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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, 13 January 2009

SECTORAL SOCIAL DIALOGUE COMMITTEE "CHEMICAL INDUSTRY"

WORKING GROUP MEETING

held on 5 December 2008 in Brussels

DRAFT MINUTES

Chairpersons: Ladislav Novak (ECEG) and Reinhard Reibsch (EMCEF)

Commission representatives: Dirk Hadrich (DG EMPL), Martin Ulbrich (DG EMPL), Solvar Hardeng (DG ENTR)

1. Welcome by the chairpersons and the European Commission.

The social partners were welcomed by the chairpersons who explained that the issue of climate change would be the top priority of the meeting.

2. Approval of the agenda

The draft agenda was approved.

3. Update on ETS legislation

Peter Botschek (CEFIC) gave an overview and update on the current ETS debates at global and European level (annex 1). He referred to weaknesses of the Commission proposal, explained the CEFIC's impact analysis, the benchmarking system and the timeline of the decision taking process. CEFIC was particularly interested to look at the carbon intensity of the different sectors.

Commission européenne, B-1049 Bruxelles / Europese Commissie, B-1049 Brussel - Belgium. Telephone: (32-2) 299 11 11. Office: J54 0/30. Telephone: direct line (32-2) 29+3222993120.

<http://www.ec.europa.eu/socialdialogue>

http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_dialogue/sectorial37_en.htm

E-mail: dirk.hadrich@ec.europa.eu

Social partners felt disadvantages, penalisation, risks on the competitiveness and handicaps for the chemical industry. They decided to prepare another joint letter that should explain the problems to the current political decision makers. The new document should be based on the previously approved joint position but it should be shorter and address in particular the support of the initiative, the long term conditions, the importance of the benchmarking system and the uncertainties through the financial crisis. The paper should be agreed by email within the coming days.

4. Regulation on pharmaceutical products and industry

ECEG explained the importance of the pharmaceutical industry which would comprise many medium size enterprises. New legislative rules would create additional costs and obligations for the sector. There would be risks for new innovative pharmaceuticals which could enter the market only under difficult conditions.

EMCEF explained to be interested in an open and general debate that could focus on training, skills and education.

Dirk Hadrich encouraged the social partners to go further and to indicate to the Commission on which specific issues, rules or legislation they would need a Commission contribution to their dialogue.

5. REACH-implementation - status-report

Solvår Hardeng (DG ENTR) reported on the current status of REACH (annex 2). The pre-registrations closed on 1 December 2008. The list of substances that have been pre-registered should be launched by 1 January 2009. After this the potential registrants are forming a pre-SIEF (Substance Information Exchange Forum) to check if they are having the same substance or not. If agreement on sameness, a SIEF is "born" and the work with the registration of the substances should start. The ECHA staff should be increased from 250 to 450 people in future.

Erwin Annys (CEFIC) added more information about quantitative figures on the pre-registration, the exposure scenario development and the communication model (annex 3).

6. HLG Chemical industry

EMCEF reported on recent activities of the HLG and its future intentions (annex 4). A final report should be drafted by the sherpas in January 2009.

Social partners would prefer that the HLG would go further concerning human resources policies, professional mobility and training. They feared future problems with finding specialists and professional workers.

EMCEF wanted to prepare a contribution paper that should be circulated as soon as possible.

7. Results of the Skills-project concerning chemical industry

Martin Ulbrich (DG EMPL) reported on the ongoing series of studies called "Sectoral analysis of emerging competencies and economic activities in the EU". He explained the scope of the project launched by the unit of DG EMPL that is responsible for anticipation of restructuring and change of working conditions. The project comprises 16 different sectoral studies looking at the implications of change for job qualification in a medium time horizon. The contractor TNO was asked to analyse the drivers of change and demands for different jobs. TNO should also draw up scenarios and see how the needs could be found on the labour market. End October 2008 was an evaluation workshop with many experts who got the draft report in advance and who made comments. Currently, TNO finalises its report within the next weeks and the intention is to publish and to circulate it soon. It was underlined that the purpose was not to give definite answers to the identified problems but to push for more and similar analysis. The social partners were encouraged also to engage into a future skills discussion.

ECEG asked if TNO could present the results of the study directly to the social partners of the Chemical industry sector. It has to be seen if this can be arranged.

In any case, the final report should be put on the agenda of the next meeting for discussion.

8. ECEG/EMCEF-project proposal on skills and qualification

Catherine Beudon (ECEG) has been working with others on a common EU approach on skills for workers in the EU chemicals industry. They took stock on different measures in different Member States, they looked at the link with training and education systems and the way to obtain diploma.

Social partners tried to identify the next steps on this issue. They wanted to see what the needs are and to analyse how recognition works in different countries. Social partners thought that many plants would have similar safety approaches and qualifications. It would be good to define a common basis at EU level.

From Belgium information was provided on the 'Colibri' system for qualifications management within companies. After consultation of social partners measures close to real situation would be put in place in Belgian companies.

Social partners decided to set up a small working group that should prepare the common understanding. There would be 4 areas for investigation: 1) teaching and education, 2) internal or in-house training within companies, 3) validating skills for official recognition (accreditation) and 4) changes of technologies and lifelong learning. The study group consists of French, Dutch, Belgian, German, British and Bulgarian members. They should push the ideas further to build up a project in 2009. They should exchange ideas also by email to avoid overloaded meeting agendas.

9. British University programme

Prof. Nick Norman presented initiatives of education establishment at the University of Bristol. The intention would be to try making chemistry more interesting, to develop modernised teaching approaches and to bring students into labs for working. Teaching should be performed in the best possible way and best use of the labs should be achieved. The basic infrastructure has been brought up to a high level making it also

available for training courses. A very innovative e-learning system has also been installed.

He was asked what he would do with teachers and people when they come to the university. He replied that the basic ideas would be to make science interesting and to show interesting analytical instruments because they are not available at school. Through visual demonstrations the university would get them excited and chemistry would be shown in a more positive and better light. There would be extremely positive feedback from teachers. It was found that the image of the sector has recently improved and that science is seen as solution for e.g. climate change problems. The schools would be charged and prices would be adjusted to what the schools can afford.

EMCEF referred to certain TV programmes with the intention to bring science back into the society.

10. Report on status of the CITIES-project

During 2008 the CITIES- project has well been brought forward. The intention was to enable secondary school teachers to have innovative and attractive teaching methods. Some modules have already been tested out and a website has been created. The final CITIES conference should be in September 2009 but the host country has not yet been decided. In any case, the very interesting outcome should be available in many languages. The different teaching modules would not be secret and should be circulated as soon as possible when they are available.

11. Report on ECRN activities on skills

The representative of ECRN could not take part during the meeting but should be invited to the next meeting. There is the intention to clarify with ECRN its responsibilities and duties. Certain difficulties came up because some of ECRN's topics and work would significantly overlap with the sectoral social dialogues activities.

12. AOB

Next meetings:

2 March 2009 (WG)

13 May 2009 (PL)

7 July 2009 (WG)

30 September 2009 (WG)

30 November 2009 (WG)

The annexes can be downloaded from the "library" on the website of the SSDC Chemicals Industry: http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_dialogue/sectorial37_en.htm