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Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion DG

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

Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee on Postal Services Working group meeting on 27 January 2011, Brussels Accident prevention and exchange with other sectors working groups Minutes

1. Accident prevention working group

The meeting was chaired by Mr Spada (POSTEUROP). Mr Schwarz (European Commission) informed the participants that the study of postal market developments prepared by Copenhagen Economics for the Internal Market and Services DG of the European Commission was available. He also pointed out that Eurofound's European Restructuring Monitor quarterly focused on the postal sector in its winter 2010 issue. The Commission's next Liaison Forum for sectoral social dialogue committees would take place on 7 February 2011, which might provide another opportunity for informal exchanges with other sectors. Finally, the telecommunications social dialogue committee would like to invite speakers from the postal services committee to give a presentation on 6 April 2011 about the activities in the field of CSR.

Mr Bailly (POSTEUROP) thanked the working group members for their work, especially the Chair and Ms Castellarnau-Dupont (UNI Europa). He welcomed participants for the first working group meeting of the year.

The Chair announced that this would be his last participation in the social dialogue committee and that he would be replaced by a colleague of Magyar Posta. Unfortunately this colleague could not participate on this occasion. The Chair recalled the history of the questionnaire on slips, trips and falls, which the working group is elaborating. Some of the questions are very technical, and there was a difference of opinion. The employers started from a more technical viewpoint, and intended to involve the unions once the facts were established. POSTEUROP is flexible, however, so it is open to starting with a more general set of questions on social dialogue.

The Chair presented an overview of the work to date. He pointed out that this was the result of common work, even if this presentation had only been circulated the day before the meeting.



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Ms Castellarnau-Dupont (UNI Europa) expressed the willingness of the trade union side to move forward, but highlighted that she had comments on some parts of the proposed questionnaire. She pointed to the importance of the preparatory meeting for reaching a better understanding.

The Chair suggested agreeing first with the Hungarian trade unions the Hungarian language version of the questionnaire before sending out the revised version.

Ms Castellarnau-Dupont (UNI Europa) stated that the union side would prefer to finalise the questionnaire immediately so that it could be launched as soon as possible. She summarised UNI Europa's comments in six points. First, the lower age group should range from 18 to 20 instead of from 16 to 20. Second, it should be asked whether employers provide footwear or other types of protective clothing. It should also be clear what type of job would need protective footwear or other protective equipment. Third, the question on injuries should also take into account upper body injuries and not just lower body injuries. Fourth, external causal factors should be added to the questionnaire, namely disease, tiredness and fatigue. Fifth, the time of week when the accident took place should be determined, in addition to the weather conditions at the time. For the answer possibilities, 'during commuting' should be added as an additional option for when accidents have taken place. Sixth, the French translation of one of the answer possibilities reads 'due to having fun'; this should be replaced by a wording such as 'not paying attention'.

Ms Castellarnau-Dupont (UNI Europa) also requested that additional information be added. In particular, the percentage of workers affected by slips, trips and falls in the company, in the sector and in the country should be determined. The questionnaire should ask whether there is a prevention plan and whether there are inspections by a prevention authority. A question should be added on the management of accident prevention in the company (i.e. whether there is a dedicated department or whether this is outsourced) and whether there is an annual accident report. The questionnaire should find out whether the information on accidents is shared with trade unions and workers and whether there is a committee to deal with accidents. Finally, a question should be added to find out what happens when there is an accident, i.e. how this information is analysed and used for prevention, and whether the trade unions are involved in this follow-up.

Ms Mir (UNI Europa) suggested adding a question on whether outsourced accident prevention services also have a legal liability. She also recommended that a question should assess whether inspections occurred at a regular frequency. Including the commute to/from work was important as well, since studies from Spain show that 20% of accidents occur on the way to or from the workplace.

The Chair thanked the participants for their useful comments and he requested UNI Europa to send in their suggestions in writing. He explained that at the outset the questionnaire was based on data that is known to be available. For instance, data on accidents on the way to work are not collected in Hungary. Therefore, while the questions could certainly be included, Hungary would not be able to answer it. That's why the focus of the questionnaire was elsewhere. The age brackets were selected because students can work from the age of 16, but the categories could be modified. The external factors (tiredness etc.) are difficult to assess and measure, so there might be no data on them. The existing information on the inspection authorities is from 2007/08, so the current questionnaire will provide an updated picture of the situation. It would be very interesting to ask about what happens after an accident, and the suggestions by UNI Europa concerning the prevention plan are also very useful in identifying best practices. The question on injuries could indeed be extended to upper body injuries, although they're often not linked to slips, trips and falls.

Ms Kromjong (POSTEUROP) agreed with the Chair's assessment and cautioned that it was not just lack of data that needed to be considered but also data protection and privacy. Some questions could therefore not be posed. It would be better to limit the questionnaire to questions that can be answered by most respondents, rather than launching a broad questionnaire with a lack of responses.

Mr Bailly (POSTEUROP) thought that some very good work had been accomplished. A new version of the questionnaire could then be circulated to see if it would be feasible. He suggested fixing a target date for completion of the questionnaire and its validation by teleconference.

The Chair agreed to this suggestion, provided that UNI Europa could also agree.

Ms Castellaneau-Dupont (UNI Europa) pointed out that UNI Europa's input was designed to make the survey interesting to the trade unions. She preferred proceeding in written form and announced that the comments would be provided in writing in French. She expressed her agreement with setting a deadline and proceeding quickly.

The Chair pointed out that Magyar Posta could not deal with documents in French. Mr Bailly (UNI Europa) stated that the trade union side would coordinate this and forward the English version to Magyar Posta.

Ms Mir (UNI Europa) highlighted that from the trade unions' point of view, accident prevention was the key. ETUI has also published a recent study on the important point of prevention. Ms Mir suggested inviting the author of this study to the next meeting of the working group to explain more the importance of prevention.

The Chair pointed out that the employers have also done studies, especially on slips, trips and falls. He suggested postponing the expert invitations until the results of the questionnaire are available.

Ms Castellaneau-Dupont (UNI Europa) agreed with this suggestion to invite experts once the questionnaire results have been analysed. She asked about the timetable and the specific logistics for distributing the questionnaire, so that the results would be available in time.

Mr Bailly (POSTEUROP) underscored the importance of the timetable.

The Chair proposed working on a tighter schedule through the summer so that the results could be presented by the September plenary.

Mr Bally (POSTEUROP) was in favour of speeding things up, since it would be difficult to maintain the mobilisation of the social partners on this issue for a long time. He proposed distributing the questionnaire in February in order to have the first results for the next working group meeting in May. The results could then be analysed in time for the December meeting. While there is understandable apprehension about too many surveys being sent out by the different working groups, their target audiences are different, so this should not be a problem.

Ms Kromjong (POSTEUROP) found this suggestion feasible if there is agreement to validate the questionnaire by telephone conference.

The Chair agreed with this suggestion but pointed out that additional time would be needed for the translations. He proposed to fix the telephone conference for 17 February, while the finalised questionnaire would be circulated on 10 February. The survey would then be sent out on 3 March with a deadline for responses by 21 April.

Mr Bailly (POSTEUROP) suggested presenting a summary of the results at the September plenary meeting, which would require a bit of work over the summer.

The Chair supported this suggestion. He reiterated his concern about language difficulties, since Magyar Posta draws up the questionnaire in Hungarian and then translates it to English. He wondered whether there were any suggestions on how to improve this process in the future.

Ms Castellarneau-Dupont (UNI Europa) pointed out that the questionnaire already existed in English and French, so that adding a few questions should not pose a problem.

Mr Bailly (POSTEUROP) cautioned that problems could arise in the course of elaborating the summary report, but that these would be solved later.

The Chair agreed and thanked the participants for their interventions. He explained that his 6 years of work in the social dialogue committee was coming to an end due to the reorganisation of Magyar Posta. He enjoyed this work very much and thanked everyone for their cooperation. He hopes that the transition to his successor would be handled well.

Mr Bailly and Ms Kromjong (POSTEUROP) presented a gift to Mr Spada and thanked him for all his work and wished him well for his future career.

Mr Baldwin and Ms Castellarneau-Dupont (UNI Europa) added their thanks and best wishes on behalf of the UNI Europa delegation.

Mr Schwarz (European Commission) also thanked Mr Spada for his participation and commitment to European social dialogue.

2. Exchange with other sectors working group

Mr Blikman (POSTEUROP) chaired the meeting. He announced that this would be the last time that he was chairing this working group, since he was stepping down from this role. He gave a presentation on the working group's activities.



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Exchange with other

In light of the scarce results obtained thus far he proposed to scale down the ambition of the working group and to have a formal agreement on dividing up the work between the various members.

Ms Kromjong (POSTEUROP) supported the proposal to share the work, but recommended giving some guidance on the tasks that should be accomplished by the people working on different sectors. This is important so that the results will be comparable and people don't work on completely different things.

Mr Bailly (POSTEUROP) recalled the origins of the working group. An exchange should be started with sectors that are close to the postal sector on the issue of social regulation, while the topic of restructuring could be discussed with sectors farther from the postal sector. The approach for these two issues would be different. For sectors close to the postal services, it would be interesting to find out how social dialogue works and how the sector is organised. The Commission's Staff Working Document on Sectoral Social Dialogue can be used as a source of information. In these cases, personal contact with sector representatives could be useful, but it is not vital to collect information. However, for sectors that are farther away from post and that have restructured profoundly, a personal exchange would be necessary. As this appears to be difficult, the topic of the exchange of experience could be narrowed, for example on questions of internal mobility or re-skilling.

Ms Wiesner (UNI Europa) expressed regret that Mr Blikman would no longer chair the working group. She expressed disapproval of the idea of a divided chairmanship of the committee and asked POSTEUROP if there were any suggestions.

Ms Kromjong (POSTEUROP) clarified that the working group would continue. Mr Bailly's intervention was about the internal organisation of work and not about the chairmanship of the working group.

Mr Bailly (POSTEUROP) apologised if his comments should have caused confusion. He absolutely agreed that there should be one person holding the chairmanship.

The Chair emphasised that the discussion was about the working methods and objectives and not about the chairmanship.

Mr Baldwin (UNI Europa) recalled the original objective of the working group. First, the working group wanted to learn from others. Second, the goal was to avoid duplication of work, for instance in Commission-funded projects. He suggested trimming the list of targeted sectors to communication, network industries and transport, with restructuring as an overarching topic. He also recommended harnessing the Commission's published information on the sectoral social dialogue committees. It has to be recognised that the interests on the employers' and trade unions' sides in the topic of restructuring are different. While employers are interested in the mechanics of change management, trade unions put the emphasis on the outcomes of restructuring processes. It is therefore necessary to define more clearly the contents of an exchange of experience on restructuring. The restructuring or shutdown of a steel plant is not comparable to the postal sector, since the steel plant is located in a single site, so the effects are concentrated and not spread across a network. The exchange should therefore focus on sectors that are most common to the postal sector, such as telecommunications. Mr Baldwin suggested inviting the telecoms sector to the next working group meeting on 10 May.

The Chair supported the idea of inviting representatives from the telecoms social dialogue committee to the next meeting.

Ms Kromjong (POSTEUROP) wondered why more progress has not been made, especially with the telecoms sector.

Mr Schwarz (European Commission) explained that the reaction from the telecommunications social dialogue committee has not been enthusiastic and that the

social partners in that committee, especially the employers, are hesitant to enter into an exchange with the postal sector. The reasons are not immediately clear and it shows that even social dialogue in similarly structured sectors can follow a very different dynamism.

Ms Wiesner (UNI Europa) suggested contacting the chairman of the telecoms committee to take this work forward.

Ms Kromjong announced that Ms Ausprung (POSTEUROP) would take over the chairmanship of the working group on an interim basis until a permanent solution would be found.

Mr Bailly (POSTEUROP) enquired about the interest of UNI Europa in restructuring. This is a very sensitive topic, so contacts with other sectors that put this issue on the table immediately are likely to be difficult. Starting with a difficult issue with unknown people seems like starting backwards. Mr Bailly would welcome other suggestions for topics for an exchange.

Mr Baldwin (UNI Europa) again recalled the origins of the working group. The idea was to comprehensively exchange information with other sectors regarding the way they work, their activities in CSR, in accident prevention, etc. However, the issue of restructuring and change management has now come to dominate the working group.

Mr Bailly (POSTEUROP) asked whether other methods of an exchange could be envisaged, such as a small meeting with the presidents of other social dialogue committees.

The Chair pointed out that he had knocked on several doors and contacted many people without receiving too many positive replies, although it is always possible to try again.

Mr Schwarz (European Commission) offered to facilitate contacts, for instance with the chair of the telecoms social dialogue committee, Mr Zylberberg of France Telecom-Orange.

Mr Bailly (POSTEUROP) announced that he would try to arrange an informal meeting with Mr Zylberberg.

Ms Wiesner (UNI Europa) supported this procedure.

The Chair suggested that the banking and road transport sectors should also be contacted again. He recommended changing the terminology and use 'change management' rather than restructuring. It would also be useful to draft a one-page document with the objectives of the working group. To exploit synergies, the meetings of the exchange with other sectors working group could be combined with those of the postal sector evolution group.

Mr Baldwin (UNI Europa) disagreed with the latter suggestion. Since the postal sector evolution working group meets without interpretation, combining the two would simply lead to a cancellation of the interpretation facilities for the accident prevention working group by the Commission.

The Chair regretted that reply but considered it a clear answer and argument.

Mr Bailly (POSTEUROP) suggested maintaining the working group setup as agreed for 2011, but to discuss this issue for 2012.

The Chair concluded that the dates for the 2011 meetings would not be changed and that Mr Ausprung (POSTEUROP) would assume the chairmanship on an interim basis. A short paper with the objectives of the group would be drawn up. The Chair, Mr Blikman, will work on contacts with road transport, while Mr Bailly contacts telecoms and Ms Ausprung and Ms Kromjong (all POSTEUROP) get in contact with the banking sector. At the next meeting on 10 May the outcome of these contacts will be discussed.

Mr Bailly and Ms Kromjong (POSTEUROP) presented a gift to the Chair and thanked him for his work in the working group. Mr Baldwin and Ms Wiesner (UNI Europa) added their thanks and best wishes on behalf of UNI Europa, while noting that this was already the second goodbye of the day.

The Chair thanked the participants and the interpreters and closed the meeting.