



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion DG

Employment and Social Governance
Social dialogue,

**SECTORAL SOCIAL DIALOGUE COMMITTEES FOR TEXTILE AND CLOTHING,
TANNING AND LEATHER, AND FOOTWEAR.**

**21 June 2016
Joint working group meeting
MINUTES**

Chair : Commission

1. Approval of the minutes of the last meetings and of the agenda

The social partners approved the minutes of the following meetings :

- Plenary meeting Textile and Clothing dd. 30 November 2015;
- Joint plenary Footwear/Tanning and Leather dd. 15 December 2015.

Also, the agenda of the meeting was adopted.

2. Introductory Remarks of the Social Partners

- The social partners welcomed the initiative to organise a joint working group meeting around a number of common themes. They stressed the importance, though, of maintaining separate plenary meetings in order to rightly address the specificities of each sector.

- The social partner organisations congratulated Mr Luc TRIANGLE with his recent election as General Secretary of industriAll. Mr TRIANGLE informed the participants that his organisation would in the future be represented in the TCLF sectoral social dialogue meetings by Mr Sylvain LEFEBVRE, Deputy General Secretary.

- COTANCE informed the meeting that, following a decision by the latest General Assembly, Mr Jonathan MUIRHEAD will be succeeded by Mr Thomas BEE as President for the period 2016-2018.

- CEC stressed the importance of skills development and CSR for the TCLF sectors.

- EURATEX announced the recent nomination as President of Mr Klaus HUNEKE, who will lead the organisation as from 1 January 2017 for a two years term. Euratex will focus its future activities on three pillars: trade, innovation and research, and sustainable businesses. For the latter, a new department was created and it addresses environmental, resources and societal challenges including corporate responsibility. Mr Mauro SCALIA is in charge.

- industriAll pointed at the added value of the organisation (created 4 years ago) in approaching the Commission services. The organisation's priorities will be investment, innovation and competitiveness, renewable energy and jobs. Mr TRIANGLE pointed at the importance of social dialogue resulting in outcomes, as confirmed during the recent industriAll congress. Finally, he particularly welcomed the Turkish participants at employers' side, stressing the importance of social dialogue in Turkey.

3. Internal market level playing field

It was proposed to put this agenda point on the next plenary meeting of the textile SSDC, and to clearly define whether the scope should relate to either control or enforcement of EU legislation.

4. Sustainability in the TCLF sectors

DG TRADE gave an overview of relevant trade-related initiatives. Ms MADRID and Ms GONDY confirmed that provisions supporting workers' rights and environmental protection are included in EU trade and investment agreements, and that specific initiatives in cooperation with international organisations, such as the Bangladesh Sustainability Compact have been launched. It is absolutely necessary to build trust amongst relevant actors at international level in order to advance on responsible management of supply chains. They pointed at the Market Access Advisory Committee, which features a working group on textiles. In this framework, sustainability issues are regularly touched upon including in relation to updates on the Sustainable Apparel Coalition, and the Euratex CSR project. Business contributions are key to contribute to more sustainable value chains, including through the integration of sustainability concerns in their core strategies. In reply, both workers' and employers' organisations pointed at the large variety of initiatives that already exist in this area which could lead to confusion with manufacturing companies, social partners and consumers according to some. They insisted that the creation of new codes of conduct is unnecessary, but existing ones should rather be implemented in the value chains. They also asked to clearly distinguish between manufacturing companies and retailers when discussing compliance standards. industriAll, on the other hand, stated that the Bangladesh Accord is a game changing initiative because of its specific nature and its clear focus on a few domains. The workers' side argued that mandatory approaches could be more impactful. Euratex welcomed the existence of different voluntary sustainability initiatives which reflect different needs on sustainability across the supply chain. Discussing improvements, Euratex also stressed the need to first identify which policy measures can provide value prior to debate further aspects".

5. EU Initiative on Responsible Management of the Supply Chain in the Garment Sector

Ms HOEKSTRA (DG DEVCO) provided an update on this initiative. Following the informal consultations with stakeholders including private sector and social partners, and between the EU and Member-states in 2015, the EC had commissioned a study on the garment supply chain to complement own analyses. Initial results were presented at the High-level Conference on Responsible Management of the Supply Chain in the Garment Sector on 25 April. There seems to be a good opportunity to give particular attention to female entrepreneurship and gender equality in garment supply chains, for instance. The final study report is yet to be published (*note: expected later this year*). The conference marked the final stages of the initiative's exploratory phase.

http://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/news-and-events/high-level-conference-responsible-management-supply-chain-garment-sector_en

The next phase will consider possible complementary actions in addition to already existing engagement in the garment sector. This will include the role of development cooperation, and will be in line with the recently published Trade for All Communication.

The social partners asked to see more coherence in the objectives and the interaction with other EU initiatives. Also, a better definition of stakeholders and

sectors involved was requested (e.g. not only to limit the action to the garment sector).

COTANCE wondered how the Commission could have derived that the leather industry was advocating for a mandatory approach. Mr Gonzalez-Quijano clarified that the European tanning industry had not yet made a decision on this aspect, while it seems that the European Parliament had resolved in the minerals sector that voluntary schemes were no longer enough in the area of responsible supply chain management.

On the necessity of a mandatory approach, the discussion showed different opinions between workers and employers, which led to DG DEVCO's conclusion that a legislative option must always be based on careful consideration of possible added value, and a thorough and careful assessment of impacts. For the garment sector, some existing legislation can be built on, and there is a need to take into account existing international standards and due diligence principles.

6. Change your shoes campaign

Following the discussions in the footwear & leather SSDC meeting of 15 December 2015, a number of dedicated meetings took place between the footwear and tanning industry, the campaign promoter "Südwind", DG GROW and DG DEVCO. The point was put on the agenda of this meeting in order to present an update of the state of play; further evidence of the problems caused to the European leather and footwear sectors with the reports published by the EU supported campaign and further workers' views.

The social partners were informed that DG DEVCO is at present evaluating the project from a legal point of view. The evaluation of the reports will take place from a qualitative angle. Therefore, DG DEVCO is not in a position to present the state of play in a meeting of social partners at this stage.

industriAll, the European Trade Union organisation, criticised not having been involved by the responsible NGOs in the discussion at an earlier stage. It deplored the provocative attitude of the NGO. However, in the current state of play, it would like to examine the alleged poor criticism on the working conditions in Italian tanneries, which should certainly not be considered as a common feature in the Italian tanning industry. It considers the NGOs involved as whistle-blowers, while COTANCE considers the practice as an illegitimate intrusion in the competences of the Social Partners. Trade Unions and industry associations agree to discuss any socially relevant issue in a transparent way in order to avoid that NGOs start overtaking the role of trade unions.

The Italian trade unions pointed at the existence of companies working under illegal circumstances or in grey areas. In Italy, the Rana Plaza disaster was used in a scandalous way for a number of broadcasts targeting the tanning industry. Therefore, they claimed that if the allegations in the controversial CYS reports would be addressed jointly by both sides of industry it would be an opportunity to clear the image of the Italian industry, in the interest of both workers and employers.

The Italian industry representatives and the EU social partners repeated their criticism on the NGO consortium led by Südwind – lead beneficiary of the "Change your shoes" project: opportunist methodology mixing up value chains and methods, blatant defamation, tendency to generalise, biased reporting on supplied documentation, activist attitude playing on public perception, and use of EU funds to attack a legitimate EU industrial sector, etc.

The upcoming discussions between industriAll and Südwind the week after this SSDC meeting, should serve to clarify some of these points.

COTANCE reiterates that there is willingness to address any relevant problem(s) in the context of EU Social Dialogue, using the instruments available. For example the

code of conduct adopted by COTANCE and ETUF-TCL (now industriAll) in 2000:
<http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=521&langId=en&agreementId=109>

7. Skills initiative : new blueprint for sectoral cooperation

In her presentation (attached) Ms SOBCZAK (DG GROW) provided an overview of the elements of the New Skills Agenda for Europe, and the underlying priority areas. More in particular, she explained the rationale behind the Skills Guarantee, the EQF revision and the Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation on Skills. The Blueprint, which is of particular importance for the TCLF sector being one of the 6 eligible sectors, will be based on synergies between EU-level and national partnerships. The engagement of social partners will be particularly welcomed. For the TCLF sector, it will be essential to define the skills gaps and shortages, and to develop concrete solutions, as explained by Ms KUSKE (DG GROW). In terms of funding, Erasmus+ and COSME will provide an amount of 4 MEUR per sector for a period of 4 years. A call for proposals is planned to be published in October 2016 with a submission date in January 2017. DG EMPL has the lead for this initiative.

8. Ongoing projects

a) Euratex gave a state of play of the textile CSR project. The web-based self-assessment tool is functioning, and is at present being tested on-site in SMEs in several countries. The project will need an extension of the duration until the beginning of 2017. Once finished, the tool is expected to have the potential for use in other sectors.

b) A second project is focussing on an analysis of the textile sector with a view to define future perspectives of sectoral social dialogue. The project applies a structure similar to the social dialogue project of the footwear sector, and will look into the achievements of sectoral social dialogue in cooperation with Eurofound.

c) The tanning and leather sector presented an update on "Leather is my Job II". At present, the focus is on the development of relevant job promoting actions at local level. The project will be presented during an upcoming congress of the tanning and leather sector in Freiberg (Germany) following the COTANCE Assembly General. The sector also submitted a project under the ongoing "social dialogue" call for proposals. This project will deal with due diligence for healthy workplaces at all ages, with a link to the OIRA project for the leather sector.

d) Regarding the European Sector Skills Council, the social partners agreed to await the details of the Blueprint for Sectoral Cooperation, in order to be able to develop further concrete steps in this area.

9. AOB

N/A.

Annexes :

List of participants

Presentation : "Overview of the New Skills Agenda for Europe"