

EUROPEAN OBSERVATORY OF CHANGE CONTRIBUTION OF THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL PARTNERS

21 November 2000

Following up on the recommendation of the “Gyllenhammar report” to set up a European Observatory on Industrial Change, *“as a resource centre for economic data and forward studies on economic, financial, technological territorial and social developments in the European Union”*, the Social partners were consulted by the Commission on the establishment of such a resource centre. They would like herewith to bring their own contribution regarding its missions, scope and functioning.

BACKGROUND

1. Globalisation, technological development, changing consumer demands, amongst others, have led to an acceleration of change. The driving forces of such changes need to be identified early enough to allow for an evaluation of the problems and opportunities they give rise to and an assessment of their impact, especially on employment. This would permit to facilitate change by developing anticipatory measures at appropriate levels, especially by the early identification of the competencies required to adapt to these trends and of possible difficulties in adapting to change.
2. The European Observatory should build on the experience and acquired knowledge of the various tools and structures which have been developed at European, national and territorial levels to date to improve the capacity of relevant actors to anticipate, analyse and respond to change.

MISSIONS

3. The core mission of the Observatory would consist in monitoring drivers of change in the European economy. It would be used by its target audiences as a tool, allowing anticipation and prospective research and analysis, and thereby facilitating adaptation at all appropriate levels : European, national, territorial and company.
4. In order to do so, it should :
 - ☞ Identify, collect and process relevant information on the major drivers of change;
 - ☞ Facilitate access to such information to its target audiences;
 - ☞ Identify and disseminate good practices regarding adaptation to change, especially at territorial, (including cross-border), sectoral and company levels;
 - ☞ Facilitate exchanges of experiences on adaptation to change
5. The Observatory should neither be a decision making body, nor a place for social dialogue. Through dissemination of quality information, it would improve awareness

raising and the capacity of concerned actors to identify changes and take relevant actions to prepare adaptation.

SCOPE AND APPROACH

6. The geographical scope of the observatory should not be limited to the European Union. It should cover EEA countries and the candidate countries to the EU. Furthermore, in a context of global economy, particular attention should be given to collection of information on an international scale.
7. Although special attention should be given to issues relating to employment and labour markets, it is essential that the Observatory adopts a multidisciplinary approach. The Observatory should indeed be able to draw on various areas of expertise, including macro and micro economy, research and development, industrial policy, social policy, education and training policy, competition policy, regional development policy, external trade and investment developments etc. Therefore, the Observatory should integrate expertise from all relevant DG of the European Commission (employment and social affairs, external relations, economic affairs, enterprises, competition, research and development, communication, regional policy, etc.)

TARGET AUDIENCES

8. The target audiences of the Observatory should be the following :

☞☞ **Companies** would get from the Observatory useful information to allow them to anticipate and respond to changes; they would also particularly benefit from experience sharing through the Observatory. Specific attention should be paid to SMEs who could benefit from the expertise available from such a resource centre.

☞☞ **Social partners**, at all levels, notably at the European sectoral level, should be considered as the priority target audience. At their request, the Observatory would provide them with relevant information to draw on their debates. The Observatory should not seek to interfere in, or become a place of social dialogue, but rather respond to the needs of such dialogue.

☞☞ **National and territorial authorities** would get, through the information disseminated by the Observatory, elements allowing them to identify consequences of changes at their respective levels and to take the relevant preventive actions in order to facilitate adaptation.

☞☞ **European institutions**, such as the European Parliament, the Commission, the Council of ministers, the Economic and Social Committee, and the Committee of Regions should also benefit from the information gathered within the Observatory when shaping European policies and programmes (for instance in the field of education and training). .

STRUCTURE

9. The structure of the Observatory should be light and flexible. It should be regarded primarily as an active network which brings together a great diversity of competencies, building on existing tools and structures. Information and communication technologies should allow the setting up of easy ways of communication and interaction between concerned actors.
10. The Social Partners consider the European Foundation for the improvement of living and working conditions to be the right place for establishing such an Observatory. The Observatory would be under the direction of a Steering Committee composed of a limited and balanced number of representatives of the interested parties, including the European Social Partners.
11. The Social Partners consider that the work of the Observatory, could be usefully evaluated on a regular basis (each year for instance) by a wider forum which would bring together representatives of the target groups identified above. Practical arrangements for this could be defined by the Steering Committee.

DISSEMINATION

12. The information gathered by the Observatory could feed a database widely accessible via the internet. This would allow proper linkage with all relevant sources of information. Limited paper publications and, when necessary, workshops could also be considered.