



EUROPEAN COMMISSION  
Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion DG

Employment and Social Governance  
**Social dialogue**

## SECTORAL SOCIAL DIALOGUE COMMITTEE FOR FURNITURE

**15 May 2019**  
**Plenary meeting**  
**MINUTES**

Chair : Mr HOOGENDIJK

### **1. Welcome-opening of the meeting**

### **2. Adoption of the agenda**

The agenda of the meeting was adopted.

### **3. Adoption of the draft minutes of the working group meeting dd. 19 March 2019.**

The minutes were adopted.

### **4. Industry Policy**

In his presentation (attached), Mr WALL (DG GROW) highlighted the EU initiatives for the Forest-Based Industries (F-BI). The 2013 Blueprint for EU Forest-Based Industries is a strategic document covering the four F-BI sectors. It identifies a number of challenges, climate policy being the most topical one at present. A key objective of the Blueprint is to increase the image of wood, profiling it as environmentally friendly and renewable. The implementation of the Blueprint resulted also in the creation of the EU Expert Group on Forest-Based Industries.

A 2015 study on cascade use of wood was the basis for the recent guidance on cascade use of wood in the context of the EU Circular Economy initiatives. The potential of wood as basic material in the circular economy is fully recognised, but a sectoral approach at national and regional level is needed, in order to address the competition with other materials.

Mr WALL then presented a number of EU documents related to F-BI industry policy. At present, particular focus is put on EU-China relations and on the preparation for a long-term vision for the new European Parliament and Commission.

For the workers' side, Mr JOHANSSON welcomed the importance of the cascade use of wood in the Commission initiatives, but he stressed the need to increase promotion of wood for sustainable goals, e.g. in the construction industry. Also, he pointed at the increased need to create jobs at local and regional level. Mr WALL reacted that the value chain is also linked to urban areas, and a split between urban and rural areas should be avoided. Following questions from Mr GEHRING (EFBWW) Mr WALL informed the participants that the process for a next Blueprint should be sector-led rather than driven by the Commission, which will need the involvement of social partners. The attractiveness of the woodworking and furniture sectors to youngsters, and the sustainability of work show similarities with the paper

sector, which is quite active in this field. Finally, the Cascade Guide will be updated so as to include the Forest Technology Platform, which gathers forest owners, CEI-Bois and CEPI. .

Following a question from the employers on good practices for the development of an industry policy, Mr WALL suggested being involved in the sector-led processes as much as possible, while at the same time paying attention to the overall challenges for the industry at large. The starting point should be to identify the overall goals and challenges, in order to come to implementing measures.

#### **5. Flame retardants**

For EFIC, Ms MURGIA presented the latest version of the joint letter to the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA). The main objective is to enlarge the restriction process to office furniture, which is an important part of the market. Mr JOHANSSON said that EFBWW supports the letter, since reducing the use of chemicals is expected to have a positive impact on the use of wood. Mr GEHRING pointed at the importance of identifying the right addressees, and suggested including – apart from ECHA – also the newly elected MEPs. He pointed at the Alliance against Cancer, which held an event non-melanoma skin cancer on 13 June. Mr HOOGENDIJK suggested sending the document to other Commission services, MEPs, as well as to other organisations who oppose to the use of hazardous substances in consumers' products.

#### **6. Digitalisation in the furniture sector**

Building on the outputs of the DIGIT-FUR project, the social partners are considering to produce a joint statement on the impact of digitalisation in the sector, taking into account national experiences. A first draft is being developed at secretariat level, but it is not ready for discussions at SSDC level yet. The document will have to highlight the role of social partners in the challenges related to digitalisation.

#### **7. CCMi (Commission Consultative pour les Mutations Industrielles) furniture related initiative**

Following discussions in previous SSDC meetings, MR GEHRING announced the application by the trade unions and employers of the furniture sector for a working group. A joint letter was sent, but it was not possible to meet the deadline of 24 May for supplying a complete application for a new opinion of the CCMi. The formalities, however, can be dealt with already. Once an application is accepted, the Board will create a study group, appoint a rapporteur and select experts to assist in drafting a document on the necessary sector-related items. For EFIC, Mr HOOGENDIJK asked to prioritise some of the proposed items, and announced that the EFIC board intends to discuss them following the nomination of a new Secretary General on 1 June 2019.

#### **8. SAWYER project**

CENFIM presented this new project, which envisages a holistic approach on the impact of the circular economy on VET and OSH in the sector (presentation attached). The circular economy will create challenges for certain sectoral occupations. At the time of the meeting, the project focussed on the report that will identify trends and statuses in the furniture sector. The project has a partnership that includes the EU-level as well as national furniture entities.

## **9. Furniture SSDC Work Programme**

EFBWW launched the discussion by saying that the present 2018-2019 work programme was a good basis for a next 2-year work programme, taking into account its relevant structure. Mr GEHRING enquired, however, whether a 4-year programme could be envisaged, in order to reflect longer-term challenges and policies. For EFIC, Mr HOOGENDIJK agreed that a broader perspective would indeed necessitate a longer-term work programme, and he suggested to put more weight on major sectoral challenges. A first draft will be presented at the next meeting.

## **10. Wood Dust Conference**

The Wood Dust Conference took place on the day after this meeting, and social partners consider it as an achievement of an activity mentioned in their work programme.

## **11. BOLSTER-UP 2**

The Belgian institution "Woodwize" is evaluating the responses to the survey. The organisation is still looking for more partners to be involved in the project.

## **12. European Parliament elections**

The social partners discussed the possibility to approach newly elected MEPs. EFBWW suggested to inform them on flame retardants, the EFIC manifesto, the new Work Programme, and the EFBWW industry policy. Both UEA and EFIC stressed the need to inform MEPs on the degree of innovation in the EU furniture sector, which is higher than for Chinese competitors.

## **13. AOB**

- Mr LUKES (UEA) enquired whether the US-China trade war could be discussed in the social dialogue meetings, taking into account customs-related issues. It should be mentioned that the US is the biggest importer of Chinese furniture. Both EFBWW and EFIC agreed with the proposal, also taking into account the opportunities for e-commerce with China.
- CENFIM proposed to envisage a project on attractiveness, possibly combined with CSR.

## **Annexes :**

- List of participants
- Presentations
  - o EU Forest-Based Industries Initiatives
  - o SAWYER project

- Annex : List of participants

<p><u>Employers</u></p> <p><b>EFIC</b>  Ms Giorgia MURGIA (EU)  Mr Paolo CHINI (IT)  Ms Pauline CLOUZET (FR)  Ms Anna FREIJ (SE)  Mr Kees HOOGENDIJK (NL)  Ms Miroslava SIMEONOVA (BG)</p> <p><b>UEA</b>  Mr Tomas LUKES (EU)  Ms Andreea PARASCHIV (RO)  Mr Julio RODRIGO (ES)</p> <p>9 employers' representatives  (4 men, 5 women)  (2 EU, 7 MS)</p>	<p><u>Workers</u></p> <p><b>EFBWW</b>  Mr Rolf GEHRING (EU)  Ms Magdalena SIKOROWSKA (EU)  Mr Juan Carlos BARRERA (ES)  Mr Fabio DEL CARRO (IT)  Mr Ruprecht HAMMERSCHMIDT (DE)  Mr Kenneth JOHANSSON (SE)  Mr Tomasz NAGORKA (PL)</p> <p>7 workers' representatives  (1 woman, 6 men)  (2 EU, 5 MS)</p>
<p><u>Other participants</u>  Mr Jeremy WALL (DG GROW)</p>	
<p><u>European Commission</u>  Mr Danny SCHEERLINCK (EMPL.A.2)</p>	