

Editorial *European companies and workers are operating in an environment that is characterised by rapid technological change, globalisation and increased competition.*

Europe's strength will largely depend on its knowledge-based labour force. If Europe is to become the world's most dynamic and competitive area it must give priority to innovation and knowledge. This is why the Portuguese presidency wants to set new strategic goals in this field for the next ten years. The aim of the special European Council in Lisbon on 23-24 March was to address politically the issues of economic reform, employment and social cohesion, with a particular focus on innovation and the knowledge-based economy.

The social partners play an important role in this context. We all agree that both companies and workers must adapt to perform effectively in the knowledge economy.

The role of the social partners must not, nevertheless, be limited to identifying the principles on which modernisation should be built. It also includes contributing directly to conditions more favourable to growth and social cohesion.

During the spring, the social partners will have plenty of other opportunities to show how they wish to promote employment and tackle the challenges of economic reforms and social cohesion. Of particular interest are the principles which will guide the process of modernising work and adapting skills, as well as the revision of social protection systems.

The High Level Forum on 2 June with representatives from governments, the Commission, the European Parliament, the social partners and the European Central Bank, intended to evaluate the results of the special European Council in Lisbon, will be a test of the intentions and abilities of the social partners.

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Main story

Civil Aviation: agreement concluded

Ms Anna Diamantopoulou, Member of the European Commission with responsibility for Employment and Social Affairs, welcomes the agreement on working time for mobile staff in the civil aviation sector, concluded by the social partners on 22 March 2000.

Following the agreement in the maritime sector (which has become Directive 99/63/EC) and for railways, this is the third sectoral agreement in a transport sector. After having put the finishing touches to the text, the social partners plan to apply the agreement as a Council directive.

The content of the agreement is substantial. The partners agreed to limit annual working time to 2,000 hours (as against 2,304 in the general Working Time Directive), including some elements of standby duty assignment. 'Block time' (meaning flying time) will be limited to 900 hours. The difficult question of standby duty has been left to national practices. In order to take account of the particularities of mobile work in the sector, no distinction was made between night and day workers. However, appropriate protection will be available to all mobile personnel. Finally, with regard to rest provision, the partners agreed upon a monthly and yearly minimum number of rest days.

In December 1998 the social partners' organisations informed the Commission of their intention to start negotiations on working time for mobile staff in the civil aviation sector. These organisations are the Association of European Airlines (AEA, the big air carriers), the European Regional Airlines Association (ERA), the European Community's Independent Airlines Association (IACA, the charters), the European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF, for the cabin crew) and the European Cockpit Association (ECA, for the pilots). The conclusion of the agreement has also paved the way for the establishment of a sectoral dialogue committee.

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Employment & social affairs



European Commission

Open Forum

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The European Federation of Agricultural Workers' Unions (EFA) was founded in 1958 as the autonomous representative of agricultural workers' unions in the EEC. As a European trade union organisation, it is a member of the European Trade Union Confederation. EFA currently has 40 affiliated organisations representing 2 million agricultural workers and small-scale farmers.

Eating cherries with the landlords

"Do not eat cherries with the landlords, they will spit the stones in your face." This quotation, which at first glance may seem like an incitement to class warfare, comes from neither Marx nor Lenin. The author is none other than Martin Luther, the German church reformer, who was seeking to make clear to peasant farmers the dangers of too close contact with powerful landowners. Is this an outdated aphorism, rendered obsolete by history in this age of mature social dialogue? In all sincerity, I could not say that this is the case. In some sectors, it still seems strikingly relevant. But for the social partners in European agriculture, Luther's statement can indeed be seen as outdated. We have learned to eat the cherries together. It was not easily achieved – the process took many years. It is not, therefore, surprising that the European Commission's communication "Adapting and promoting social dialogue at European level" of 20 May 1998 already mentions the sectoral agreement of 24 July 1997, concluded between the European Federation of Agricultural Workers' Unions and the GEOPA/COPA Employers' group, as an example of good practice. Although not all member organisations on the two sides ratified this text, both agricultural unions and employers are today proud of this pioneering act at European level which laid firm foundations for long-term cooperation. How should we judge the results of this agreement today? It is not easy to give an honest answer to this question, while looking at ourselves with a critical eye and without detracting from the agreement's historical value. It is an unfortunate fact, but the concrete impact on working conditions in the field remains weak. More than two years after this European agreement was signed, its effects on national collective agreements are scarcely discernible. So where does this text's value lie?

It is still too early to make a final judgement. Yet one thing is already certain: it cannot be judged by its objectives alone. The process of negotiation itself has proved to be an important factor. In contrast to the method adopted by UNICE and the ETUC which, in negotiations on parental leave, directly broached detailed questions, we first concluded a general framework agreement. In the course of these long and often difficult negotiations we learned to strike a balance between competing interests, without compromising them or creating an unacceptable hotch-potch.

I am personally convinced that, for agriculture, the road we took was the right one. On this firm foundation, social dialogue in the agricultural sector has made considerable qualitative gains over the past two years, accompanied by concrete progress. In connection with the ARE project (Agriculture-Regions-Employment), the six European study days held in 1999 and the closing conference served to lay the basis for negotiations on the recognition of vocational training diplomas. This year, in addition to setting up a joint working group, four dates have already been agreed for negotiations. In terms of employment policy, the concrete results of the ARE project include, on the one hand, the publication of the social partners' White Paper and, on the other, the carrying out of a joint European survey on employment in agriculture, to be presented and appraised at a European employment conference in Nice.

The conclusion? On the basis of a fair reconciliation of interests and mutual acceptance, it is a good thing to eat cherries with the landlords. As to those who still fear receiving a stone in the eye for their troubles, there is nothing to stop them from first removing the stones from the cherries.

Cross-sectoral

Social protection: the social partners launch the debate

The Social Dialogue Committee met on 30 November 1999. The number one priority was to discuss the Commission communication on modernising the system of social protection.

At the meeting of the Social Dialogue Committee of 30 November 1999, the social partners discussed the Commission communication on a concerted strategy to modernise social protection. This strategy is designed to strengthen cooperation between the Member States and the European Union on the basis of an exchange of experiences and a monitoring of current political developments with a view to identifying best practices.

On the day before the meeting, 29 November, the Council received the Commission document very favourably, stressing the role of the social partners in this strategy.

The social partners found that the communication provided an interesting basis for a more ambitious and committed approach. For its

part, UNICE spoke of the need to include social protection as an integral part of employment and macro-economic strategy.

The social partners also discussed setting up an Observatory on Industrial Change. They debated the need for such a body, how it could complement existing bodies and how it would operate in practice. They finally decided that a technical working group should meet early in 2000 to look at these questions in more depth. This group met on 11 January 2000. At the meeting, the social partners expressed their shared desire to participate in managing the future observatory. The details of this joint contribution are now being drawn up.

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Discrimination at the workplace

16 December saw a very lively seminar on policies implemented by companies to combat discrimination.

UNICE had expressed the desire for a practical and informal seminar on the way companies deal with discrimination.

The seminar was held on 16 December. Concrete examples were presented of policies implemented at the workplace to deal with the various categories of discrimination covered by the Commission's proposals, based on Article 13 of the Treaty of Amsterdam: racial or ethnic origin, religion or belief, sexual orientation, age, and disability.

The debate proved extremely useful and lively, in particular highlighting problems relating to age. This aspect of discrimination is linked to employment policies, and has been recognised more recently than the other areas as a source of inequality. There was less debate on racial or ethnic origin, as this is a subject which is more traditionally handled by national legislation.

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Agriculture

With a final conference held in Bonn on 16 and 17 December 1999, the social partners EFA and GEOPA/COPA have successfully completed the ARE project.

This project, which made up the core of the 1999 work programme, established the link between employment and training policies in the agricultural sector at European level. The social partners assessed the potential benefits of an advanced training policy for the creation and protection of jobs in the European regions. Six seminars, in Germany, Denmark, Italy, France, the UK, and Spain, focused on three major subjects: financing of vocational and further training, innovative practices in training, and reaching agreement on the certification of individual qualifications.

The social partners' White Paper on vocational training serves as a link with their 2000 work programme. The final text will be presented at a major employment conference on 12-13 April in Nice. It offers an overview of vocational training systems in the EU, an evaluation of the Strasbourg Forum on further training in agriculture (June 1998), an evaluation of the ARE project, a link to other projects in the field of vocational training, and a chapter on the general positions of GEOPA/COPA and EFA.

The ARE project is a milestone in the GEOPA/COPA - EFA social dialogue, and will be followed up within their sectoral dialogue committee. One of the most important conclusions was the need for a European certification scheme for individual vocational qualifications. This could improve the framework for worker mobility and create more transparency in the labour market.

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Banks

The social partners in the banking industry extend their field of activities.

In the last Newsletter we reported on the study and conference of the social partners on competition from 'new banks' and 'non banks'. The study is now available in English, French, German and Italian. The social partners have adopted the joint conclusions from this conference held early in 2000.

At the plenary meeting of the sectoral dialogue committee for the banking industry, the four social partners' organisations - UNI-Europa, BF-EU, ESGB, and EACB - decided to set up two working groups in 2000.

One group will examine employability in the banking sector in the information society, the other is dedicated to establishing closer cooperation with social partners in the Central and Eastern European Countries (CEECs). The social partners are planning to organise, in cooperation with TAIEX (Technical Assistance Information Exchange Office) and Employment and

Social Affairs DG, round tables with their counterparts in the applicant CEEC countries.

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Commerce

The European social partners for commerce, EuroCommerce and UNI-Europa, are organising a conference "Employment and Commerce", on 14 April, in Lisbon, Portugal.

Commerce does not only employ a large number of Europeans - 22 million in the EU Member States alone - it is also a particularly dynamic part of the economy. Structural and technological developments are influencing retail and wholesale trade all over Europe, driven by changing consumer demands and growing competition. This conference, bringing together social partners from all Member States, will take stock of the impact of these developments on employment and jobs in commerce. It will also review the active European social dialogue for commerce and identify new challenges for the future. About 150 employers and trade union leaders are expected to attend.

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Construction

The work programme of the sectoral dialogue committee pays particular attention to posting and to health and safety.

At their plenary meeting on 14 December 1999, the social partners FIEC and EFBWW decided to follow up a 1999 feasibility study on the posting of workers. On 16 December, the deadline expired for the transposition of Posting Directive 96/71/EC.

The social partners are interested in gaining a clear and easily accessible overview of the framework of labour law and collective agreements governing posting in all 15 Member States. They have therefore launched a project to compile a database containing this information.

A joint statement on the proposals for directives on free movement of workers (COM 99/12) and the freedom to provide services (COM 99/13) was adopted in January 2000.

The 2000 work programme will also focus on health and safety issues. The social partners will examine which questions still have to be tackled after the construction site directive has been transposed into law in the Member States. They will also discuss their respective attitudes to a scaffolding directive.

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The graphics industry

The challenges of modernisation

Made up of both SMEs and large companies, the graphics sector is facing many changes: technological developments, internationalisation, changes in the relations between the customer and the suppliers, etc. These are all factors that have a considerable impact on employment, qualifications and work organisation.

With the aim of making the sector more competitive, the social partners (Intergraf for the employers and EGF [UNI-SGE] for the workers) have been involved in preparing and carrying out a major European study on the subject (carried out by the Fraunhofer Institute at the Commission's request). The study was completed in November 1999.

The social partners, who have not yet submitted a joint request to set up a sectoral dialogue committee, will be using this study as a basis for organising, in June 2000, a conference on the measures and approaches to be adopted for the modernisation and reinforcement of European companies.

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Private security

Projects for work organisation...

After long months of discussion, the social partners in the private security sector, CoESS for the employers and UNI-Europa⁽¹⁾ for the unions, have agreed jointly to consider the implications of new forms of work. The approach adopted, while showing caution, also expresses their determination to achieve palpable results that can be implemented at national level, where the need to adapt is most clearly evident.

Two decisions have been taken. First of all there is a need to arrive at a general statement recognising the responsibilities of the European social partners in work organisation. Subsequently, the task will be to negotiate a more detailed joint text defining the field of action and content of these responsibilities following a study and in-depth discussions. The first general text is currently being prepared, and an agreement should soon follow. Watch this space...

... and mutual recognition.

Following the signing of their joint statement on mutual recognition between CoESS and EuroFIET and on social dialogue in June last year (see issue 10 of this Newsletter), and as a means of giving concrete follow-up to this text, CoESS and UNI-Europa will be asking the European Commission for a subsidy to produce an information brochure. The brochure should be widely distributed among all the sector's workers and companies, in the European Union and CEECs. The publication, which will be translated into all

EU and CEEC languages, will include the necessary information on CoESS and UNI-Europa, the results of their social dialogue, and important issues under discussion or in preparation. It will also include a very practical section on affiliated European and national organisations. Through this concrete project, CoESS and UNI-Europa want to take a first step towards genuine implementation of mutual recognition, at national, regional and company level.

(1) Euro-FIET changed its name on 1st January 2000 to UNI-Europa.

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Private Security

A high-quality round table on quality.

In June of last year, CoESS and UNI-Europa signed a joint agreement on awarding contracts to private security companies in the public sector. This was followed by the production of a handbook for adjudicating authorities, which contains a checklist of criteria for assessing the quality of private security services, drawn up jointly by the social partners. Since then, their main concern has been to convince these adjudicating authorities to use the handbook.

The Belgian national social partners were the first to take up this challenge and organised, with the financial support of the European Commission, a round table in Brussels on 25 January 2000. Some 150 participants, representing the national administration, the national social partners and private security companies, were informed about CoESS and UNI-Europa's work in the field of public tendering. The methodology of the manual was also presented.

All the participants welcomed the workshop. It showed the importance of the participation of all interested parties (clients, public authorities, trade unions and employers' organisations) in the debate, and in the preparation of both the calls for tenders and the tenders themselves. The Austrian and French social partners have already expressed their intention to hold a similar workshop.

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Private Security

CoESS and UNI-Europa have just finished an important Leonardo project for the training of personnel in basic guard duties.

One of the main goals of the Leonardo project was to develop a Europe-wide training structure that would promote higher levels of professionalism and improve the image of the sector. Vocational qualifications for basic guard duties will form the starting point for developing professional standards in the private security service sector.

The project does not aim to change national training systems. Its primary goal is to supply a basic training structure that can be discussed nationally and will be established as a minimum standard in national law in the near future.

The project has produced a European Vocational Training Manual for basic guarding.

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Tanning (leatherworking)

The social partners in this sector adopted a joint statement on 7 December 1999.

The social partners (Cotance for the employers and ETUF:THC for the workers) attach great importance to improving the sector's image, increasing competitiveness and jobs, and winning better access to international markets. To this end they adopted a joint statement, on 7 December 1999, within the 'Tanning' sectoral dialogue committee.

This joint text covers the sectoral dimension of the Observatory on Industrial Change, a project on training needs and a proposal for the Commission to implement an action plan to improve competitiveness and employment in the sector. The statement also confirms the agreement in principle on a code of conduct covering fundamental social rights and general principles and guidelines on working time, health, safety and hygiene, and wages. The social partners are also to set up a joint database of national collective agreements.

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Textiles and clothing

In a joint statement, adopted on 22 November 1999, the social partners (Euratex for the employers and ETUF:THC for the workers) adopted a position on the subject of the Observatory on Industrial Change.

In their statement, the social partners stress that the Observatory must help boost competitiveness, in particular by identifying and anticipating qualification, training and employment needs. The social partners also consider that they are in a position to make a valuable contribution to the Observatory's work, in particular in the framework of sectoral dialogue.

In December 1999, with financial support from the Commission, the social partners in the textile and clothing sector (in partnership with the footwear sector) launched the first phase of a pilot feasibility project on alternative social security financing, in order to stimulate and preserve jobs in labour-intensive activities and sectors.

The committee is also actively preparing for European Union enlargement. With this in view, the application of the code of conduct on fundamental rights has been extended to the CEECs. The social partners held a joint seminar on 8 and 9 November 1999 aimed at stimulating awareness and observance of the code in these countries.

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The principal joint agreements concluded in the framework of European Social Dialogue can now be consulted on the Internet, in French, English and German, at the following address:
http://europa.eu.int/comm/dg05/soc-dial/social/euro_agr/index_en.htm

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