



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion DG

Employment and Social Legislation, Social Dialogue
Social dialogue, Industrial Relations

SECTORAL SOCIAL DIALOGUE COMMITTEE FOR TEXTILE AND CLOTHING

26 April 2013
Working group meeting
MINUTES

Chair : Commission

1. Discussion and approval of the minutes of the last meeting and of the agenda

The minutes of the plenary meeting dd. 18 December 2012 were approved.
The agenda of the meeting was adopted.

2. Presentation of the German Campaign "Go Textile"

Mr Oliver Woye of the Agency "Die Wegmeister" showed a presentation (attached) on this campaign, the objective of which is to attract and recruit younger workers for the textile industry (www.go-textile.de). The campaign is launched by the German textile and fashion industry association. The target group are youngsters between 14 and 18, as well as their parents. The campaign, which is highly visual, has been designed to convince youngsters that the textile sector does not only produce clothes, but is also responsible for technical textile (e.g. medical textile, airplane bodies and windmills, living and lifestyle objects), which makes up about 40 % of its production.

The campaign makes ample use of social media and videos, and is interactive in that it proposes textile companies based on the location of the website visitor.

The presentation raised criticism from Mr MOREAU who claimed that the campaign does not give a complete picture, failing to cover social aspects such as wage conditions. Also, pointing at the situation in France, he wondered how it would be possible to attract young people if many technical schools that provide training in textile techniques are closing down. As to Research and Development, the question was raised whether this aspect is really focussed on the European textile sector. Finally, and pointing again at social conditions, reference was made to the salary problems in the French site of the German company Sedimetal. In reply to this, Mr MARCHI pointed at the advantages and merits of the campaign, which is, however, not the appropriate instrument to deal with social issues. He also proposed to increase cooperation and networking on European level in order to tackle social abuse.

Mr RHODE also acknowledged the merits of the campaign, but raised doubts about the slogan "Your chance", which he considered not convincing enough to young people.

3. a) EU Staff working document on the competitiveness of the fashion industries: results and follow-up.

Pia BULLER. (DG ENTR) provided the participants with a presentation (attached) of the follow-up of the Staff Working Documents (SWD) on the competitiveness of the fashion industries. The sector, during its previous meeting, was most interested in the SWD related to knowledge, skills and creativity, intellectual property rights and a fair level playing field in trade. The focus of the exercise will now be on a number of

preparatory events – interactive workshops - in European cities, resulting in a final conference in London (December 2013) with the participation of some 200 people from the private and the public sector. Two parallel processes (aimed at media coverage as well as at content) are on-going; the industry's leading role in both processes is deemed necessary while the Commission will act as facilitator. Following the London conference, a road-map will be published showing responsibilities and actions.

In a first reaction, Luc TRIANGLE stated that the trade union is also involved in skills issues, which is not limited to the textile sector only. He expressed his satisfaction with being involved in the preparation of these events. Mr MARCHI stressed that the workshops in the capitals will be on European level as much as possible. He also mentioned the intensive and innovative aspects of the process, with interactive workshops based on the SWDs.

Replying to Mr MOREAU who questioned the usefulness and the ultimate goal of this initiative aimed at the fashion sector solely, Mr MARCHI stated that the fashion sector was the only one for which a Communication was expected. Also, he added that Commissioner TAJANI wanted to show a product in order to keep the fashion industry in the EU.

b) Free Trade agreements and economic and social impacts, follow-up.

In the absence of a representative from DG TRADE to provide information on Free Trade agreements the social partners discussed Pakistan's request for constant duty-free access to the EU for textile and clothing products. The social partners consider it to be a risk if this request would receive a positive reply for political reasons, since it would destroy the benefits of the existing agreements. The employers asked the relevant Commissioners in writing for a fair and non-political implementation of the GSP+ rules for this country, in other words for an objective and legal application of the assessment criteria. In order to prevent the ratification, a solid dossier will be necessary. The trade unions proposed to contact the global partners with affiliates in Pakistan in order to obtain information on compliance and local implementation of criteria.

c) Developments regarding the textile names Regulation : conclusion of the Matrix study and follow-up.

Mr CARDOSO (DG ENTR) presented the outcomes of the study on possible new labelling requirements of textile products, written by the consultancy firm Matrix. Regulation 1007 of 2011 gives a mandate to the Commission to report by 30/09/2013 on possible new labelling requirements. This information is considered to be relevant to consumers, which therefore became the focus of the study in question. The study provides a better understanding on information valued most by consumers. It also shows that there are already a number of well-established systems known to consumers, next to EU and international standards. Therefore, the added value of additional labelling requirements is considered to be uncertain. The two most valued labels by a panel of 3500 consumers proved to be related to size and care instructions respectively.

The next step is the production of a report by end of September, which will indicate whether the introduction of new labelling requirements is deemed necessary, in other words whether additional regulation by the Commission is to be proposed.

In a first reaction, Mr KREUZER agreed that the Matrix study contains interesting figures, but he stressed that the consumer is interested in data on the country of origin as well, certainly in view of the recent events in Bangladesh. Also, he mentioned, labelling on the country of origin provides indications on transport and CO² emission. Mr CARDOSO replied that social labelling would meet difficulties in checking compliance. In addition, he referred to the recent Commission proposal for a General Product Safety Regulation, article 7 of which deals with country of origin. As to the social and environmental dimension, he stated that the existing regulation,

which is fit for purpose, functions well. Ms HENDRYCH pointed at the difficulties in determining the country of origin, certainly in view of existing value chains. Mr MOREAU reacted by saying that the current legislation offers limited possibilities for progress in terms of traceability and the related employment issues, and pleaded therefore to go beyond the existing legislation. To this, Mr MARCHI replied that there are different views and definitions related to traceability; the debate on the definition was started too late and therefore, a bottom-up process on the traceability modalities should be started.

d) Report on the Euro-Mediterranean Conference on Skills Development and Social Dialogue for the Textile and Clothing Sector in the Euro-Mediterranean Area.

Mr Norbert SCHOEBEL reported on this conference, organised by DG ENTR in Malta (10-11/04/2013) and which was attended also by representatives of the European social partners of the textile and clothing sector. Both sides of the industry were present, which contributed to the success of this event. Although the conference focussed on skills, a minor drawback was the lack of an overview of the respective competences of the actors in the skills field : EMPL for the demand side, EAC for the supply side and the social partners for the curricula domain. The conference included participation of the Western Balkans, but apparently the context and the exact situation of the textile sector in those countries could have been covered more profoundly. The global dimension was covered by ILO, who have expressed their interest in further discussions on global issues. Mr SCHOEBEL also referred to the problem-solving capacity of a well-functioning social dialogue, as presented by the Belgian IVOC representative during the conference.

The conference documents can be found at :

http://ec.europa.eu/enlargement/taix/dyn/taix-events/library/detail_en.jsp?EventID=51327

The social partners were positive about the ambitious conference programme, and both sides stressed the importance of the regional approach including the Western Balkans, given the importance of the textile sector there and the existing skills mismatches in those countries. Also, this kind of events provides opportunities to take stock of the position of the EU industry in a geopolitical dimension.

4. EU Social Dialogue joint projects

a) EU follow-up Project on the EU TCL Skills Council

Mr MARCHI reported on the state of play of the TCL sector skills council, the first year of which concluded by a successful final conference. The grant dossier for the second year of action, however, is at present delayed by the Commission for administrative reasons, since all accepted projects must be the subject of a single report which has to go through different procedural steps. This is beginning to cause a lack of interest with the partners in the project. Ms LE BERRE reiterated the original five pillars of the sectoral skills council scheme, and asked to be informed about the position of the Commission regarding the future dimension of the sectoral skills, and about the links between the different Commission initiatives in the educational field. Mr TRIANGLE added that the enlargement of the sectoral skills council is an important challenge for the coming year of activity, involving organisations recognised by both social partners on national level.

Mr BLOEMEKE mentioned the absence of a German speaking organisation in the TCL sectoral skills council and suggested to introduce the Insel school in the network. Mr RHODE described the activities of the Bundesinstitut für berufliche Bildung, a trilateral institution which in his view should also be convinced to

participate. Mr TRIANGLE agreed with the proposal, and suggested holding the next meeting of the council in Germany. Ms LE BERRE added that Poland, Italy and Spain may be involved. The issue will be further discussed during the next meeting.

b) Joint code of conduct : implementation and follow-up

Mr TRIANGLE introduced this point by saying that this sector had signed two codes of conduct in the past : a charter of the social partners in the textile and clothing sector in 1997 on the implementation of ILO standards, and secondly the restructuring recommendations signed in 2008. The follow-up of these two documents and their value are at present under discussion, given the changed context and recent accidents (e.g. Bangladesh). He therefore suggested creating an informal working group to discuss the implementation of the two documents in daily practice, and to what extent the documents should be updated.

Mr MOREAU agreed with the proposal and pointed at a recently signed agreement on public tendering including social aspects, but without an exact overview of the implementation thereof.

In reply to the remark on public procurement Mr MARCHI described the two Commission initiatives : one on public procurement and internationalisation and a second one on public procurement in research projects using them as innovation instruments. The issue is that the implementation of these by member states often depends on goodwill. He also asked for clarification on the state and the necessity of changing the two original documents, and of increasing the number of labour standards. He proposed to consult his members before taking further steps.

Mr TRIANGLE then referred to the possibility of including the complete process of updating and implementing the code of conduct in a CSR project which could be submitted under one of the calls for proposals of DG EMPL. This process has become of major importance, given the pressure from NGOs and consumers' expectations, which was confirmed by Mr KREUZER. EURATEX expressed its willingness to participate in such a project, provided that it is backed by their affiliates, and that the project is based on common points of interest with a sense of compromise.

5. AOB

The Commission reiterated the rules on reimbursement, especially on the deadlines for submitting justifying documents.

Annexes :

- List of participants
- Presentation : "Go Textile ! Campaign - Facts"
- Presentation : "The EU policy for the fashion industries"