approach agreed in Luxembourg.

Under these new guidelines the social partners are once again set to play a major role. In the field of the return to work, they are requested, each at their own level of responsibility and action, to rapidly conclude agreements with a view to increased training opportunities, work experience and other measures with the same goal. In terms of reconciling work and family life, agreements reached by the social partners should be more promptly implemented and subject to on-going monitoring. Whether in the field of

(Continued on page 2)

Allan Larsson,
Director General DGV

The main story

Towards ethical production and consumption

How can we stop the exploitation of workers in the Third World? The promotion of social labels and codes is one way which can prove effective. In a number of sectors - textiles and clothing, footwear, commerce - the European social partners have given very concrete undertakings.

An increasing number of voices have recently been raised denouncing the exploitation of workers in the Third World. Many private initiatives for social labels and codes have resulted. These instruments are generally designed to promote observance of international labour conventions, such as on child and forced labour, discrimination at work, trade union freedom and the right to collective bargaining. The social partners for textiles/clothing, footwear and commerce have also supported the cause.

Back in 1996, Eurocommerce and Euro-FIET adopted a joint declaration condemning child labour. Since then, these two social partners have launched a research project designed to combat child labour in European commerce, while Eurocommerce now issues its members with a recommendation on the social conditions of purchasing.

For their part, in 1997 the social partners for the footwear industry, the CEC (European Footwear Confederation) and the ETUF-TCL (European Trade Union Federation for Textiles, Clothing and Leather), updated the charter on child labour which they first adopted in 1995. Most recently, in 1998, an agreement was concluded with the CEDDEC (European Confederation of Footwear Retailers) in order to widen the charter's field of application to include the footwear business.

Finally, in 1997 EURATEX and the ETUF-TCL adopted a code of conduct on the obser-

vance of six international labour conventions. In June 1998 they undertook an initial assessment of how the code was being respected and implemented. It should be stressed in this respect that the partners of several Member States have already incorporated the code into their national collective agreements.

The Commission itself has also carried out an exploratory study of social labels in the framework of the Bangemann group which brought together, under the auspices of the Commission, all those involved in the textile sector and requests for partners.

But interest in this problem is not limited to the European Union alone. In the framework of transatlantic dialogue, a conference of European and US companies and NGOs was held in Brussels in February 1998 in order to permit an initial exchange of experiences on codes of conduct. A second conference is scheduled for the end of 1998 in Washington. In the future, the Commission intends to support initiatives to promote joint actions by the social partners and other players seeking to ensure that basic working conditions are respected. In November 1998 it organised a European study conference on the central question of monitoring social codes and labels.

(See also pages 3 and 4 of the "Sectors" section and "Open forum" by Patrick Itschert, secretary general of the ETUF-TCL)

Employment & social affairs



European Commission

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child care or care for dependants, ready access to a sufficient number of quality services is vitally necessary if men and women are to be able to return to and remain in employment.

However, it is in the area of the modernisation of work organisation that the social partners are being called on to perhaps make the greatest effort. The guidelines appeal to them to negotiate and conclude, again at all the appropriate levels, agreements designed to modernise work organisation, including flexible working hours, in order to render companies productive and competitive and to achieve the necessary balance between flexibility and job security.

The Commission is determined to encourage further progress in this whole area of efficient work organisation which can make such a significant contribution to increasing productivity. The social partners are urged to define the European contours of this inevitable and necessary modernisation, in which the key elements are reconciling various areas of life, ensuring that workers are informed and consulted, combating discrimination, reorganisation of and reduction in working hours, vocational training, mobility and equal opportunities.

Following the social partners' refusal to enter into essential negotiations on informing and consulting workers, the Commission recently adopted a proposal for a directive while at the same time regretting that a contractual settlement has not proved possible in this field. It is vitally important for the social partners to be even more closely involved in developing, implementing and monitoring this new stage in Europe's employment strategy. By so doing, it will become possible to realise our shared ambition of providing a high level of good quality employment throughout Europe. This contribution made at every appropriate level will consolidate European employment strategy. At the same time, it will enrich and stimulate social dialogue as well as the partnership approach at sectoral and interprofessional level. The total commitment of each of the parties is clearly an absolute necessity. ■

Multisectoral

The sectoral social partners and reconciling work and family life

The European Commission recently published a wide-ranging study on reconciling work and family life (see European Social dialogue, issue 4). A number of sectors subsequently expressed their desire to ensure concrete follow-up.

Textiles and clothing: the European social partners - the ETUF-TCL representing the trade unions and EURATEX representing the employers - will be organising, with financial support from the Commission, a joint research action on employment and working conditions for women in their sector. A Commission study identified the textiles and clothing sector as making little effort to reconcile work and family life or to promote equality between men and women.

Electricity: the social partners - EURELECTRIC for the employers and EPSU and EMCEF for the trade unions - will also be receiving the Commission's backing in running a project to

analyse the impact of the sector's present restructuring on women. This most radical restructuring ever undertaken by the sector will result in increased administrative and financial tasks and more contacts with the consumer. The analysis results will be discussed at a major conference of the social partners next year.

Other sectors have also expressed an interest in monitoring. Discussions are in progress with the social partners from the public sector in order to determine the amount of support the Commission may be able to give to the proposed actions.

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Sectoral

Agriculture

■ *The social partners for agriculture are currently implementing a number of initiatives arising out of the framework agreement on employment and working conditions, signed on 24 July 1997.*

The European Forum on continuing vocational training in the agriculture sector, held in Stras-

bourg on 5 and 6 June 1998, permitted a fruitful exchange of information on existing training systems at the national and local level. This Forum gave rise to a major joint initiative by the EPA (European Federation of Agriculture Unions) and the GEOPA/COPA (Group of Agricultural Employers in the European Union). The first step will be to produce a White Paper based on the experiences presented in Stras-

Working time in the excluded sectors

Agreements have just been reached on working time in the maritime and rail transport sectors; negotiations in the road transport sector have failed.

The social partners for the maritime and rail transport sectors signed working time agreements on 30 September 1998. If they so request, these agreements will be converted into proposals to the Council with a view to European legislation. This would be the first time the procedure laid down in the Agreement on Social Policy annexed to the Social Protocol would have been used for European sectoral agreements. The sectoral agreements are part of a wider body of proposals which the Commission will be presenting as part of the strategy defined in its White Paper (COM(97) 334) of 15 July 1997 which also lay at the basis of the negotiations which have just been concluded.

The results of the sectoral negotiations will make a major contribution to these proposals, in particular with a view to sectoral legislation:

- a proposal will be submitted to include the agreement reached by the social partners for maritime transport on working time for sailors in the Social Protocol. This will mean transposing the agreement as it stands into Community legislation (after checking that the signatories are representative and that the content complies with Community legislation);
 - the special dispensations requested by the social partners for rail transport will be included in the (amended) general directive on working time.
- For the other excluded sectors, including road transport where the social partners failed to reach agreement, appropriate measures will be proposed which take account of the specific nature of the sector.

Open Forum

Patrick Itschert,
ETUF-TCL Secretary General



The European Trade Union Federation for Textiles, Clothing and Leather (ETUF-TCL) has 45 member organisations in 26 countries, thereby representing just under 2 million workers in Europe. The ETUF-TCL is one of the 14 federations of member branches of the European Trade Union Confederation.

A qualitative leap forward

When, in 1991, the ETUF-TCL was engaged in an internal debate on the need for dialogue at European level with employers' representatives of the textile, clothing and leather sectors, that is CEC and EURATEX, members' reactions were positive. There were two main reasons for this.

The first was that the European textiles, clothing and leather sectors were facing economic crisis on such a scale that only global measures supported by all the social partners could halt the decline. The second consideration was that implementing EMU would require - as the Commission stresses in its latest communication on social dialogue of May 1998 - the creation of a "genuine European contractual area" for which social dialogue can only prepare.

So how should these first five years of our dialogue be judged?

Positively, as several DGs have agreed to "fully" consult our organisations, including sometimes on "very sensitive" issues. Positively also because, in 1996, DG II initiated a genuine tripartite - social partners, Member States, Commission - study of the development of "competitiveness" and employment in our sectors in the face of industrial change.

Again positive is the way the social partners, in the framework of their "autonomy", have concluded a series of recommendations and agreements, including the "Charter on child labour" and the "Code of conduct for the textile and clothing sector", two European agreements which will be incorporated in the respective sectoral national agreements.

But, on the other hand, the results remain insufficient when you consider the fact that, among other things, the third stage of EMU is to enter into force in just a few weeks time. This Monetary Union could cause some to call into question "European social security" or to push for greater wage flexibility. But Europe cannot allow itself several "Vilvoorde" or "LEVIS". To meet the challenges of globalisation, anticipate industrial change and manage EMU, it is therefore essential for the social partners to quickly make a further "qualitative leap forward" in their dialogue and demonstrate their ability to jointly agree European strategies designed both to boost competitiveness and employment in European industry and to preserve the spirit of solidarity which is so characteristic of our European social model.

bourg, in order to stress the importance of vocational training - and continuing vocational training in particular - in the strategy to safeguard jobs. Subsequently, a series of regional seminars will bring together the social partners from three or four Member States. These will pave the way for a European conference on employment in agriculture and the rural world, to be held at the end of 1999, with the Commission's support.

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Audio-visual

■ *EURO-MEI held a conference on 29 and 30 August 1998 in Vienna on: "European workers in the cinematographic and televisual industries: towards the encouragement of a single European production voice and the setting of minimum standards for coproductions".*

The conference adopted three resolutions. The first is for a strong and diversified European production, the safeguarding of national cinematographic systems and coordination with EU programmes. The second relates to inter-European trade union representation in European cinematographic production. The third relates to minimum rest periods.

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Footwear

■ *The social partners have decided to extend the charter on child labour to include the footwear retail sector (see article on page 1).*

By the terms of this charter, the social partners undertake to help implement actions designed to eliminate any form of exploitation of child labour and to support measures and programmes to eliminate any direct or indirect use of child labour in footwear manufacture or commerce.

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Commerce

■ *EuroCommerce and Euro-FIET have submitted a joint proposal to the European Social Fund on "the impact of the development of electronic commerce on training needs in commerce". The initiative follows the conference held by the social partners in Athens on 6 and 7 April and a study on the same subject.*

Among other things, the Athens conference and study stress to what extent electronic commerce is changing the nature of employment in this sector. Mobility and personal development must be encouraged in order to ensure a successful migration of jobs without job losses.

Education and training are very important tools in achieving this. The proposal submitted by the social partners seeks to define training needs and establish a training programme.

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■ *The European social partners, Euro-Commerce and Euro-FIET, organised a round-table discussion on 26 October in Budapest (Hungary) and are currently preparing further talks to be held in Prague (Czech Republic) in January 1999.*

These meetings follow a first round-table discussion held in Tallinn (Estonia) on 29 May 1998. The aim is to exchange information and establish closer contacts with the social partners in the commerce sector in the CEECs in the light of their future EU membership.

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Cleaning

■ *The European social partners in the cleaning industry, EFCI (employers) and Euro-FIET (trade unions), have started negotiations on undeclared work with a view to reaching a common position.*

Following the European Commission's communication on undeclared work of 7 April 1998, the social partners want to make a joint

contribution to the debate leading to the adoption of employment guidelines in 1999. They are convinced that the fight against illegal labour must be a major priority for a European employment strategy over the coming year. Their sector could play a very positive role in this respect by working closely together with the public authorities in the EU Member States. This subject has already been raised by EFCE and Euro-FIET, in particular in their debate and joint actions on new sources of jobs. It is also the subject of a European sectoral inquiry at present being carried out in the framework of social dialogue.

■ *EFCE and Euro-FIET, in cooperation with the national social partners, organised three round-table discussions: in Rome on 30 June, in Madrid on 22 October, and in Paris on 26 October.*

It was following the European conference of October 1997 on creating employment in cleaning services for private individuals that EFCE and Euro-FIET decided to organise national meetings. Rome, Madrid and Paris are therefore the first in what will be a series of national round-table talks to be held over the coming months.

The next issue of this newsletter will give further details of future meetings.

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Fishing

■ *A series of seminars is currently being held on accident prevention on board fishing vessels.*

The first in the series was held in Denmark and attended by operators from the North Sea countries. The others are to be held in France and Spain for the Atlantic coast and Mediterranean countries respectively. These seminars were set up on the initiative of the Joint Committee on Fishing, within which the social partners are also considering other important questions linked to the safety of workers in this sector (working hours and safety devices on small fishing vessels).

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Postal services

■ *The "Promoting employment in Europe's postal sector" framework agreement was signed on 29 October in Brussels at a conference on a European universal postal service and the future of social dialogue, funded by the Commission.*

This framework agreement had been approved by the social partners at a plenary session of the Joint Committee on Postal Services of 26 March 1998.

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Sugar

■ *The social partners have launched a vocational training project under the Leonardo da Vinci programme with a view to improving safety levels at sugar refineries. The first concrete results are expected by the end of 1998.*

Three interactive instruments will be available by the end of the year. A Community data base on health and safety in the sector will be accessible on the Internet. Factory operators are being requested to complete an interactive self-assessment questionnaire in order to permit an in-depth analysis of security at their plant. Finally, a CD-ROM will allow operators to determine for themselves the risks linked to work during and between seasons and to propose remedies. This project, in 11 languages, began two years ago and is supported by the Leonardo da Vinci programme.

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Private security

■ *The social partners for private security, the COESS for the employers and Euro-FIET for the trade unions, have initiated discussions on applying quality criteria to selecting and awarding public-service contracts in the field of security services.*

At the same time as pursuing the political debate on this subject, the social partners have launched a project aimed at analysing the practice of public calls for tender on the security services market and the role of quality in awarding contracts. This study will also be considering to what extent a European agreement could be implemented within the present European and national legal framework. The social partners plan to mutually negotiate and agree a set of criteria to guide the authorities charged with selecting and awarding these contracts. The results of this study will be discussed at a conference organised by the sector's social partners in Berlin in June 1999.

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Textiles and clothing

■ *Ten months after signing the charter of social partners in the European textiles and clothing sector, an initial assessment of progress to date was made at the social dialogue meeting of 29 June 1998.*

Considerable progress has been made in transposing the charter at national level. For the first time a European agreement has been implemented by means of national collective agreements. The process is complete in Finland, Belgium, Italy and Germany and under way in several other Member States. On the other hand, the first reports on the concrete application of the textiles/clothing code of conduct speak of too many violations

Tanning

Launching the social dialogue

European social dialogue was officially launched in the tanning sector on 26 October. Almost a million people are employed, directly or indirectly, in the leather industry which generates an annual turnover of more than ECU 30 billion.

After many years of "informal contacts", the social partners for Europe's tanning sector, namely COTANCE (Confederation of the National Associations of Tanning and Tawing of the European Community) for the employers and the ETUF-TCL (European Trade Union Federation for Textiles, Clothing and Leather) for trade unions, launched a SAFE project at the beginning of 1997 on "promoting training, health and safety in Greek tanneries". Last May, at a meeting to assess the state of progress of the SAFE project, COTANCE and the ETUF-TCL confirmed their desire to widen their field of dialogue and for closer contacts.

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of trade union and human rights, particularly in the Central and Eastern European countries but also in the European Union. The social partners have therefore decided to make this a priority over the coming months. They have also agreed to hold a special seminar on this subject in the CEECs in the framework of social dialogue.

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