



European Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee on Local and Regional Government

**Report of the working group meeting on
Strengthening social dialogue in the new Member States and in candidate countries
20th March 2006, Brussels**

The meeting started with a tour de table of the participants (see list in annex) and was jointly chaired by P. Clarke and A. Ozceri.

1. Presentation of the integrated programme of the European cross-sectoral social partners

Valeria Ronzitti (CEEP) and Julianne Bir (ETUC) presented the content of this programme, which aims to support capacity-building of the social partner organisations in the new Member States and in acceding countries (see their presentation, attached).

Ronzitti and Bir stressed that the implementation of the integrated programme since 2004 had demonstrated that there is not one social dialogue model applicable to all the new Member States, in view of the fact that the structure and degree of development of social dialogue greatly differs from one country to another. The programme therefore focused on providing to the social partners the tools and knowledge to engage into a real and effective social dialogue at both national and European level. At the same time, the programme also sought to increase the ability of the social partners in the new Member States and acceding countries to better anticipate the challenges linked to restructuring.

The programme will partly end with the organisation of a European Conference on 26-27 June in Brussels to present the final version of a study conducted on the issue of restructuring in the new Member States. In the years 2006-2007, ETUC, CEEP and UNICE foresee to extend the scope of this report to the EU-15 Member States as restructuring is also a challenge faced in the 'older' Member States.

Further information on the activities of the cross-sectoral partners is available at:

- www.unice.org/erc (for employer organisations),
- www.resourceetuc.com (for trade unions).

2. Technical assistance provided through the TAIEX Instrument

Sabine Fasching (European Commission, DG Enlargement, Unit D5) presented the technical assistance programme of the Commission in support of capacity-building activities of public authorities in the new Member States and in acceding countries. She explained that TAIEX

also covered the South-Eastern European countries of Kosovo, Bosna-Herzegovina and FYROM, as well as the countries neighbouring the EU but not yet eligible to EU accession (the Mediterranean countries, ex-USSR countries and Russia).

The TAIEX programme typically supports the organisations of events such as seminars, workshops, peer reviews and training sessions on the implementation of sectoral EU legislation (i.e. the European labour law). 1.300 of such events were organised in 2005 by TAIEX. The programme works primarily with national governments and local and regional authorities but social partner organisations are also eligible to apply. However, to date, the TAIEX team has received only a limited number of applications from social partner organisations (one lead to the organisation of a conference on the European social dialogue in Bulgaria).

In practice, all applicants must send their requests in writing to the TAIEX unit. Once the project is approved, the applicant must provide to the European Commission the list of the participants to invite to the planned event. The TAIEX team in turn takes care of booking the conference room, providing interpretation at the meeting, sending the invitations to the participants and making the necessary arrangements for the speakers.

Fasching ended her presentation by inviting CEMR and EPSU members to make use of the TAIEX programme for their capacity-building activities at national or regional level. Further information, including the application form for the programme is available from <http://taix.cec.eu.int>.

3. Tour de table” on current capacity-building activities of EPSU and CEMR members

The participants exchanged information on their respective activities in support of strengthening social dialogue in the new Member States and in the candidate countries e.g. by promoting the joint management of modernisation in local and regional government. A number of trans-national projects were mentioned, including those developed by:

- The Norwegian Association of Local and Regional Authorities (KS) in partnership with the Association of Polish cities on benchmarking public services;
- KS again, in partnership with the Association of Slovak Town and Communities on reconciling paid work with family life, as part of a wider project to manage demographic changes (see documents attached);
- The trade unions from the Baltic States on the organisation of a regional seminar on social dialogue.

In addition to these, the representative of the Latvian association of local and regional authorities reported on a large project funded through the European Social Fund in Latvia with a view to increase the capacity of the municipalities to manage economic and social restructuring and to develop local employment plans.

4. Discussion on future activities

Summing up the various ideas that had been expressed in the morning, A. Ozceri and P. Clarke outlined the following activities that could be organised in the coming months in the follow-up of the 2005 CEMR/EPSU project:

- The organisation of *national and/or regional seminars* aimed at bringing employees and employers' organisations together to discuss how to develop their social dialogue at local and sectoral level. Such seminars could be organised with the support of TAIEX at the initiative of certain EPSU/CEMR member organisations;
- The organisation of a *European conference* to discuss more broadly how to respond to economic and social changes through social dialogue in local and regional government.

CEMR and EPSU's secretariats also announced their intention to send to their members a *questionnaire* to update information available on issues such as: the priorities of each association, the issues tackled in the frame of their social dialogue (in countries where this takes place), the obstacles hindering the further development of social dialogue, their recent cross-border activities in partnership with organisations from other Member States, the contact details of their experts and, possibly, of also the persons they are in touch in the member States that are not yet taking part in the activities of the European sectoral social dialogue Committee.

Comments made by the members in the ensuing discussion can be summarised as follows:

- The joint activities should aim to develop the capacity of not just the national associations but also of employees and employers in municipalities directly to engage in social dialogue. In particular, local and regional authorities should be motivated to act as employers, by helping them to better understand the concept of social dialogue and what it entails (i.e. not just collective bargaining but all kinds of formal and informal contacts between the two sides);
- CEMR and EPSU should avoid duplicating at local and regional government level the work of CEEP, UNICE and ETUC;
- The organisation of a first national seminar could be tested in Slovakia, as this country has the most developed structure for social dialogue among the new Member States;
- CEMR and EPSU should gather information on development projects aimed at improving the quality and efficiency of local and regional services provision;
- The members should more generally share more information on their national activities and other developments occurring at national level that are impacting on social dialogue (legislative changes, organisation of conferences on social dialogue as in Greece in June and in Slovakia in April, etc),
- The European conference that will be organised in Brussels should be on the model of the one held by CEMR and EPSU in 1996;
- The regional seminars should aim to promote cross-border cooperation and could be in the number of three: one for the Baltic and Scandinavian States, one involving Italy, Portugal, Spain and Greece along with the South-Eastern European countries, and a third one involving the countries of Central Europe;
- The questionnaire that will be prepared by the secretariats should also seek to gather information on the types of services delivered at local and regional level as well as the levels of funding allocated to local and regional authorities.

A. Ozceri and P. Clarke proposed to send the questionnaire to the members by June and to hold a second exchange of views on the organisation of future activities at the working group meeting of 31st October.

At the close of the meeting, the next meeting dates where recalled as follows:

6 th June:	Working group meeting on addressing demographic changes
22 nd September:	<i>This meeting will most likely be cancelled by the European Commission</i>
31 st October:	Working Group meeting –theme yet to be determined
29 th November:	Meeting (in plenary size) on new forms of work organisation in local and regional government.
