



## EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities DG

Social Dialogue, Social Rights, Working Conditions, Adaptation to Change  
**Social Dialogue, Industrial Relations**

### **Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee on Telecom**

#### **Steering committee meeting on 8 February 2010, Brussels**

#### **Minutes**

The meeting was chaired by Ms Dedden (UNI europa)

#### **1. Update on the Good Work – Good Health project**

Mr Silva (ETNO) gave an update on the progress of the project.



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UNI europa remarked that a better information flow regarding the project was necessary, and that Ms Dedden should be consulted on all decisions. Mr Zylberberg (ETNO) pointed out that France Telecom had not been contacted regarding the planned company visit, but that he would contact the project manager to arrange the details.

#### **2. 2010 working programme and review of the functioning of the committee**

Ms Dedden reminded participants that the December plenary meeting failed to adopt a work programme, and that UNI europa's objective is to make European social dialogue work. UNI europa therefore regretted the fact that ETNO did not want to commit to a work programme and did not provide feedback on UNI europa's suggestions.

Mr Zylberberg (ETNO) recalled that social dialogue in the telecommunications sector worked well for many years and that it produced good results. He acknowledged that the situation in 2009 had been difficult, due to internal challenges within ETNO and France Telecom and due to different strategic decisions of ETNO members. ETNO therefore decided to re-launch its social affairs working group in 2010, and will call for more participation by other companies at an ETNO board meeting. However, due to resource constraints ETNO cannot promise that the social dialogue committee can focus on anything other than the Good Work – Good Health project during the year. Regarding the draft statement on CSR provided by UNI europa, while ETNO was open to discuss on skills and training in the ICT sector, they did not wish to reopen the discussion on CSR, as the 2007 joint statement was difficult to agree on.

UNI europa (Ms Salis Madinier) was glad to hear about ETNO's intention to re-launch European social dialogue, but expressed disappointment that there could not be more work on CSR. Therefore, the focus would have to be on skills and training in a pragmatic and practical way in order to obtain results. The committee could not focus exclusively on the GWGH project, since that is funded separately and is not directly a subject for

discussion at social dialogue meetings. UNI europa therefore suggested to focus on the anticipation of change, and to link this to the topic of green ICT.

Mr Siebern-Thomas (European Commission) was happy to hear the commitment to European social dialogue. He pointed out that the work programme could cover one year, or it could cover a longer period. Many social dialogue committees have rolling bi-annual work programmes. However, it should not focus exclusively on a project that is funded separately. He noted that, in relation to the draft work programme, it seemed from the statements that ETNO and UNI europa broadly agreed that the topics of health and safety, skills and training, new Member States, and regulation probably are most relevant. Mr Siebern-Thomas stated that it would be important to better understand the reasons behind the difficulties faced by the committee in recent years (capacity? commitment? mandate? representativeness? ...), and he confirmed that the Commission is interested in assisting social partners in their work, and always welcomes concrete suggestions in this respect. As part of this effort, the Liaison Forums are held regularly, with the one on 24 February focusing on representativeness studies. This may become a topic for the telecommunications social dialogue committee, since the Commission needs to reflect on changes in the sector and within social partner organisations, as evidenced by UNI europa's new ICTS sector as well as recent changes in ETNO membership. Furthermore, Mr Siebern-Thomas confirmed that the Commission attaches high importance to the GWGH project, which is of interest also to other sectors, and is willing to give sufficient visibility to its results. He also noted that this project could lead to further discussions and work of the committee, such as statements, guidelines, handbooks or other tools.

ETNO pointed out that in its view, European social dialogue committees are places to discuss, exchange views and share best practices, but are not appropriate forums for signing agreements or for negotiations. Of course ETNO does not represent 100% of the telecommunications sector, and it would be open to discuss the composition of delegations. For instance, should individual companies be members? This discussion, however, would also need to cover the workers' delegation.

UNI europa remarked that representativeness was a secondary concern at this point; most important now was a work programme. It was encouraged by some of the ideas, and suggested to adopt a 2-year work programme covering principally skills and training and health and safety. The work organisation working group would be frozen, and there would be no further work in the diversity working group.

ETNO agreed to the idea of a 2-year work programme, and was open to discuss the topic of skills and training at the next working group meeting on 27 April. However, there needed to be more clarity on what is to be discussed; for instance, ETNO would not want to work on the European Qualifications Framework, as that would not be relevant for its members. There should also be more contact with the Information Society and Media DG of the European Commission.

UNI europa suggested to consult with the members and affiliates on each side in order to find a common understanding. Still, it should be clear that European social dialogue provides an added value rather than just present local and national examples. This added value could also then attract members from the new Member States.

ETNO did not agree that the added value of European social dialogue needed to come from obtaining a global or European view, and pointed to the successes of the past: they were based on the exchange of good practices established at a national, regional or

company level. Such an exchange is an added value in and of itself, as best practices are often not even shared within the same company.

UNI europa pointed out that in its opinion, on some issues there would be a value added if the European dimension were emphasized more strongly within the committee, for instance on the topic of skills and training. In any case, each side should liaise with their members and affiliates to gauge the expectations they have from European social dialogue.

ETNO agreed that a consultation of members was necessary.

The Commission pointed out that each committee functions differently and that they are difficult to compare. Some committees certainly make use of the instrument of negotiations at a European level, possibly leading to legislation. An instrument to be considered in order to encourage participation in European social dialogue would be to apply for a funded project to organise a small meeting or workshop, bringing together the committee with delegates from new Member States and other stakeholders. Finally, another open question concerns the possible cooperation of European social dialogue committees with other social dialogue structures, specifically European Works Councils.

UNI europa expressed its interest in submitting such a small project application for the August deadline. ETNO would be open to this idea.

Regarding cooperation with EWCs, UNI europa considered that as a first step, it was more important to know what should be on the agenda of the social dialogue committee. In the medium term, there could then be complementary work.

ETNO highlighted that it would be opposed to mixing or combining issues between EWCs and European social dialogue.

In summing up the discussion, Ms Dedden (UNI europa) reiterated the points that were agreed: there will be a bi-annual work programme, which UNI europa will draft and circulate for comment. It should be circulated internally within both ETNO and UNI europa, and agreed by email. It will focus on health and safety, skills and training, new Member States and regulation of the sector, including contacts with the Information Society and Media DG of the European Commission. In addition, by mid-March ETNO and UNI europa will consult their members on their expectations of European social dialogue, so that an agenda for the 27 April working group meeting could be fixed by the end of March at the latest.

### **3. Any other business**

The Commission announced that it was planning a one-day Liaison Forum to be held on 30 September 2010 in Brussels, which will follow up on the forthcoming Commission Communication on sectoral social dialogue, provide an occasion for exchange of best practice on selected social partner projects and on practical aspects of project management.