

Editorial *In a rapidly changing work environment, factors like globalisation, technological innovation and increased competition between companies both within Europe and worldwide, contribute to shaping our economies and societies. In a long-term perspective, these are trends that create wealth and opportunities but also bring risks of growing inequalities. In the short term, companies and employees are faced with industrial restructuring, labour substitution and new patterns of work. These are factors of change. Social dialogue, at all levels, makes it possible to manage change through co-operation. Joint contributions by the social partners, obtained through discussions and negotiations, are an effective way of finding solutions, which reflect the balanced interests of both companies and employees.*

The challenge for the social partners is to contribute to the creation of conditions, which support and promote the adaptation of companies and employees to change.

The three framework agreements at cross-industry level and agreements at sectoral level on issues such as working time and training have shown that the social partners are capable of making valuable contributions. However, the social partners can not rest on their laurels. The new millennium will bring new challenges and they must be ready to look ahead. That is why it is essential for the social partners to set out, in a multi-annual work programme, their priorities for action in the coming years, not least with regard to their responsibilities under the employment strategy. In the run-up to the Lisbon Summit, 23-24 March 2000, they should also consider how they could contribute to shaping the conditions for growth, employment and social cohesion, thus preserving the European social model. Furthermore it is important that, at European level, they contribute towards modernising industrial relations.

These are just some examples of ways, in which the European social dialogue can demonstrate its strength and ability given the major challenges we face. I will personally support efforts to find appropriate solutions to the various problems encountered in this area. Where needed, I will promote the required initiatives at EU level.



Anna Diamantopoulou
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The main story

Excluded sectors: Amendment of the Working Time Directive

In November 1999, the European Parliament adopted on second reading its report on the common position established by the Council on 12 July 1999 with a view to amending Working Time Directive 93/104/EC. The main point of difference concerns doctors in training.

The Parliament insists that doctors in training be brought within the scope of the working time directive after a four-year transition period, during which they should work no more than 54 hours a week on average over a four month reference period. While the Commission had originally proposed a transition period of seven years, the Council wanted to extend the transition period to nine years.

A second point of divergence relates to the implementation period, where the Parliament is committed to a period of two years, compared to the four years proposed by the Council. A third difference concerns offshore workers, where the Parliament would allow Member States to extend the reference period to 12 months as long as representatives of employers and employees were consulted and able to negotiate. This provision, however, should be reviewed from a health and safety perspective five years after the entry into force of the directive.

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Employment & social affairs



Open Forum

Doro ZINKE,
ETF general secretary



The European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF) is a new pan-European trade union organisation covering rail, road and sea transport, the ports and docks, inland waterways, civil aviation, fishing and tourism services. It represents around 3 million workers in 34 European countries.

The difficulty of social dialogue for transport sector workers

The Commission has awarded the social partners a central role in the modernisation of the European model. Their task is to achieve a balance between flexibility and security.

There are four dimensions to security for transport sector workers: job security, the safety and reliability of infrastructures for the provision of services, protection and safety at work, and traffic safety. Unfortunately, transport sector employers are often only interested in flexibility, it being left to the unions to assume responsibility for these four security dimensions as a whole.

Workers' representatives are therefore not only defending the interests of their members, but are also working for the community at large. In reality, the imbalance which results from this situation is both due to and exacerbated by the fact that the Commission sees itself primarily as the motor for liberalisation and the establishment of free markets. Social Europe is often neglected.

We need support in order to pursue social dialogue in the transport sector. Evident themes include the regulation of working time, for example. The Commission should be able to find the right moment when there is a need to put pressure on the social partners and allow them to work autonomously.

An unfortunate example is social dialogue on working time. The Commission was late in undertaking its own work. It then put pressure on the social partners. Although a solution was nevertheless found in the maritime sector, this was partly due to the fact that international regulations existed which the social partners were able to fall back on, and partly due to a targeted and appropriate intervention on the part of the Commission. The whole procedure lasted five years and was not successfully completed until 30 September 1998.

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The Parliament accepted the Council's basic approach on sea fishermen. The Council departed from the original Commission proposal to adopt a sector-specific instrument and introduced a new provision in the horizontal directive for workers on board sea-going fishing vessels, providing for minimum provisions for all employed workers, similar to those in the Maritime Agreement. However, the Parliament insisted on the introduction of the principle of a maximum of 48 hours work in a week over a reference period of 12 months.

For all remaining points of divergence, a Conciliation Committee is likely to be set up according to the rules of the co-decision procedure in order to arrive at a joint text.

Sectoral measures on working time

In December 1999, the European Parliament and Council also adopted the directive on the enforcement of seafarers' hours of work on board ships using Community ports. This directive is a necessary complement to the directive implementing the European Agreement on seafarers' working time concluded on 30 September 1998 between ECSA and FST (Directive 99/63/EC). The "enforcement" directive provides for a comparable level of safety and health protection for seafarers on board all ships, irrespective of the flag they fly⁽¹⁾, and constitutes a valuable tool against social dumping.

Meanwhile, social partners in the civil aviation sector have continued their negotiations on working time. It is hoped that a third agreement on this issue can be concluded soon.

(1) Directive 99/63/EC only applies to workers on board ships flying an EU flag.

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Agriculture

The final two seminars of the ARE project were held at Stoneleigh Park (United Kingdom) and Toledo (Spain) in late September and early October 1999.

The social partners in the agricultural sector – EFA (European Federation of Agricultural Workers' Unions) and GEOPA/COPA (Employers' Group of the Committee of Professional Agricultural Organisations) – agreed at these meetings a project linking innovative vocational training practices to an employment strategy in the agricultural sector. The social partners took part in preparing a conference to assess the results of the ARE project, to be held in Bonn on 16 and 17 December 1999. The project and conference results will be included in the White Paper on vocational training. Further details will be provided in a future issue of this newsletter.

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Banks

The conference on "non-banking competition" was held in Brussels on 18 November 1999.

Conference participants discussed a new form of competition. Companies known for their activities in other sectors – insurance companies, car manufacturers, supermarkets or public service companies – are now starting to offer banking services. The effects of these new competitors on structures and employment in the industry were examined.

On 19 November 1999, the sector's social partners (the FBE, GECE, GEBC and Euro-FIET) met in the first plenary session of their Social Dialogue Committee. The work programme for the year 2000 provided the framework for their discussions.

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Construction

At its general assembly on 4 and 5 November 1999 in Luxembourg, the EFBWW (European Federation of Building and Wood Workers), representing the sector's trade unions, adopted its action programme for 2000–2003.

During this period the organisation wants to concentrate on its sectoral dialogue with employers' representatives within the FIEC (European Construction Industry Federation). Plans include the development of joint strategies and possible negotiations on vocational

training (Europass-Training), and health and safety at the workplace.

The social partners are at present drawing up a project for the follow-up to the 1996 directive on secondment, which should have been transposed by December 1999. They also aim to compile a database of national collective agreements and legal provisions in connection with secondment.

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Culture

At its meeting of 26 October 1999, the "Live Entertainment" Social Dialogue Committee stressed the importance of promoting live entertainment.

The Committee also decided to carry out a study bringing together and analysing legislative and contractual practices which could have an impact on the growth of live entertainment in the European Union's Member States.

On the subject of financing live entertainment, a debate was held on a feasibility study which aims to list the most recent publications in this field. Finally, a seminar on vocational training for show technicians will be held in Turku (Finland) on 26 and 27 May 2000.

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Energy

On 10 November 1999, the social partners in the gas sector, EPSU and EMCEF (trade unions), and EUROGAS (employers), organised a joint seminar on health and safety issues.

The seminar focused primarily on risks related to the gas sector and the management of health and safety at work. It included a brief assessment of future developments. Both sides appreciated the event and believed it would serve as a basis for future collaboration.

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Fishing

In the framework of their sectoral social dialogue, the social partners in the sea fishing sector have set up a working group on vocational training. This met in Brussels on 18 October 1999.

The group is preparing and following two joint

projects to be co-funded by the European Social Fund. These are a forum for the mutual recognition of patents in Europe's sea fishing sector and an action linked to the creation of a European Network for Training in Fishing and Employment (REFOPE).

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Footwear

The social partners in the footwear sector (CEC and ETUF-TCL) have confirmed their desire to develop the updated version of the database of national collective agreements: "Shoedata 2".

The social partners also called on the WTO (World Trade Organisation) to end the many direct and indirect import restrictions facing European exporters in many third countries. The application of international social standards should be incorporated in full in the WTO's negotiations. The Social Dialogue Committee is to assess the publication and implementation of the code of practice to combat child labour which was concluded in this sector in March 1995 and revised in October 1997. This code also applies to trade in footwear. The Committee is envisaging widening the code to cover all fundamental social rights.

In a joint request, the social partners stress that the Commission should complete its work on the action plan for competitiveness and employment.

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Personal services – hairdressing sector

As indicated in the previous issue of this newsletter, the European organisations representing the sector's workers (Euro-FIET) and employers (CIC-Europe) are engaged in very active social dialogue. Many joint projects are currently underway or in the pipeline. Two of these projects were debated at the seminar held in Brussels on 5 November 1999.

At the social dialogue session of 30 September 1998, Euro-FIET and CIC-Europe submitted a request for funds from the European Commission in order to permit the collection of basic information on the hairdressing sector in the Union Member States, and to provide support for European social dialogue in this sector. The objective of the final report on this project was to provide relevant information that would

assist in the successful continuation of European social dialogue in the hairdressing trade. The first move towards this objective was made at the conference held in Brussels on 5 November 1999.

The social partners both agreed that the report provides some very valuable figures on the hairdressing sector. It supplies important evidence of the major challenges the sector is facing, clearly showing the activities already undertaken on these core issues, and giving information which can be used to ensure that this work continues in the right direction.

The conference further provided the occasion to launch a new project – also supported by the European Commission – on future training needs in the hairdressing sector. The overall aim of this project is to develop the European hairdressing sector in accordance with industrial change and the labour market, so that European citizens can be offered personal services with a high level of expertise.

The objective is therefore to implement national and European measures regarding new skills and job opportunities in the European hairdressing sector. This will be done by producing a set of guidelines designed to set the target groups⁽²⁾ on the right track in defining future needs five or ten years from now. These guidelines will be very useful for these target groups at both European and national level, as well as for European social dialogue and national trade unions.

More in-depth interviews with employers, training schools, workers, trainees and representatives of the hair product industry are at present being conducted.

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Postal services

Sectoral dialogue between the social partners in the postal services sector (POSTEUROP and INTERNATIONALE DES COMMUNICATIONS) has allowed them to set up two select working groups. Their objective is to draw up a major work programme for 1999-2000 based on equal opportunities, training and the acquisition of new skills.

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(2) The project target groups are:

- employers - in order to plan for improvements/further education and a new business structure;
- employees - to plan further training and improve skills;
- vocational training schools and further education institutions - to enable them to cope with the challenges and to introduce students to the new skills and job opportunities in a national and European context, through student and teacher exchanges;
- regional and national employment agencies;
- regional and national union insurance funds;
- national education ministries;
- national employment ministries;
- national and European validation bodies.

Sugar

On 23 November 1999, the social partners in the sugar sector (CEFS and ECF-IUF) signed a joint declaration on the Joint Organisation of the Sugar Market and its importance to employment.

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Tanning

The social partners, Cotance (employers) and ETUF-THC (unions), have prepared to implement a database of national collective agreements. The "Shoedata" project in the footwear sector served as their model.

In this database adapted to the tanning sector, the information will be supplied and updated jointly by the social partners at national and European level. The database will facilitate access to information on working conditions and salaries as negotiated at sectoral level.

At its meeting of 4 October 1999, the Social Dialogue Committee discussed preparations for the WTO ministerial conference in Seattle, taking into account the major sectoral implications for employment of the Millennium Round. In particular, it is requesting better access to international markets for European products with a high added value, the lifting of restrictions on raw material exports to the European Union and a universal application of the fundamental rights of workers.

The Committee also worked on proposals to be submitted by the social partners to the European Commission with the aim of drawing up an action plan for competitiveness in the tanning sector. The social partners are in the process of drawing up a code of practice on the fundamental rights of workers.

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Textile and clothing

The Euratex and ETUF-THC social partners have submitted a feasibility pilot project on alternative social security

financing. The project aims to make concrete proposals and to develop a pilot project to stimulate and preserve employment in labour-intensive sectors.

The Social Dialogue Committee believes an alternative financing method must be found for social security systems, but without weakening social protection. The Committee refers in this respect to the 1999 employment guidelines. It also envisages involving other sectors in the project, viewing it as a cross-sectoral priority. The footwear sector has already made a positive decision.

The Committee called for an in-depth analysis of the impact of the Russian and Asian crises on employment in the sector and proposed pursuing an action plan for competitiveness. The Committee insisted that at the WTO negotiations the European Union should demand that third countries remove tariff and non-tariff barriers to European exports.

The social partners held a seminar to promote the dissemination of the European code of practice, concluded by the Committee in September 1997, on the fundamental rights of workers in the Central and Eastern European countries (CEECs). The Committee is finalising a project on the use of personal protection equipment aimed at encouraging the use of this kind of textile technology - consisting of very specific materials - in order to protect the health and safety of workers.

The social partners envisage circulating the results by their own means among companies and workers and through European networks in the field of health and safety at work.

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Wood

The social partners (CEI BOIS and EFBWW) in the wood sector have submitted a joint request to the European Commission to set up a Social Dialogue Committee.

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