

**Edito** Following a number of major developments at the end of last year, 1999 looks set to be a promising year for European social dialogue, bringing unprecedented challenges and opportunities for the social partners at European level.

The Vienna European Council, in December 1998, approved the 1999 employment guidelines which will give an increased role to Europe's social partners. This European Council paved the way for a European pact for employment. The Commission adopted its new communication: "Modernising work organisation - a positive attitude for change". In this document, the Commission invites the social partners to take the initiative in the process of change.

At the Vienna mini-summit, the social partners agreed to work on drawing up a timetable and defining the common subjects for debate. This is an encouraging response - but only the beginning. If the social partners are to prove up to the challenge, they must develop a coherent industrial relations strategy for 21<sup>st</sup> century Europe. This strategy must cover all aspects of industrial relations, moving on from the fragmented approach of the past. Within this global strategy, however, a number of themes can be developed. Some of these are included in the communication: vocational training, temporary work, teleworking and working time, for example. The social partners set the tone at the beginning of the year as the UNICE, CEEP and ETUC concluded a framework agreement on fixed-term employment contracts.

Over recent weeks teleworking has been cited as a possible theme, for consideration at the cross-sectoral and sectoral level. As this is a relatively recent subject, it would be a suitable point of departure for the "new" agenda.

Odile Quintin  
Acting Deputy Director General DGV

## The main story

### A European employment strategy: one step further

*The European Council in Vienna on 11 and 12 December considered that significant progress had been made on the employment front, but that the process should be further strengthened: a process in which the social partners have an important role to play.*

To strengthen the process, additional verifiable objectives must be agreed, dates set - nationally and for Europe - and joint indicators introduced. There will also be a need for increased participation and a greater sense of responsibility on the part of the social partners.

In regard to the 1999 employment guidelines, the Council called on Member States to attach particular importance to:

- achieving tangible progress in promoting equal opportunities between men and women;
- giving substance to the notion of lifelong learning by setting a national target for participants on such schemes;
- realising the full potential of the services sector and services linked to industry, in particular information technology and the environment sector;
- creating a climate in which small businesses can develop;
- re-examining tax and benefit systems in order to encourage the unemployed to accept a job or training and employers to create new jobs;
- helping older workers to participate more in working life;
- encouraging social integration and equal opportunities for disadvantaged groups.

In its conclusions, the European Council stressed the important role which the social partners must play in this employment process. It was pleased to note that, at the Vienna mini-summit in December 1998, the social partners expressed the desire to draw up their own programme for the modernisation of work organisation.

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Employment & social affairs





# Vocational training: a favoured field for social dialogue

*Over the years, vocational training has become a priority field of action for the European social partners, at cross-sectoral and sectoral level. What then are the principal achievements in this field? We attempt an initial assessment.*

## At the cross-sectoral level...

In agreement with the UNICE, CEEP and ETUC, the Commission decided to support and develop a forum for social dialogue on education and training at European level. This initiative is expressed in particular in the support given to autonomous dialogue between the social partners within the "Education-training" working group, set up by the Social Dialogue Committee, as well as support for sectoral surveys by the social partners, among others under the Community's Leonardo da Vinci programme. This involvement of the social partners was also apparent in the series of joint opinions on education and training adopted in the years 1987 to 1995.

Following the special Luxembourg summit on employment in November 1997 and the debate on the guidelines defining Europe's employment strategy, vocational training has been identified as the fundamental element in increasing the employability of young people and the unemployed and in adapting workers to technological and organisational change.

In this new context, the social partners must play a key role both in the individual Member States and at European level. The 1999 guidelines reinforce the role of the social partners in this respect.

In 1998, the "Education-training" working group received a mandate from the Social Dialogue Committee to draw up a joint expression of the social partners on the proposal for a Council decision on stage two of the Leonardo da Vinci programme. The social partners wanted the European Commission to ensure that all actions relating to knowledge policy are both coherent and mutually complementary. They also supported the idea of simplifying the management mechanisms for this second stage of the programme.

## ...and at sectoral level

• **Agriculture.** The social partners (EFA and GEOPA/COPA) want to see a European White Paper on agricultural training and are looking at

the possibility of negotiating a European agreement on this subject.

• **Banks.** On 13 October 1998, the social partners signed their first joint document. Point 6 in this joint declaration states that "companies are the first to be affected by the specific training of their own workforce and must promote training".

• **Commerce.** As early as 1988, the social partners signed a memorandum on training in the retail business. Following a study on the effects of electronic commerce on employment, the social partners have just submitted a training project in this field to the ETUF.

• **Electricity.** The social partners held a seminar in January, in Brussels, on the implications of the single electricity market for skills, qualifications, training and equal opportunities.

• **Entertainment.** Discussions recently began on considering the possibility of creating a minimum set of qualifications for workers in this sector.

• **Fishing.** The social partners (Europêche/Cogeca and the FST) are currently discussing the subject of mutual recognition of patents within the EU countries. Training in the Global Marine Distress and Safety System is also on the agenda. A seminar is to be held on these subjects in France, in 1999.

• **Footwear.** The social partners (CEC and ETUFC-TCL) are providing a practical follow-up to the European study on changing training needs in the sector.

• **The graphic industry.** The social partners are currently putting the finishing touches to a plan to update, at European level, the qualification profiles for print workers.

• **Industrial cleaning.** In 1995 the social partners (EFCI and Euro-FIET) adopted guidelines on vocational training. A proposal was finalised under the Leonardo da Vinci programme to provide training for the basic cleaner. The material will be circulated under a second Leonardo project. A project relating to health and safety and another relating to the training of persons working at home have also just been launched.

• **Insurance.** On 2 October 1998 Euro-FIET submitted a proposal on "adapting training to

the need for change in the insurance sector".

• **Postal services.** After participating in the study on employment trends in the postal sector, on 23 March 1998 the social partners approved an agreement to promote jobs in this sector. Under this agreement, there will be a joint analysis of questions relating to training and retraining.

• **Private security.** There is currently (1997-1999) a Leonardo da Vinci project in the field of basic security practices.

• **Road transport.** In 1997 the social partners (IRU et FST) supervised a study on continuous vocational training in this sector. The study formulates conclusions and recommendations for both small firms and large companies in the road transport sector.

• **Sugar industry.** In the framework of a vocational training module on "Active/interactive safety in the sugar refinery", a set of interactive tools has been developed to improve safety standards. There are two "managers" diskettes, an "operators" CD-ROM, and a "drugs/alcohol" brochure.

• **Sea transport.** Following the Dublin Conference (1996) - "The European seafarer, an endangered species?" - the social partners in the sea transport sector (FST and ECSA) set up a study aimed at identifying training priorities for seafarers.

• **Telecommunications.** Under the framework agreement for the telecommunications sector, signed in Brussels on 8 January, there will be a joint analysis of training issues. The social partners have also approved a joint opinion on organising a series of national round tables on employment (including vocational training needs). On 23 November 1998 the social partners approved a draft feasibility study for setting up an Observatory on working conditions in the sector, to be responsible for looking at skills, qualifications, training and retraining.

• **Textiles and clothing.** A joint opinion for better access by women to vocational training was signed in this sector in 1994. The social partners (Euratex and ETUF-TCL) are jointly implementing two projects under the Leonardo da Vinci programme.

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## Open Forum

**Søren B. Henriksen**  
President of the EuroCommerce  
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*After the manufacturing industry, EuroCommerce is the European Union's second largest employer, representing a sector of 22,5 million workers. EuroCommerce is present in 24 European countries.*

# The bases for effective cooperation

In EuroCommerce we consider that the Social Dialogue in the European Union is one of our most important tasks. European commerce employs more than 22,5 million people in 4,7 million companies. 95% of these companies are SMEs employing fewer than 10 workers. All these commercial companies have one thing in common; they earn a living by supplying their customers with the services they need. Commerce is indeed part of the services sector. For this kind of enterprises, working conditions are extremely important.

Keywords such as flexibility, education and training are normally the background for a competitive commercial business.

EuroCommerce acknowledges that the dialogue with the employees and their organisations is an important element to retain the level of employment and to develop international competitive power.

This is the reason why EuroCommerce considers the co-operation established by the European Commission such an important issue. With great responsibility the Commission is focusing on the employment situation in Europe. This has placed the services sector and European commerce in a central role. In contrast to other sectors of the economy

there has been a positive employment development in commerce. Between 1985 and 1995 15,5% of all new jobs were created in commerce. EuroCommerce has attached great importance to the ongoing co-operation with the Commission and the unions. Together we can analyse the future employment possibilities in commerce and the structure of European commerce in a changing world with new technology and increasing international competition.

Education, retaining of mature workers as part of the workforce, facing the IT development, and improving the competitive power of SMEs are natural elements in this co-operation.

EuroCommerce is aware that this co-operation can only be based on the fact that creation of new jobs requires enterprises with high competitive power. And it is with pleasure that we note that the unions have come to acknowledge this. But still there is no doubt about the fact that the unions must radically change their politics on some crucial points in order to reach the optimal results for European employment.

For EuroCommerce it is a main task to reach this goal, not only as a sector-organisation but as a responsible organisation on the highest level.

## Cross-sectoral

### "Employment package"

■ *In Vienna, on 11 November 1998, the Social Dialogue Committee's last meeting of the year was principally devoted to the social partners' contribution to the Vienna European Council.*

Allan Larsson, Director-General of DGV, presented the joint report, the report on 1998 employment levels and proposals for the 1999 guidelines. The social partners presented their respective positions, in which the points of convergence provided the working basis for the secretariats with a view to arriving at a common position.

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### Mini-Summit on social dialogue

■ *On 4 December 1998, in the presence of the President-in-Office of the Council, Mr Klima, the Austrian Employment Minister, Mrs Hostasch, the Commission President, Mr Santer, and Commissioner Flynn, the European social partners exchanged opinions on Europe's employment strategy and the Commission's Communication on work organisation.*

At this mini-summit, the UNICE, CEEP and

ETUC discussed their role in the framework of the current employment process and announced their intention to submit a contribution to the Vienna European Council. They also restated their intention to launch a joint analysis of initiatives taken by the social partners in the Member States which are of relevance to the implementation of employment guidelines.

The social partners took the view that the Commission's Communication could provide material for a debate on drawing up a social dialogue work programme. They will shortly be drawing up an agenda setting out the subjects for joint reflection.

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### Joint declaration

■ *At the Vienna European Council of 11 and 12 December 1998, the social partners submitted a joint declaration on the 1999 employment guidelines as well as a joint opinion on the reform of the Standing Committee on Employment.*

Noting that the international crisis is compromising the prospect of achieving sustained growth of a nature to create jobs in the medium term, the UNICE, CEEP and ETUC considered that the 1999 employment guidelines should be accompanied by an appropriate, coherent and coordinated economic response on the part of the

"Economy-Finances" Council, on the basis of the Treaty and the Pact for Stability and Growth, and on the part of all the other parties concerned.

The social partners repeated that the Commission's proposals on guidelines for the Member States' employment policies in 1999 recommend the inclusion of measures designed to promote the integration of disabled people in work. They are preparing a joint declaration on this subject.

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### Temporary employment contracts

■ *On 15 January 1999, after months of in-depth negotiations, the UNICE, CEEP and ETUC arrived at a draft agreement on fixed-term work. This draft agreement must be submitted to the decision-making bodies of their organisations for ratification.*

The draft agreement aims to improve the quality of fixed-term work by ensuring respect for the principle of non-discrimination and to draw up a working framework in order to avoid abuses stemming from the use of successive fixed-term employment contracts or agreements. If ratified, this agreement will mark major progress for European social dialogue.

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## Commerce: joint employment strategy

*On 30 November 1998 in Brussels, the social partners in this sector undertook to cooperate in order to improve training levels, adapt to new technologies and examine special provisions for teleworkers and older workers.*

EuroCommerce and Euro-FIET also signed a new working framework within which employers and unions can negotiate joint issues at European level.

On the eve of the Vienna summit, EuroCommerce and Euro-FIET declared that the creation of new jobs and services in the field of commerce will depend on economic growth and an increase in consumer purchasing power. Commerce employs more than 22 million people, representing 16% of all jobs within the European Union.

The joint declaration stipulates that: "Current changes in information technology and the rapid development of electronic commerce will lead to important changes in the conditions for distributing goods and services. Electronic commerce will lead to changes in the whole structure of the commerce sector. New areas of work will be created, traditional ones will be redefined."

+ Available on the Internet

<http://www.eurocommerce.be/epress98.htm#dec07>

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## Cleaning

■ *The EFCI (employers) and Euro-FIET (workers) signed a joint declaration on undeclared work, on 4 December 1998. The social partners presented this agreement as their sectoral contribution to a European employment strategy.*

Following the European Commission's Communication of 7 April 1998 on undeclared work, the social partners adopted a joint text which they submitted - in the framework of the preparations and adoption of the 1999 employment guidelines - to the European Council on 11 and 12 December in Vienna.

In their joint declaration, the EFCI and Euro-Fiet undertake to actively contribute to combating undeclared work. This undertaking is dependent on introducing national and European measures which are favourable to this campaign.

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## Sugar

■ *Aware of the need to increase the skills of young people on the labour market, on 1 December 1998 the social partners (the European Union of Food Workers and the European Committee of Sugar Manufacturers) signed a joint recommendation on training in the sugar industry.*

In this recommendation the social partners express their desire to offer young people - whenever economically and socially feasible -

additional opportunities for qualifying training courses and apprenticeships, thereby facilitating their professional integration and increasing their skills on the labour market.

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## Tanning

■ *On 26 October 1998 the social partners in the tanning sector initiated social dialogue at European level.*

COTANCE and ETUF - THC have drawn up a work programme on the sector's brand image, vocational training, illegal work, social dumping, and health-safety-hygiene. The social partners also want to discuss the development of a charter and code of conduct.

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## Textiles and Clothing

■ *EURATEX and ETUF - THC, the social partners in the textiles and clothing sector, have agreed to participate in compiling a database of collective agreements.*

In 1999 the social partners' code of conduct will be distributed in the various Central and Eastern European countries. At the same time, a seminar will be held in Prague in the spring of 1999 for the social partners in the textiles and clothing sector in the CEECs.

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## Towards an ethical production and consumption

■ *As announced in issue 6 of "European Social Dialogue", Europe is continuing to look at the subject of codes of conduct and social labels. Two important developments in recent months have brought a concrete European initiative significantly closer.*

Following a European workshop on monitoring codes of conduct, held in Brussels on 25 November 1998, a general consensus has been reached on three points. First of all, codes of conduct are now accepted as being a valuable means of improving working conditions worldwide, based on the commitment of firms and consumers. Secondly, all codes of conduct must include the principal labour standards as laid down in the ILO conventions on the banning of child labour, enforced labour, and discrimination on the basis of sex, race or religion. Thirdly, effective codes of conduct and social labels are only possible as part of a gradual, long-term partnership which offers the incentive for change.

Most of these points were confirmed by the majority of the EU participants at the 2<sup>nd</sup> EU-US Symposium devoted to codes of conduct and international labour standards, held in Washington on 10 and 11 December 1998. However, the discussions within the working parties showed that there is no precise answer to a series of open questions. There is a general need for a more structured information exchange and more coordinated action.

In the wake of these two events, the European Commission stated that it could initially help all the European players to come together on a more structured basis. In this respect, the Commission wants to support the creation of a network in response to a request for aid from the ETUF-TCL (European Trade Union Federation for Textiles, Clothing and Leather).

A special issue of "European Social Dialogue" devoted specifically to this subject will soon be available.

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