Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee on Telecom

Working group meeting on 22 June 2010, Brussels

Minutes

The meeting was chaired by Ms Salis-Madinier (UNI europa)

1. Welcome and approval of agenda

The participants in the meeting introduced themselves. The agenda was approved.

2. Work programme

The Chair presented the draft work programme as proposed by UNI europa. This has a biannual format and includes health and safety, skills and training, new Member States, regulatory issues and work organisation. UNI europa also recalled the very meagre results of the social dialogue committee thus far in 2010, when a work programme has not even been adopted yet.

The Chair highlighted that prior to the meeting ETNO had agreed to the draft with respect to general issues and with respect to the ongoing work on health and safety in the context of the Good Work – Good Health project. There were differences with ETNO on the issue of skills and training, where UNI europa proposed to work on the planned European skills councils. ETNO also did not agree with UNI europa's proposals on working on the new Member States. Under the heading of regulation, UNI europa would like to work on universal service, while the work organisation working group could be frozen, but UNI europa would not agree to abolishing it.

ETNO presented its excuses for the low number of participants in the meeting. The delegates present could not provide an immediate answer on the topic of new Member States, while ETNO certainly considered this an important issue in general. ETNO could agree to the freezing of the work organisation working group without abolishing it completely.

Mr Schwarz (European Commission) reminded the committee that there was still no common work programme that had been adopted.

UNI europa responded that this was a result of the dysfunction of this social dialogue committee, and that work could not continue in this manner. A vicious cycle had been created. It was now upon ETNO to react and to reach a consensus on the work programme.

The Chair expressed her hope that the ETNO's delegates would have the mandate to adopt a work programme today, and suggested to discuss the wording item by item.

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ETNO again presented apologies for the low participation on its side and recognized a need to mobilize more delegates in the future. ETNO agreed to discuss the draft work programme point by point.

UNI europa reiterated that it was urgent to adopt a work programme for 2010 and 2011. A working group meeting had already been cancelled in the first half of 2010 due to the absence of a work programme and the inability of the committee to adopt one.

The work programme was subsequently discussed and edited point by point. It was adopted by the committee (see annex; the wording under the heading "skills and training" was discussed later in the meeting; see point 6 below). It was also agreed that the subject of universal service will be debated at the plenary meeting on 20 September.

3. Update on the Good Work – Good Health project

Mr Mrozowski (ETNO) gave a presentation on the progress of the Good Work – Good Health project.

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Mr Gonçalves criticized the organisation of the project and expressed his displeasure with the way the project is progressing. The expert reference group had been marginalized and did not have any input into the conference programme. He suggested undertaking a follow-up project on stress.

The Chair added that some questions marks also concern the management of the project by BT, since BT is no longer a member of ETNO.

ETNO pointed out that there are telephone conferences of the steering group every month involving both UNI europa and ETNO. There was an agreement that BT would continue to manage the project despite its withdrawal from ETNO.

Mr Fernandez Sierra (UNI europa) encouraged everyone involved in the project to keep up the work in order to be able reach an agreement on a joint statement at the end of the process. This agreement should be up to date and not obsolete already on adoption, and to this end the effect of the crisis should be taken into account.

Ms Dedden (UNI europa) emphasized that the work programme foresees the adoption of an up-to-date statement by the social partners at the end of the project. She also confirmed that regular telephone conferences do take place and that the steering group is quite operational and functional. She conceded that the expert reference group had not always been involved in an optimal manner and that communications problems have existed.

Mr Schwarz (European Commission) called on the social partners to keep the Commission informed of developments regarding the project. He noted that TeliaSonera (Sweden) had been replaced by Telenor (Norway) as one of the companies to be visited. He reminded social partners that Norway was not a Member State of the EU and that costs related to travel to non-EU countries could not be charged to the project.

The Chair proposed to resume the discussion on the Good Work – Good Health project later in the meeting (see below).

4. Digital Agenda for Europe

Ms Sansoni (European Commission) gave a presentation on the progress towards a Digital Agenda for Europe.

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UNI europa asked how the broadband goals could be achieved without a universal service obligation and how the skills objectives could be realized.

The Commission replied that the role of the private sector is important for broadband development, but that there is a role for the public sector as well. The Commission aims to encourage Member States to make better use of existing funding, in particular the structural funds, and to use the funding possibilities provided through the European Investment Bank. A Commission Communication on broadband is forthcoming, which will also touch upon the issue of freeing up spectrum for wireless broadband. With respect to the development of skills, there are two dimensions to this issue. The first refers to the skills and competences of consumers in using the internet, while the second refers to the skills and competences of workers in the telecommunications and IT sectors. For the latter, the Commission also encourages the better use of existing funds, in particular the European Social Funds. A platform of skills could also be created in order to improve the transferability of skills.

UNI europa asked about the structure of the cybercrime observatory and remarked that the goal of 30 MBps broadband speed was acceptable but not very ambitious. Furthermore, budgetary constraints and cutbacks might make it impossible to achieve the skills targets. UNI europa also inquired whether there would be a universal service for broadband, what the plans were to close the digital divide, to what extent trade unions would be involved in the scoreboard, and whether the Commission considered the legal framework in the telecommunications sector to be adequate.

The Commission replied that it is the intention to establish a European platform on cybercrime by 2012, but that the exact format is still under discussion. The goal on broadband speed was determined in order to be ambitious but realistic, since there are since significant differences and gaps across the EU. With respect to skills, it is difficult to assess the impact of the crisis on what has been achieved, and the role of the social partners here is important. The public consultation on a universal service obligation for broadband had been concluded and a structured analysis will be forthcoming. The recently published Monti report on a new strategy for the single market did include a recommendation for such a universal service.[1] In rural broadband in particular, public authorities have a key role. The planned scoreboard will be based on data from Eurostat. The legal framework on the European level is now settled and the Commission is focusing on its implementation.

The Commission encouraged the social partners to help shape the Digital Agenda and to contribute their ideas. To this end, a submission form and all the details on the Digital Agenda are available online at http://ec.europa.eu/information_society/digital-agenda/ In

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[1] Available at http://ec.europa.eu/commission_2010-2014/president/news/documents/index_en.htm

addition; the in the Members States Commission is organizing conferences on the Digital Agenda in the framework of the "going local" initiative. A full list of country visits and dates can also be found on this website.

A separate public consultation on net neutrality will be launched in the fall.

5. Good Work – Good Health project (continuation of the debate)

In continuing the previous discussion, Mr Gonçalves (UNI europa) requested more information on the company visits and on the logistical aspects of the final conferece, in particular on the number and identifications of delegates who will be able to attend. The cancellation of the meeting in Hungary due to the volcanic ash cloud in April also contributed to the communications problems in the project.

ETNO responded that in the case of France Telecom, the company visit took place during two days. The local affiliated trade unions of UNI europa were fully involved, and Mr Zylberberg was also present, along with Ms Dumont and the person responsible for health and safety in the company. The group visited a call centre and received a presentation of a study that was made at France Telecom after the well publicised events of recent months. The company visits at PT, Deutsche Telekom and BT took place in a similar manner, taking into account the specificities of company culture and organisation.

Ms Dedden (UNI europa) underscored that she had provided all the contacts of UNi europa to the researchers and personally participated in the visit to Belgacom. She considered the questionnaire that was used to be well developed and was of the opinion that the visit was a success. In general, she is satisfied with the company visits in general. Ms Dedden reported making a critical remark on the draft report, where it is not always clear who is making which comments. It needs to be clarified which statements are attributed to management and which to trade unions, but this will be discussed in the steering group.

Mr Gonçalves (UNI europa) reported on the visit to PT, which also went well in his opinion. He only became aware of the guidelines for these company visits once the PT visit was over, however, which he considered indicative of the deficiencies of the project. Regarding the final statement that will be adopted a the end of the project, he underscored that this would require careful drafting, as it should not be too technical but make a clear difference and have a positive impact.

ETNO commented that the draft report had just been received and that the first part indeed was very technical. The second part consists of a report on the company visits. In general, many remarks have been made and the report will need more work in order to enable the social partners to arrive at guidelines or a statement. For the conference, decision will still need to be taken regarding the participants to be invited, but it is envisaged to have 150 delegates.

The Chair emphasized that is was the goal of the social dialogue committee to make concrete recommendations based on the outcomes of the project. These must be sufficiently accessible to have a positive impact in practice, so work still needs to be done in this respect, as well.

Mr Gonçalves (UNI europa) recalled that it was necessary to invite participants on time.

ETNO responded that this issue is on the agenda of the next steering committee. A possibly difficult issue in this regard concerns trade unions that are not members of UNI europa.

Ms Dedden (UNI europa) agreed that the determination of participants was a task that the steering committee should undertake as soon as possible.

6. Skills and training

Mr Schwarz (European Commission) updated the committee on the planned European skills councils. He reminded the committee that this process builds upon the study of sectoral skills and competences[2] and the feasibility study of 2009.[3] The former was presented in the plenary meeting of the telecoms social dialogue committee on 8 June 2009 in the presence of ETNO, so both sides should be fully aware of it. The process to establish a council would be driven by the European social partners in those sectors where a social dialogue committee exists. The first phase consists of identifying existing national observatories and partners for the setting up of the council itself. Further details can be found in the attached note, which was distributed to social partners at the 29 April Liaison Forum.

Note on European
Sector Councils.pdf

ETNO reaffirmed its interest in working on skills and training, but considered it premature to decide on the setup of a skills council, since the governance of the councils is still unclear. The report on the sector councils and on the sectoral competences are interesting, but ETNO – at least as far as France Telecom is concerned – was not involved, and would still be interested in more information.

UNI europa was of the opinion that a clearer wording and more concrete commitment was needed on skills and training in the work programme. The Commission could be invited to present its thinking on the skills councils, but the social partners should agree on something more concrete among themselves. This way the committee can avoid going around in circles. The existing skills observatories, such as the one in France, are very valuable institutions and it is worth linking them on a European level.

ETNO agreed that it was not its intention to go around in circles, and supported the proposal that the Commission should give a presentation on the skills councils at the plenary meeting on 20 September.

The Chair noted that ETNO is interested in working on skills and training and highlighted that this work should be useful on a national level to both workers and companies. The committee then agreed on the wording of the item on skills and training in the 2010/2011 work programme (see annex).

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[2] The full report and the data annex for the post and telecommunications sector is available here: http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=782&newsId=581&furtherNews=yes

[3] The full report, its annexes and the country reports are available here: http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=782&newsId=743&furtherNews=yes&preview=cHJldmlld0VtcGxQb3J0YWwh

To facilitate the work, UNI europa suggested that ETNO nominate a contact person for skills and training who could then meet on an informal basis with the counterpart from UNI europa.

7. Any other business

UNI europa brought a study on the privatisation of public services and the impact on quality, employment and productivity ("PIQUE") to the attention of the committee. This study was financed under the European Commission's 6th Framework programme for research, and the committee might be interested in hearing a presentation from the authors of the study. The Commission replied that it would try to arrange such a presentation, but considered it difficult, since the project had been finalized and the funding ended.

The agenda for the plenary meeting on 20 September will include a debate on universal service, the customary update on the Good Work – Good Health project, as well as presentations on ICT standards and the skills councils from the European Commission. The final agenda will be agreed between the social partners by email.

The Chair thanked the interpreters for their services and closed the working group meeting.

Telecommunications European Social Dialogue Committee

Biannual working programme for 2010-2011

1. General issues
- Better adapt working group meetings and their agenda to the working programme.
- Limit working group agendas to two topics in order to provide enough time for in-depth discussion and flexibility of interpretation.
- Improve the functioning of the Social Dialogue Committee in general.

2. Health and Safety
- Continue the 'Good Work Good Health' project and report back to the social dialogue committee on its progress.
- Follow up on the project's results, especially on the future guidelines on GWGH in order to elaborate a statement or position on mental health issues based on the project's outcome.

3. Skills and Training
- Discuss and define future skills and training needs in the ICT sector to anticipate change and the training plans, which will be needed for this. This issue should be addressed at European level.
- In order to anticipate skills needs in our sector, UNI europa and ETNO wish to obtain more information on and discuss the idea of creating a European skills council in the telecom sector.

4. New Member States
- Encourage participation of social partners from new Member States.
- Ensure broader participation by setting a clear agenda and language scheme for working group meetings.

5. Regulation
- Invite DG Information Society on a regular basis to provide the SDC with information and updates on regulatory affairs.
- Participate in the impact assessment of relevant regulation.

6. Work Organisation
- Temporarily frozen
- To be discussed in 2011
- Redefine scope of the working group