



EUROPEAN COMMISSION

Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion DG

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

Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee on Telecom

Steering group meeting on 31 January 2012, Brussels

Minutes

Mr Schwarz (European Commission) chaired the meeting.

1. Biannual Working Programme 2012-2013

Ms Delacotte (ETNO) explained that the draft working programme had been circulated but had received little feedback. The two working groups decided upon are skills and training and health and safety.

Ms Dedden (UNI Europa) asked on behalf of the trade union side for the issue of work organisation to be integrated into the work programme as an additional topic, which could be opened after the completion of work in the other two areas. This is important to make sure that the work programme includes a sufficient content to ensure a productive two years exercise.

Mr Schwarz (Commission) explained that the work programme does not need to have a high level of precision. However, he advised the social partners that they cannot undertake work that is part of a Commission-funded project within regular social dialogue meetings, as this would constitute double financing. The social dialogue committee can and should of course be kept informed of the progress of project implementation, but the work in the social dialogue committee should be distinct from project-related work. The committee meetings therefore need to have a full agenda on their own.

The participants raised a number of possible additions to the work programme:

- Expressing the commitment of the social partners to participating in impact assessment procedures (i.e. regarding the green paper on restructuring)
- Developing exchanges of information and best practices with other SSDCs/DGs/companies in the field of action of the working groups

Mr Schwarz pointed out that the social partners are free to invite experts who can have their expenses reimbursed within the contingent allowed (54 participants for a plenary session, 30 for a working group meeting).

The social partners then discussed the individual items on the work programme 2012-2013:

Section 1: general issues

- After weighing the wording carefully, the social partners agreed on a new bullet point: "Share best practices of companies and national social partners on topics related to social dialogue in order to provide the SDC an impulse for its work". This wording stresses a bottom-up approach and is compatible with the various European systems of industrial relations.
- The formulation of the last bullet point on ensuring more participation and feedback was clarified.

The social partners had a lively discussion on the issue of attendance and participation in the meetings of the SSDC. Mr Steeg (ETNO) stressed that despite direct contacts through several rounds of emails, the national social partners of the sector were not very reactive. Ms Delacotte pointed out that the director of ETNO was about to change, which would require adaptations, and stressed that companies generally had no resources available, except when forced to deal with regulation or when they needed information at the national level. Mr Steeg expressed his doubts that working on the skills and training project would bring them back. Ms Delacotte suggested structuring the work and increasing commitment by having thematic leaders designated according to their background and knowledge. Mr Mrozowski (ETNO) supported this idea and added that this would ensure better communication between meetings. Ms Dedden pointed out that there are working group chairs in theory, but that the change in membership had made this organisation ineffective. Mr Schwarz explained that other committees relied heavily and successfully on this thematic leaders system. The social partners agreed on trying to re-launch the process of structuring work.

Section 2: Health and Safety

Upon suggestion of Mr Schwarz, the social partners were added as addressees of the second bullet point.

Section 3: Skills and Training

No major change was made to this section. Mr Steeg suggested adding a calendar of action, but Ms Dedden recommended leaving this issue open to have a maximum of flexibility to adapt to Commission deadlines.

Section 4: Information from the Commission

A new bullet point was added, expressing the commitment of the social partners to participating in impact assessment procedures as suggested by Ms Dedden.

Mr Schwarz reminded the social partners of the rules on the consultation of the social partners and the difference with the green paper procedure.

New section 5: Work organisation

The paragraph existing in the prior working programme was included into the new draft working programme.

The social partners agreed on this modified draft working programme (see annex). They will check the wording and should be able to adopt it definitely at the next meeting.

2. Skills and Training project

Ms Dedden (Uni Europa) explained that a conference call took place on 20 January 2012 had been identified. The social partners should endeavour to gather information on what is being done in other sectors on the issue of Sectoral Skills Councils, regardless of the fact that the Commission's deadline for project applications has not been published yet. Considering the limited resources available to ETNO and UNI Europa, part of the research work must be externalized. Potential contacts with academics and researchers should be explored. This research would result in a mapping of national skill councils and best practices in companies, and provide a primary assessment of the usefulness of a European-level sectoral skills council. A medium-sized workshop on this issue would be organized to examine these results. Depending on its conclusions, a follow-up project would then set up the skills council. The project would take 12 months if accepted by the Commission. Information received from the commerce sector, which has already completed the first stage of the process, could serve as a template to ease the work of the telecommunications social partners.

Ms Delacotte (ETNO) added that the particularities of the project (number of workshop and languages for translation and interpretation) remained to be discussed but argued for a small-sized project (no website, no 200-people conference). She announced that positive indications about participation in the project had been received from Romania, Telefonica, PT, France Telekom and Deutsche Telekom.

Ms Dedden presented elements of the commerce sector project:

- The steering group of the project already involved training institutions of the sector already.
- The project included three workshops, a report produced without the help of an external expert, a website and an online networking database, with a total budget of 220 000€ Important costs were dedicated to travel, translation, interpretation and logistical matters. This is much more than what a smaller organisation like ETNO and the small section of UNI Europa can manage.

Ms Delacotte stressed that reducing the number of meetings and of participants and avoiding setting up a website would allow limiting the budget. Online tools could be considered in a second phase to promote dissemination. She suggested a French consulting firm and mentioned other ideas from other working group members.

Mr Schwarz (Commission) gave a detailed explanation of the system of subcontracting in Commission-funded projects. If the project goes beyond 60 000€ a tender must be issued and sent to at least 5 potential contractors. The allocation of the contract is then done according to a fair selection process including objective award criteria. This process can be audited and should be well managed. Details are available for instance in the PROGRESS 2011 call for proposal. He advised the social partners to be careful about the ratio of externalization in designing the project, as evaluation committees are very attentive to this issue. The project could be refused if a large percentage of the budget is dedicated to external expertise, as it would be subsidizing consulting firms rather than social partners. Therefore, subcontracting must be well justified.

The social partners discussed options for respecting this balance: increasing the number of workshops and meetings or creating a website. Mr Mrozowski (ETNO) argued for focussing on defining well the scope of the project, in order to ensure the quality of the

help that an external consultant would provide. Mr Steeg (ETNO) mentioned that he had obtained some information on a Sectoral Skills Council mapping project in another sector which was had just been accepted. In this project 20% of the total budget is dedicated to external expertise. He argued for limiting the outsourcing to essential issues needing fundamental research outside the reach of the social partners. Ms Walter (Commission) pointed out that the sector in question had already worked on an agreement on competence profiles and had therefore more material to build on. Ms Delacotte clarified that the project had to concentrate on mapping the availability of information and structure in the member states. Only in a second phase will the networking activities begin. This second phase is crucial: while the social partners can be fairly certain to obtain funding for this project, they will be responsible for making the sectoral skills council a reality afterwards.

A conference-call will take place on 9 February 2012 to further elaborate the design of the project. The precise definition of objectives should make it easier to decide upon the amount of external expertise required, the size of the budget, the frequency of meetings and workshops and the choice of the research institution. The need to respect the confidential nature of the information provided by other sectors was stressed.

Mr Schwarz noted that the deadline should be in June as in the previous year.

The social partners then discussed the issue of the project applicant. As ETNO was responsible for the previous project on health and safety, Mr Steeg asked whether it was now UNI Europa's turn. Although both social partners have limited human resources in any case, Ms Dedden explained that the application might be more solid if ETNO was signatory, as their financial structure is more important. Ms Delacotte added that ETNO might have an intern to help, but stressed that an involvement similar to the previous projects' was not possible. The project must therefore be limited and the responsibilities must be fairly distributed and clearly allocated. If this is done, ETNO and its board members would probably be on board. Ms Dedden offered to draft the project description and tender specifications accordingly, to approach ETNO board members on a solid basis.

Concerning the scope of research, Mr Steeg suggested that academic research institutes might have a too broad perspective compared to the needs of the project. Mr Mrozowski (ETNO) argued for concentrating on the area of soft skills. Otherwise, one may look at too many things. The research could be structured according to the categories of retraining, re-skilling and initial training upon arrival into the industry, or those of HR and recruiting, gender and reskilling. Mr Steeg agreed that the tender should ask the contractor to focus on some of the 8 objectives from the September project draft, not all of them. Ms Delacotte responded that this limited perspective could leave aside important aspects of the industries' skills needs.

Ms Dedden answered that the objectives defined in the draft could not be changed as they had been formally agreed. The working group must define the research scope and methodology within each category. In some of the 8 areas, the researcher will not find any national practices, which is also an interesting result. As the goal is to gather information, not create new documents, this should not be a too overwhelming task. On the basis of the study's results, which will identify the main issues, instances of good practices will then be compared and national experiences confronted.

Ms Delacotte added that her contacts had shown that if the research institution is carefully chosen for its knowledge of the sector, carrying out the research should not be such a challenge. The steering group will in any case be able to make choices on the methodology used and the focus of the research institution if improvements are needed.

Mr Schwarz concluded on the next steps:

- A first version of the application, including the budget will be drafted.
- The legal entity submitting the project must be decided upon.
- The details of the project will be further developed.

3. Impact assessment of the Good work, good health project

Mr Mrozowski (ETNO) gave an update on the follow-up to the good practice guidelines that resulted from the Good Work Good Health project. 4 responses had been received from ETNO and 5 from UNI Europa so far. The request will be sent again, with a deadline of the end of February for the answers. For future projects, it could be worthwhile to consider whether the assessment can take place sooner after the final event.

Ms Delacotte (ETNO) enquired whether an analysis even made sense based on the limited number of responses. Mr Mrozowski (ETNO) and Ms Dedden (UNI Europa) considered this necessary, especially to acknowledge the work of the respondents. Ms Delacotte announced a phone conference in mid-March to prepare the analysis in time for the next social dialogue meeting on 27 March.

4. Any other business

Mr Schwarz (Commission) asked the social partners to inform him of the languages needed for the working group meeting of 27 March 2012: interpretation will be provided in PT, EN, FR (active) and ES (passive).

The social partners decided to hold the preparatory meetings in parallel from 10:00 to 11:00. Interpretation will be provided to the workers' side only, as all participants from the employers' side speak English. The full meeting will begin at 11:00.

Annex: Biannual working programme for 2012-2013

1. General issues

- Limit working group agendas to two topics in order to provide enough time for in-depth discussion
- Share best practices of companies and national social partners on topics related to social dialogue in order to provide the SDC an impulse for its work
- Improve the exchange with other sectors on key common issues of interest.
- Improve the exchange with the DG education concerning training issues
- Ensure broader participation from members by setting a clear agenda, increasing contributions and assigning responsibilities

2. Health and Safety

- Follow up on the GWGH project's results, especially on the impact assessment
- Presentation of good practices from companies and social partners which want to be quoted as an example

3. Skills and Training

- Launch the working group on skills and training and define a detailed work programme
- Project to be submit to the Commission
- Follow up on the project's results, especially on the future skills and training needs in the ICT sector to anticipate change and the training plans based on the project's outcome.

4. Information from the European Commission

- Invite DG Information Society on a regular basis to provide the SDC with information and updates on regulatory affairs.
- Participate in the impact assessment of relevant regulation.
- Invite other DGs to present information on issues interesting the TELCO sector

5. Work Organisation

- Temporarily frozen
- To be discussed in 2012/13
- Redefine scope of the working group