



## **CEMR – EPSU joint statement on the development of social dialogue in local and regional government**

*(adopted at the plenary meeting of the sectoral social dialogue Committee on local and regional government held on 29 November 2006)*

### **Introduction**

Local and regional government represents a major employer in Europe, accounting for around 10% of total employment in the European Union. It is central to the provision and management of high quality public services, which are at the heart of its mission and which form a major means to foster welfare and competitiveness.

Throughout Europe, local and regional authorities are facing many challenges as they strive to provide such services to the evolving communities they serve. These challenges notably stem from globalisation, increased competition, budgetary restraints and demographic changes, from greater mobility and increasing demands from citizens, as well as from the growing impact of the EU rules on the liberalisation of markets and on public procurement activities. To meet these challenges local authority employees have to be motivated, skilled, and involved in the process of change.

The European sectoral Social Dialogue Committee for Local and Regional Government was established in 2004 with a view to strengthen the possibilities of EPSU and CEMR members to:

- Deliver opinions to the European Commission on initiatives with regard to social and employment policy and the development of European policies having consequences in these areas for local and regional governments;
- Encourage and develop the social dialogue at European, national and local level in the local and regional government sector.

As part of their first two-year work programme, CEMR and EPSU carried out in 2005 a project on “strengthening social dialogue in the new member States and in candidate countries”<sup>1</sup>. This project demonstrated that structured social dialogue hardly exists in new member states. Furthermore, there is also a mixed picture in the EU15 Member States, with differing degrees of structured social dialogue taking place.

EPSU and CEMR recognize that social dialogue operates at a number of levels and needs time and support to develop. Through the present statement, they seek to:

- (a) reiterate their commitment to social dialogue processes,
- (b) highlight the benefits of social dialogue in local and regional government, and,
- (c) support the further development of social dialogue activities at national and local level, between members of CEMR and EPSU.

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<sup>1</sup> The findings of this project, which benefited from the financial support from the European Commission, are available from the respective websites of CEMR and EPSU in the form of a publication in English, with summaries in Polish, Hungarian, Estonian, Slovak and Turkish.

## **The value of social dialogue**

The parties wish to recall that:

1. Social dialogue is a means of addressing major issues affecting employers and employees. As such, it can help to reduce conflict and misunderstanding, explain objectives, improve efficiency and the quality of working life.
2. Social dialogue is essentially an autonomous matter for social partners, subject to certain rights and duties established within an evolving legal and policy framework set at international, European and national level.
3. Social dialogue operates at various levels and exists in a number of forms, which include the consultation of employees on important issues affecting work organisation, the negotiation of the terms and conditions of employment and implementation of collective agreements, and co-operation through various participatory procedures.
4. In the context of local and regional government the purpose of the social dialogue at workplace, regional, national and/or European levels is to:
  - improve working methods;
  - improve the efficiency and quality of local and regional services;
  - support innovation in service delivery;
  - shape working conditions;
  - make employment in local and regional government services attractive
  - identify and discuss other issues the social partners find important and relevant.
5. At European level, social dialogue forms an integral part of the *acquis communautaire* and is also part of the “Copenhagen criteria” for EU membership. As such, it is a governance tool, facilitating participation in decisions affecting working life by representatives of employers and employees.
6. At the same time, social dialogue is an important instrument for achieving the EU objectives of economic and social cohesion, as expressed by the Lisbon Strategy. CEMR and EPSU members strive to achieve these objectives by implementing or complementing the EU social *acquis* through the promotion of social dialogue processes in local and regional government.
7. Effective social dialogue at the European level is facilitated by appropriate mechanisms and practices developed in the Member States.
8. National governments, whilst respecting the principle of autonomous social dialogue, can actively support the development of bipartite social dialogue processes by facilitating the establishment of appropriate structures and frameworks, and by including the social partners from the local and regional government sector in suitable tripartite activities such as the development of the National Programmes for the Lisbon Strategy, and the drafting and implementation of reforms programmes supported through the European Social Fund (ESF).

9. Social dialogue at the local level complements the direct relationship that the employer has with its employees. The participation of employees in social dialogue processes is an essential criteria for the success of these processes and participation will generally foster both the sense of commitment to the organisation and the ownership of the solutions developed at the workplace to address challenges and adjust to changes.
10. Initiatives to improve the quality of work and workplace performance should focus on the overall organisation of work. Strategies building upon a long-term commitment to change and new cooperative management methods are also key factors for successful management policies. EPSU and CEMR members therefore consider it necessary that the social partners develop their cooperation progressively by setting themselves attainable objectives, building on mutual trust. In this context, addressing joint issues of concern through social dialogue is seen as a means of strengthening trust.
11. In labour intensive public services, the reorganisation of the work processes and administrative structures are often the main instruments for adapting to the changing environment. A long-term vision of employment, including education and training and the continuous development of professional skills and adaptability of employees, helps to facilitate change. Successful management of change, in particular, demands dialogue and co-operation between social partners in all organisations.
12. The European Commission has recognised the potential of quality local and regional services to generate both economic growth and employment, not only at local level but also throughout the whole economy. CEMR and EPSU therefore consider that due attention should be paid at all levels of decision making to the prerequisites of quality and modern public services, not least that they should be sufficiently funded.
13. The EU and the wider context of globalisation have brought the requirements for productivity and efficiency gains into the focus of the organisation and provision of local and regional services. CEMR and EPSU express their commitment to co-operate and develop social dialogue for the purposes of meeting the key challenges in their sector, and they underline the special role played by social dialogue in formulating sustainable and adequate reform measures. The parties simultaneously express their willingness to continue their regular discussions with the European Commission in all matters related to the modernisation of employment and public services delivered or managed by the local and regional government sector.

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