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Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities DG

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

Brussels, 28 November 2006

SECTORAL SOCIAL DIALOGUE COMMITTEE "CHEMICAL INDUSTRY"

PLENARY MEETING

held on 26 October 2006 in Krakow

DRAFT MINUTES

Chairpersons: Simon MARSH (ECEG) and Reinhard REIBSCH (EMCEF)

Commission representative: Dirk HADRICH (DG EMPL)

1. Welcome by the Chairpersons and the European Commission and technical announcements

The Social Partners were welcomed by the Chairpersons, the European Commission and the Polish host social partners.

2. Approval of the Agenda

The Agenda was approved.

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3. Education, Training and Lifelong Learning in the European Chemical Industry

a) Presentation and formal adoption of the report prepared by the Working Group on Education, Training and Lifelong Learning on the basis of the survey conducted by EMCEF and ECEG member organisations

Jeanette van Dongen presented the report with saying that there was the intention to use reliable data and to avoid travelling and interviewing. One interesting finding was that only around 20% of the pupils would generally decide to go to university and only 17% of them would decide to study science. Of this final group only 3% would in the end decide to study chemistry. A large diversity of school programmes on science was found. The group of women studying chemistry was discovered bigger than expected. One concluding recommendation was that lobby work would be necessary to get especially women involved in studying chemistry .

The report was formally adopted.

3. Education, Training and Lifelong Learning in the European Chemical Industry

b) Report on the progress of the CITIES project and outlook towards next steps

Prof. Leo Gros (FH Fresenius) described the CITIES Comenius project (Chemistry and Industry for Teachers In European Schools) about professional education, attitudes and awareness of teachers in chemistry. 5 Course modules for secondary school teachers were explained and their structure was described. Industry's needs for education play a major role. The aim is to advance chemical education, to change attitudes and to increase awareness of teachers and especially to improve the image of the chemicals industry sector. Young students often have the impression that the sectors is covering businesses working not very clean and is dealing only with cryptic formula. Therefore, the sector would not be interesting and attractive for young students. The training includes secondment of teachers to industry companies in order to improve teachers' knowledge on industry facts. The teacher training programme should finally be delivered on CD Rom in 5 languages. The social partner organisations and their affiliates are invited to submit any kind of information that should be included in one of the modules of the training programme.

3. Education, Training and Lifelong Learning in the European Chemical Industry

c) General report on the work done in the working group since the last Plenary meeting in May 2006

Alfons de Potter informed about the recent activities on education, training and lifelong learning in the Chemical industry. It would be important to create interest for the sector, to promote chemistry and scientific training and to feminise the image. Training directly at the workplace was considered in order to integrate training in the working process. Attention was paid to EUROPASS and to the evaluation of competencies. Permanent restructuring effects were noticed in the sector requiring also negotiations of the social partners at national level.

4. Responsible Care

a) General report on the work done in the working group since the last Plenary meeting in May 2006

Jochen Wilkens explained that Responsible Care would be an important, global and voluntary initiative. The aim is to improve and to communicate better on the use of chemicals. There is hoping to get less regulation by the EU authorities as a consequence of the initiative. The social partners decided to collect their contributions and to establish a report in 2007.

Stephano Ruvalo added that cases of best practice have been collected to address health & environmental protection, to implement high standards, to create management instruments and an indispensable product stewardship. He referred to the frequency of accidents in the chemical industry and explained that not in each Member State there is the same level of responsible care and not the same methods of managing risks. Responsible Care is a good example where the social partners can show the working together.

5. REACH and Health and Safety Management

a) Activities of the working group: Report from the two Social Partner conferences in March in Prague and in May in Bucharest

Reinhard Reibsch reported from the two Social Partner conferences in Prague and Bucharest. The background was for the chemical industry to find its role in the EU25 market. In the past, REACH was insufficiently discussed among the social partners and there was mainly only a transfer of information on REACH. There is a need for more initiatives to create links and to improve social dialogue in these countries.

5. REACH and Health and Safety Management

b) Update on the REACH legislative procedure: Second reading in Parliament and Council

Jean Claude Lahaut informed on the recent developments in the European Parliament. The EP environment committee was working on its position and a vote in the EP Plenary was expected for November/December 2006. There would be chances to end up with a conciliation procedure between the EU institutions. The debates on some key issues have already been solved (registration, duty of care, evaluation & agency, authorisation and access to information). However, it was concluded that the main objectives of REACH would be supported by CEFIC and the Social Partners.

5. REACH and Health and Safety Management

c) Presentation of the joint position paper of ECEG and EMCEF for formal adoption

Jean Pelin explained the draft of the 3rd joint position paper which would be consistent with the 1st and 2nd joint positions. The authorisation and banning procedure would be crucial and could lead to extremely dangerous effects. In the case of the carcinogen CVM 40.000 workers would be involved in this business. However, the Council position could be seen as an acceptable compromise (but not more!).

Thomas Nieber added that substitution and authorisation would be very difficult issues since there is high competition and the risk that non-EU companies would take over the businesses.

Sylvain Lefebvre referred to the experience with asbestos where 40 years had been necessary to find the right risk management decisions and to the position of the French employers that would oppose to the EP's substitution proposal. He stressed that the substitution proposal should not be undermined.

The draft text of the 3rd joint position was voted and adopted with 4 abstentions and no votes against.

5. REACH and Health and Safety Management

d) Status Quo of the proposed project with downstream users industries and their social partners on health and safety and presentation of Brochure

Jean Claude Lahaut presented the brochure "Working with chemicals" in which five cases of good practice are illustrated. The brochure was supported by the social partners.

6. Social Partners contribution to Flexicurity – Presentation from the European Commission and discussion

Dirk Hadrich explained the Commission's reflections on the issue of flexicurity which is about creating simultaneously more flexible labour markets and more social security. The issue was also discussed in the European Social Summit in Lahti (Finland) on 20 October 2006 where the Social Partners confirmed their intention to prepare a joint contribution before March 2007. The basic questions for the Social Partners to consider are: 1) How to achieve greater flexicurity? 2) What are the obstacles to this policy?

7. Progress report regarding the setting up of a high level group on the Chemical industry by the European Commission in 2007

Reinhard Reibsch explained that there is consideration to set up a high level group on the Chemical industry by the services of the European Commission. This group should develop an integrated approach for industrial policy and workers organisations would be encouraged to take part in the debate. The group would start to work after the adoption of REACH and it would look at the impact of legislation but REACH itself would not be in the scope of activities. The group would be composed of SMEs, NGOs, EP, industry and

3 Member States. There was also the idea to transform the REACH WG into a Competitiveness WG.

8. Update on recent upcoming social affair activities of the European Commission

Dirk Hadrich explained the background of the two Commission Communications on the demographic future of Europe and on the reconciliation of professional, private and family life. Both Communications were adopted by the Commission on 12 October 2006. Some interactive demographic trends were presented and the inevitable consequences of those trends were explained: ageing population & shrinking workforce. Strategic keys to the successful management of the future problems would be the promotion of employment, higher productivity, integration of migrants, sustainable public finances and finally better working and family life balance. On this latter issue the Commission has launched a 1st stage Social Partner consultation ending on 22 November 2006: The Social Partners are asked to express their opinion on the current need for action, need for improvements, helpful means for such a balance policy, adequateness of the current EU legislation, possibilities to balance the costs and benefits for individuals and companies.

The attention was drawn to the Green paper "Labour law" that will launch an intensive political consultation period after its adoption by the Commission planned for 22 November 2006.

As announced in the Social Agenda 2005-2010 the Commission is considering the idea of creating an EU framework at the disposal of the Social Partners willing to formalise the nature and results of their transnational collective negotiations. Currently, the Commission is collecting and analysing transnational texts concluded at company level. Different tools have been identified and studies are produced to provide a basis for an open debate with the stakeholders. A growing number of transnational texts at company level was discovered and more than 60 companies were involved in this action. Different titles were found and usually there is not the legal character of a collective agreement. The findings will be further analysed by the Commission during the year 2007.

9. Any other business

Next meetings:

8 December 2006 (WG)

26 February 2007 (WG)

4 May 2007 (PL)

4 July 2007 (WG)

18 September 2007 tbc

5 December 2007 tbc