



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion DG

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

SECTORAL SOCIAL DIALOGUE COMMITTEE FOR FURNITURE

29 May 2013
Plenary meeting
MINUTES

Chair : Camilla RAVAZZOLO (EFIC)

1. Adoption of the draft agenda

The agenda was adopted.

2. Adoption of the draft minutes of the Plenary Meeting dd. 22/11/2012

The minutes were adopted.

3. Adoption of the 2013 Work Programme

Ms RAVAZZOLO introduced the 2013 work programme, which had been circulated to the secretariats before. Rolf GEHRING reacted by saying that the workers' side found it quite ambitious, but the subjects covered were substantially related to the activities of the SSD committee. Consequently, he agreed with the proposal, as did Mr DE TURCK for UEA. Hence, the 2013 work programme was adopted.

4. New Community Strategy on OSH 2013/2020.

Ms RAVAZZOLO reminded the participants of what was agreed during the previous meeting, i.e. to send the social partners' joint opinion once the public consultation was opened. Mr GEHRING completed this by saying that the timing had changed : since the evaluation of the previous strategy was delayed, the public consultation was not yet available. He also referred to a meeting in March between trade unionists and Commissioner ANDOR, where the Commissioner showed some reluctance when asked whether a new strategy was expected in the near future. Speaking for the trade union side, he stated that the initiatives of DG EMPL are generally seen as fairly unsuccessful. Since a new OSH strategy is deemed to be of the utmost importance, he proposed to go forward by sending the joint opinion immediately, even in the absence of a public consultation. Mr SCHEERLINCK took note of this interpretation and completed it by timely information from unit EMPL.B.3: the staff working document on the evaluation of the previous strategy would be published in the very near future, which would coincide with the launching of the public consultation. He also informed the participants of the possibility that an OSH framework would be envisaged instead of a strategy. Commenting on Mr GEHRING's proposal Mr DE TURCK said that it seemed advisable to send the joint opinion to the Commission anyhow, since it contained a number of important

statements regardless of the launching date of the public consultation¹. Ms RAVAZZOLO agreed with this proposal.

5. Carcinogenic substances and MSDs

On the Carcinogens Directive, a joint opinion of the ACHS was issued on 5 December 2012, which included a proposal on limit values for wood dust going down from 5 to 3 mg per cubic metre of air in the workplace. The employee side, however, had proposed 2 mg. This is a decision on limit values for hard wood dust only, which is expected to remain the case in future.

Formaldehyde is not covered by the Directive on carcinogenic substances. The ACHS is of the opinion that an indicative threshold for formaldehyde should be decided upon. This could be included in the chemicals directive, because formaldehyde is not classified as carcinogenic for human beings. Also the European Chemicals Agency (ECHA) in Helsinki is at present discussing whether formaldehyde is to be considered as carcinogenic. The time-frame for a decision by the Commission is unclear at present, but it may result in a consultation of stakeholders (including social partners) still this year. Following contacts with the ACHS the social partners are now invited to the meeting where they may take the floor on this issue. There was a discussion in the previous plenary meeting of this committee whether EFIC wants to sign the joint opinion on the matter, already signed by EFBWW and UEA. At the present meeting, EFIC did not have a position on the signature of the joint opinion, but proposed to re-open the discussion as soon as the results are known. EFBWW, however, confirmed that it would present EFBWW-UEA's joint position during the ACHS meeting the day after.

In addition, Mr DE TURCK stated clearly that the responsibility for the threshold for formaldehyde should be with the suppliers, and not with the furniture industry; hence legislation in this field should be written in that sense.

Ms Ewa ONEY (DG ENTR) explained her unit's initiative to organise a meeting between social partners (from woodworking and furniture sectors) and the Commission units dealing with chemical matters.

Replying to Mr EIRUP's statement on the importance of the measurement system for wood dust, Mr GEHRING referred to the "Less Dust" project of the woodworking sector and to the contacts with Mr Stefano BOY of ETUI aimed at installing a temporary working party on machinery design. However, he admitted that there is no significant progress in the discussion on measurement methods.

6. Nanotechnologies in the furniture sector

Mr GEHRING reported on the dissemination activities of the brochure, the report and the three flyers which were the outputs of the project in question. The results are on OSHA's website, and are highly valued by experts, since they are related to specific sectors. He proposed to put a link on EFIC and UEA sites as well, which was accepted. Replying to a comment of the Czech employers' representative on the absence of CZ translations, he raised the issue as to whether start a follow-up project for further dissemination. It was agreed that this would be discussed during the next working group meeting, including matters related to funding.

¹ The "public consultation on the new EU occupational safety and health policy framework" was published on 31 May 2013 with a deadline of 26 August 2013.

7. OSHA – SSDC Furniture : setting the ties

Mr GEHRING made reference to the presentation by Ms Brenda O'BRIEN (OSHA liaison officer) in the furniture plenary meeting the day before, who presented OSHA's upcoming Health & Safety campaign which will be dedicated to stress and psycho-social risks in EU workplaces. The campaign will deal with ways of managing stress, risk assessment and the experience of all kinds of stress (inside the organisation as well as in personal life). Consequently, the next campaign will not concentrate on a person in isolation, but taking a holistic approach. The campaign will be launched in April 2014, but initial information material will become available as of January. Mr GEHRING therefore proposed to invite an OSHA representative to an upcoming meeting for further information.

In the field of demographic change, the Agency has an on-going pilot project on older workers, running over a period of 2 years. The Agency is therefore looking for sectoral info, although the actual project is intended to have a holistic approach, starting from education.

In this context, the social partners discussed the possibility to join the project proposal on demographic change developed by the woodworking sector. The question is whether there are enough parallels between the two sectors, since the woodworking sector is not homogenous either. This would make it possible to look at the issue from a sectoral angle. Mr DE TURCK also questioned the favourable aspects for the furniture sector in participating, since the perception of the woodworking sector is less positive according to a recent study. The issue would be further discussed at secretariat level, taking into account the upcoming submission date.

8. Bolster-up II project

Ms Hanna SCHRANKEL (IG Metall) gave an update of the status of the Bolster-up II project, dealing with the upholstering and cabinet making qualification profiles, resulting in EU core qualifications (www.furniture-professions.eu).

The project is divided into three phases : an analytical phase, a common profile development phase, and finally a consolidation phase. At present the analysis phase is on-going, with expected results by November. Ms SCHRANKEL asked the committee for active support, on national as well as on EU level. More in particular, contacts in companies or involvement in the advisory board would be welcomed. A number of representatives expressed their interest to become partners, such as the SE trade unions, and the CZ and FR employers.

Referring to the project folder (attached) Ms CORI stressed the need of translating documents with the aim of disseminating effectively, as was the case for this project.

9. Study project on skills observatories

Ms Jackie BAZELEY gave an update on the activity of the furniture sector in the field of sector skills councils ("EFSSC Feasibility Study", presentation attached). The project is concluded, and the results will be discussed during the upcoming VET WG meeting of the furniture sector in September. Mr GEHRING he suggested inviting the appropriate target group, e.g. the partners involved in the "Bolster-up II" project.

10. Feasibility study on creating a social label for furniture

The social partners UEA and EFBWW agreed to re-submit the project under the present call for proposals, since it was rejected for mere administrative deficiencies last year. EFIC will reconsider whether to participate as co-applicant.

11. SISMIILE Project

Regarding the SISMIILE project, Mr DE TURCK informed the participants that the foreseen e-training courses had been developed. However, the recommendations were somewhat below expectations, due to the lack of safety standards for furniture. Consequently, he proposed to discuss the issue of standardisation further in the social dialogue committee.

12. AOB

- Regarding EUROFOUND's working conditions survey, the social partners came to the conclusion that they could not exercise much influence on this quinquennial statistical data collection; therefore, it was decided to await the results. However, UEA reiterated the question about a possible grant application for an update of the study on collective bargaining agreements, which was backed by Mr VAN DE VEER. In this context Mr SCHEERLINCK shared information about the 2014 call for proposals as communicated during the latest liaison forum. In brief, there would be one submission date, some budget lines would be combined, and the Commission would encourage applicants to propose fewer projects, be it for more important amounts.

- Mr DE TURCK then asked the participants to give their views on the EU Timber Regulation (EUTR), dealing with the legality of wood. More in particular, he was interested in the possible involvement for the furniture sector, and in the implementation of risk-based control on national level. He explained that the EUTR seems to concentrate on imported hardwood, rather than on import of wooden furniture which is, however, more important in volume. He asked the social partners to join UEA in issuing a declaration expressing this concern. EFBWW supported the proposal.

- The Committee expressed its gratitude to Mr Flemming ANDERSEN for his participation in the SSDC for the Furniture Industry in the past 15 years.

- Next meeting dates : 25 September (WG) and 13 November (WG with interpretation).

Annexes :

- List of participants
- Bolster-up folder
- Presentation : "EFSSC Feasibility Study"