

EUROPEAN TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

UNION OF INDUSTRIAL AND EMPLOYERS' CONFEDERATIONS OF EUROPE

EUROPEAN CENTRE OF ENTERPRISES WITH PUBLIC PARTICIPATION AND ENTERPRISES OF GENERAL ECONOMIC INTEREST

S/5.1/forumE.doc

Joint statement of the social partners to the Forum on 15 June 2000

1. New dynamic created by Lisbon

The Lisbon summit created a new dynamic by setting itself the strategic objective of making the European Union a competitive economic area based on innovation, knowledge and social cohesion, capable of tackling the necessary changes “in a manner consistent with its values and concepts of society and also with a view to the forthcoming enlargement”.

ETUC, CEEP and UNICE/UEAPME endorse the Lisbon European summit’s objective of strengthening co-ordination and synergies between the Luxembourg, Cardiff and Cologne processes in order to improve growth and achieve full employment through good co-ordination of economic policies, better functioning of the labour market and implementation of the necessary structural reforms. These efforts to co-ordinate and achieve synergies should also involve better involvement of the social partners and rationalisation of consultation procedures.

The European social partners reaffirm their willingness to contribute to the success of this strategy in the framework of their own responsibilities and underline the importance of social dialogue as an indispensable element for managing the necessary change.

2. Macro-economic framework

The European economy is now entering what could - and should - be a period of sustained growth, job creation and strengthening of competitiveness. The fundamentals (current account surplus, high level of investment, falling real unit labour costs, progress towards balanced budgets, very low inflation levels) are good. However, they are not yet properly reflected in the current euro/dollar exchange rate, thereby entailing a risk of inflation being imported into the European system. Nevertheless, ETUC, UNICE/UEAPME and CEEP are confident that ECB will be able to fulfil its prime mission of maintaining stability without compromising the recovery. Budgetary authorities must be resolute in ensuring the conditions for continued growth, on the basis of the broad economic policy guidelines and the Lisbon conclusions. As the summit stressed: “the opportunity provided by growth must be used to pursue fiscal consolidation more actively and to improve the quality and sustainability of public finances”.

3. Structural reforms

It is necessary to accelerate structural reform of product and capital markets in the single market. The social partners endorse the Lisbon conclusion that it is “essential that, in the framework of the single market and of a knowledge-based economy, full account is taken of the Treaty provisions on services of general economic interest, and to the undertakings entrusted with operating such services”.

The Cardiff process produces only an annual report without any systematic follow-up to measure progress made and without involving the social partners in an appropriate manner. Follow-up of the Cardiff process must be integrated in European strategy for growth and employment.

For their part, the social partners affirm their determination, within their spheres of competence and collectively if necessary, to pursue policies for industrial relations and reform of labour markets which contribute to the reform process.

The EU's innovation and research capacity must be developed with the aim of devoting 3% of GDP to research. Europe must become a more attractive place for all men and women whose skills (scientists, researchers, engineers, IT experts, etc.) are necessary in an innovation-based economy to prevent them from leaving Europe. This innovation and research policy must also go hand in hand with an effective policy for education, initial vocational training and life-long learning.

4. Social partners' contribution to European employment strategy

4.1 Strengthen macro-economic dialogue

The Cologne process has made a useful start, though it will be important to ensure that discussions are interactive, and that provision is made for a stronger representation and participation of finance ministers. It is also becoming clear that the dialogue should embrace the links between macro-economic and structural policies.

4.2 Improve the functioning of the labour market through active policies for employment and social inclusion

- Open negotiations on temporary agency work

In order to contribute to the European employment strategy, strengthened at the recent Lisbon summit, and further to the European framework agreements already concluded on part-time work and fixed-term work, the social partners have decided to open negotiations on the theme of temporary agency work.

- Action by the social partners in implementation of national action plans (NAPs)

ETUC, UNICE/UEAPME and CEEP call on Member States to involve the national social partners fully in preparation and evaluation of national action plans, and, where appropriate, in their implementation.

ETUC, UNICE/UEAPME and CEEP are currently finalising a report which presents exemplary practices of the social partners contributing to implementation of the four pillars of the employment guidelines. This report should make it possible to learn lessons for future guidelines.

- Develop life-long learning

Technological change and innovation in the framework of the new knowledge and innovation society give a new dimension to life-long vocational training as an investment which is essential for maintenance and development of the skills and qualifications needed by companies and by workers, and for their recognition. This responsibility is shared between companies, workers and the public authorities. Recognising the essential role of the social partners in this area, ETUC, CEEP and UNICE/UEAPME have put in place a working group in order to identify ways of promoting access to life-long learning and developing the skills of all men and women.

- Telework

The social partners have started to reflect on telework with a view to delineating the concept of telework more clearly, cataloguing the questions that need to be examined and evaluating their cross-border dimension.

- Observatory of change

Further to the recommendation in the Gyllenhammar report regarding creation of a European observatory for industrial change as “ a resource centre of economic data and forward-looking studies concerning economic, financial, technological, territorial and social developments in the European Union”, the social partners have been consulted by the Commission on establishment of such a resource centre. With that in mind, ETUC, UNICE/UEAPME and CEEP are preparing a joint contribution on the missions, field of activity and operation for such a centre to be useful and effective.

4.3 Social protection at the heart of partnership

The social partners express their support for the concerted strategy proposed by the Commission and call to be closely involved in the work of the new social protection committee through a procedure which allows a full hearing of the entire committee with representatives of the social partners from the fifteen Member States at an early stage in the process, information and systematic consultation of a delegation of the social partners by a delegation of the committee after each meeting, and a full hearing of the entire committee on the draft final report.

5. Preparing for enlargement

The March 1999 Warsaw conference on EU enlargement highlighted the role of the social partners in implementation of the *acquis communautaire* and the need to prepare for integration of the social partners from the candidate countries in European social dialogue. ETUC, UNICE/UEAPME and CEEP have launched a joint study on “Social dialogue and tripartite concertation in the candidate countries: situation and prospects”. The results of the study will be discussed at a further conference of the social partners on EU enlargement.

ETUC, UNICE/UEAPME and CEEP would like to see participation of observers from the social partners of candidate countries in EU bodies for social dialogue and concertation.

* * *