Reflecting discussions and initiatives in the 2007 social dialogue, the main focus in 2008 will be on core employment and labour relations issues in European commerce.

The social dialogue for commerce continues to build on a wide range of previous agreements and statements, which all support the general aim of economic and social cohesion, and a future development of commerce as an industry producing good quality services for the consumers while providing employment to large numbers of men and women, under secure and favourable conditions.

The concrete application of the results of the social dialogue over the past years will therefore get special attention and the development of suggestions for its further use by social partners on different levels will be discussed.

A variety of tools will be used in order to realise the social partners’ objectives.

The following particular issues will be raised in the 2008-2009 social dialogue:

**Dialogue on promoting gender equality in European commerce**

In their social dialogue in 2007, the social partners for commerce started discussions on how best to promote gender equality in European commerce. This dialogue includes a number of areas, such as supporting the economic and social inclusion of the most disfavoured commerce workers, reaching a favourable balance aimed to reconcile at best professional, private and family life, ensuring equal opportunities between men and women in the pursuit of careers among others. For the forthcoming years, the social partners have the intention to gather the best practices implemented in their sector in the field of the promotion of gender equality and deepen their discussion on this issue.

**The integration of Young people in the Commerce labour market**

In their social dialogue in 2006 and 2007, the social partners started to look for ways to promote youth employment in commerce. 2006 already advanced the social partners’ work by exploring both employers’ and trade unions’ initiatives and views. This work will continue during the next years, with a view of defining concrete measures to support and develop the employability and employment of young men and women in European commerce. Disadvantaged youth, vocational education and training initiatives, the introduction of advanced technologies and the employment potential of SMEs will be given particular attention in this work. A special session of the social dialogue, allowing young workers to engage in a direct dialogue with European commerce and distribution employers, will be arranged during the year. A particular attention will also be devoted to the next developments at EU level as regards youth policy, such as the follow-up of the recently published Communication on "Promoting young people's full participation in
education, employment and society”. The dissemination of the results of the European Commerce Competence project (formerly BeQuaWE) and its translation in more EU languages will also be a priority of the social partners, in the framework of a joint project which will be presented to the EU Commission at the beginning of 2008 for funding.

Promoting a safer shopping and working environment

In many parts of Europe, violent or abusive behaviour towards people working in retail stores is reported to be on the increase, and is a serious problem in both the working and the shopping environments. In the United Kingdom, where the commerce social partners have been working together for some years already to get to grips with retail violence and abusive behaviour, through their Freedom From Fear project, experiences have shown that the impact on the victims of this retail crime is frequently very serious.

During the last years, the European social partners for commerce have discussed in many occasions the best ways to bring an active contribution for a safer working and shopping environment by promoting an increased awareness and knowledge about the issue, as well as about measures that can be taken to lower the risk of incidents, to deal with incidents when they happen, and to address the effects of such incidents. Collecting and disseminating good practice examples is an important part of this work, which has started in 2006-2007.

In 2007, Uni-Europa Commerce and EuroCommerce deepened the discussion on this issue and agreed starting working on a possible new joint outcome. It has been decided to organise a technical symposium on this issue on 7-8 February 2008. The aim of this symposium will be to share views, analyse solutions and develop a shared understanding of what could reasonably be done to deal with third-party violence at which level.

Moreover, the European Social partners have the intention to present to the European Commission a request for funding aimed to implement a common project on third-party violence.

Migrants and mobility

While free movement of workers is theoretically achieved, the European Union has to tackle issues of the free movement of workers in the context of enlargement. In their joint statement on the proposed European services directive, EuroCommerce and UNI-Europa Commerce defined a number of common views on this issue.

Through their active participation in and support for the European Commerce Competence (formerly BeQuaWe) training and qualifications project, the commerce social partners have wanted to contribute concretely to promote mobility under good and secure conditions. During 2008, the results of this project will also be used to support the employability of migrant workers, whether from European Union countries or outside, and to help them to secure proper working and employment conditions.
The issue of migration has also be taken into account in the already agreed social dialogue on promoting gender equality, as well as in measures to support social inclusion, which the social partners have committed themselves to discuss. The social partners will intensify their co-operation on this issue and will prepare a common contribution on the most relevant aspects for the commerce sector. Moreover, the follow-up of the joint statement signed by the Social Partners on combating racism and xenophobia will also be taken into consideration in this context.

**Corporate social responsibility**

The impact of economic, structural, technological, competition other developments in commerce on employment, and on employment and working conditions, will be discussed within the social dialogue. Based on the survey on the application of the joint statement on corporate social responsibility, which has been particularly well received in the industry, the social partners will consider further follow up initiatives and action.

**The impact of the enlargement of the European Union**

The European social partners for commerce will continue their monitoring of the impact of enlargement on retail and distribution, and on employment and employment conditions for the workers in this sector. European Commission funding will be sought for round tables with local social partners in Romania, Bulgaria and Turkey. The aim of these round tables is to promote social dialogue in commerce and distribution in the countries concerned, and help to integrate their social partners in the European social dialogue for commerce.

**Reducing ‘red tape’ from the small and medium enterprise sector**

The European social partners for commerce have agreed to explore ways to reducing administrative burdens from small and medium enterprises without compromising the employment and social needs and interests for their employees. The work on this issue aims at identifying joint initiatives with regard to both European and national regulations.

**Wholesale trade, business to business commerce and distribution chain issues**

The European social partners for commerce will explore how the results of their social dialogue can be applied to the circumstances and needs of wholesale trade, various forms of business to business commerce and in the distribution chain. This will include a discussion about the growing engagement of commerce and distribution in various voluntary corporate social responsibility initiatives, which the European social partners for commerce want to continue promoting.

Moreover, the social partners will undertake a joint work on the identification of the increasing requests from consumers, the technological innovation in the distribution chain and the future skills needs, in particular for highly qualified employees, resulting from these developments.
Ageing workforce
A special focus will be devoted to the follow-up of the Voluntary Guidelines supporting Age Diversity in Commerce of 2002. Questions related to ageing workforce, in particular measurements or best practices on this subject especially concerning employability, life long learning, health management and barriers on the labour market will be discussed.

The application of the results from the social dialogue
The social partners will continuously follow up on their 2004-2005 survey on how various agreements and other results from their social dialogue have been followed up on different levels. The aim will be to issue joint recommendations to promote a more effective follow-up and implementation, and to develop measures and practices for them to use in the European social dialogue to promote this.