



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities DG

Social Dialogue, Social Rights, Working Conditions, Adaptation to Change
Social Dialogue, Industrial Relations

Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee on Telecom

Plenary meeting on 8 December 2009, Brussels

Minutes

1. Opening of the meeting and approval of agenda

UNI europa (Mr Guillot) chaired and opened the meeting, and the agenda was approved. The members of the social dialogue committee presented themselves. Mr Zylberberg (ETNO) explained that his absence at the last few social dialogue meetings was due to the crisis at France Telecom. He also announced that BT had left ETNO, but that the Good Work – Good Health project team would continue its work.

2. Update on the Good Work – Good Health project

ETNO gave an update on the project.



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The likely dates for the dissemination conference are 14/15 October 2010 in Brussels.

UNI europa added that ETNO had addressed a letter to companies, while UNI had sent a letter to its affiliated trade unions, asking them to participate in the project and the company visits.

UNI europa requested that there should be balanced representation from the steering committee when accompanying company visits, i.e. one person from each side, and not just a single steering committee member. In addition, the date of the conference has not yet been fixed in a definite manner. UNI europa also highlighted the importance of the project and of the final conference, as it will serve to give visibility to the work and to the social dialogue committee. Therefore it was suggested to emit a joint social declaration on the occasion of the conference.

ETNO pointed out that this is a sizeable project, and that it is important to respect the budget. Therefore it would be difficult to have parity of representation when accompanying the company visits, also because the scientific gathering of evidence should not be disturbed by the presence of outside employer and union representatives. ETNO emphasized that "political" representatives should not interfere in the company visits, be they from ETNO or from UNI europa, as the work will be of a technical nature, and the steering group member would just observe to make sure the contacts are established in the manner foreseen.

UNI europa repeated that it would be more acceptable nonetheless to have equal representation. There is no question of interference, but indeed of observation and

ensuring that everything will proceed as agreed. Therefore this issue should be discussed within the steering group for the project.

3. Corporate social responsibility

Regarding the draft statement proposed by UNI europa, ETNO stated that it would not want to work on such a new document, as it regards the 2007 joint statement on the social and economic aspects of corporate social responsibility as sufficient.

The Chair pointed out that current affairs affecting the sector should be discussed, especially the effects of the economic crisis. This could be linked to the topic of green employment. Nonetheless, it was clear that it would not be possible to proceed as much as hoped for at this stage.

Ms Bird (European Commission) gave a presentation on the Commission's guide to social considerations in public procurement.



Social considerations.ppt

Ms Bird highlighted the work of some sectoral social dialogue committees such as the textile, catering and private security committees, in developing their own guides for socially responsible public procurement.

ETNO pointed out that the issue of raw materials being sourced from developing countries is not relevant for telecommunications companies. What is an issue, however, are the practices of outsourcing and multiple layers of subcontracting, whether it be the activities by some companies in Latin America or the possible sale of prepaid telephone cards by children in Africa. Then it becomes much more difficult to clearly state how this should be dealt with, although some companies have reached framework agreements with UNI that address some of these issues.

The Commission replied that supply chains are very complex, both in sourcing and in sales, so that there can be contradictions and unintended consequences of the introduction of social considerations. The Commission is aware that there cannot be an immediate solution, and that it will work with all the stakeholders, including companies, trade unions and government.

The Chair requested clarification on the scope of the guide and how the terms "public procurement" are to be interpreted.

The Commission replied that only public authorities are the addressees of the guide, but private companies would be welcome to use it as well if they so wish.

UNI europa emphasized that there were no big ethical problems within the sector as such, but that subcontracting and outsourcing were creating poor working conditions. UNI europa also enquired as to the legal status of the guide, since the past has shown that public authorities have lost court cases when they tried to incorporate social considerations into their procurement activities.

The Commission answered that it would not become legislation, but that it would interpret the Directive on public procurement. It is written by the same lawyers that drafted the Directive, so it should provide more clarity and avoid legal problems for

public authorities in the future, should they wish to take social considerations into account in procurement.

4. Skills and training

Ms Dumont of UNETEL-RST (employers) and Mr Fouritte of CFDT (workers) gave a presentation on the French "Observatoire des Métiers de Télécommunications".



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Both speakers highlighted that this was an important institution in the framework of social dialogue. Its budget and programme is negotiated every two years between the board members that are nominated by employers and trade unions. The "Observatoire" itself is not a forum for negotiation, but rather it permits an in-depth analysis and understanding of how skills in the sector are developing. The results are thus very interesting for both sides of industry.

UNI europa pointed out the importance of such an institution for gathering knowledge about the changes that are occurring every day. UNI europa asked whether the "Observatoire" was a permanent institution, and how it is financed. In addition, UNI europa wondered whether there is indeed a skills shortage in the telecommunications sector.

The presenters replied that the "Observatoire" is a permanent institution that is financed by employers. While it is an important part of its work to speak to educational institutions and to raise awareness of future developments, it is for individual employers and their human resources department to identify possible skills shortages, depending on their needs. This is therefore not the role of the "Observatoire".

5. The European ICT policy

Mr McGullion (European Commission) gave an overview of the development of the new European digital agenda.



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UNI europa found fault with the fact that its response to the consultation was not mentioned, despite having answered it. The Commission replied that there was a second consultation ongoing at the same time concerning the role of ICT in the transition to a low-carbon economy, and that the answer may have been submitted in response to that consultation. In any case, the contribution of UNI europa and other trade unions to public consultations will certainly be taken into account.

ETNO inquired about the lessons that were learned from previous difficulties in implementing telecommunications legislation. The Commission answered that the main difficulties occurred between the Council and the European Parliament, where some thought the original proposal was watered down too far, and others consider that it goes too far.

The Chair expressed displeasure with the fact that the social dialogue committee is often viewed as a lobby group and that its input is not taken into account. He also voiced frustration that the committee appears to be consulted less and less by the Commission, and argued for understanding that the committee works at its own rhythm.

The Commission took note of this issue and pointed out the Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities DG was the leading service on the Europe 2020 strategy, where the digital agenda will be embedded.

UNI europa highlighted its frustration at the lack of information exchange with the Information Society and Media DG, and thanked Mr Mc Gullion for appearing before the committee. UNI europa hoped that this type of exchange will be regularly repeated in the future.

ETNO asked about the expectation that the Commission has from the social dialogue committee, to which the Commission replied that all input on issues related to the telecommunications sector is welcome.

The Chair pointed out that the Europe 2020 agenda is a very important issue for social partners, where they must give their input.

6. 2010 work programme of the sectoral social dialogue committee

This agenda item had to be postponed to 8 February 2010 due to the internal difficulties at ETNO, which prevented the employers from discussing the work programme proposed by UNI europa.

UNI europa expressed its irritation at the situation, since the committee appeared to be going backwards rather than forwards. First, the Commission must ensure appropriate interpretation facilities, since trade unionists cannot be expected to master multiple languages. Hence, the cut in the number of working group and plenary meetings was most unfortunate. Second, other social dialogue committees do work better and do not suffer from the low attendance that the telecommunications committee often has.

The Chair acknowledged that the work of the committee indeed could be improved, but that the work programme for 2010 would be defined at the 8 February steering group meeting. This will be followed by working group meetings on 27 April, 22 June and 29 November, with the plenary scheduled for 20 September.

7. Any other business

Since Mr Guillot is retiring as president of the trade union delegation to the sectoral social dialogue committee and had just chaired his last meeting, Mr Courtney and Ms Dedden (both UNI europa) offered their sincere thanks for his service.

The Chair then thanked the interpreters for their work and closed the meeting.