



**EPSU Collective Bargaining and Social Dialogue Conference**  
**Brussels, 30 November-1 December 2006**  
with the support of the European Commission

**EPSU Collective Bargaining Annual Report 2006 – Summary**

**Collective bargaining developments**

In several countries the issue of collective bargaining itself has been a central concern particularly in the national administration sector. ROTAL in **Estonia** continues to campaign for the right to negotiate for state officials while EPSU affiliates in **France** and **Portugal** also find themselves up against governments that have been imposing inadequate pay increases rather than get involved in proper negotiations. This has been one of the issues behind a series of national strikes and demonstrations in Portugal throughout the year. In **Turkey** civil service unions don't have the right to strike and pay increases this year were finally imposed after a conciliation board failed to resolve the dispute. In **Italy** the main problem over the last couple of years has been the long delays in concluding new collective agreements and then getting them implemented across the public sector. This year tax workers took strike action in order to get their collective agreement applied after long delays.

Pay increases in most countries and sectors managed to match or stay ahead of inflation. Some of the main exceptions included **Portugal** and **France** where both governments imposed pay rises of 1.5% in 2006. With inflation in Portugal at 3% by the end of the year and at 2% in France, this means that public sector workers have suffered further erosion in their real pay and unions will be demanding higher pay increases in future to make up the fall in purchasing power.

The pay of health workers has been a particular issue in central and Eastern Europe with a number of demonstrations and strikes over pay levels and privatisation in **Bulgaria**, **Slovakia**, **Poland** and **Estonia**. Low pay more generally in the public sector is creating recruitment problems as many workers migrate to western European countries. This was one of the main reasons behind a national demonstration in **Lithuania** in November under the slogan a "European wage for Lithuanian workers."

In **Switzerland**, where pay bargaining is very decentralised, public and private sector unions joined forces in a national campaign on pay, which began with a focus on equal pay in the spring, leading up to a 25,000-strong, national demonstration in September. Public sector unions have suffered a gradual erosion in their real pay over the last 12 years as pay increases have lagged behind inflation.

Regional government employees in **Germany** were involved in the longest public sector strike there since the Second World War. Services union ver.di co-ordinated action with other unions across a number of regions over a period of 14 weeks during February, March and April. The unions successfully resisted attempts by employers to impose increased weekly hours across the board. The employers had withdrawn from the public sector working time agreement in 2004 and had refused to sign the new public sector agreement in 2005, which had been endorsed by federal and local government employers. As a result of the strike a range of different working hours arrangements have been agreed across the regions and a new collective agreement came into effect at the beginning of November.

There were a number of other disputes in the public services during the year with several pay disputes across the **UK's** decentralised civil service pay bargaining arrangements. However, the largest industrial action there involved workers in the Department of Work and Pensions protesting at the planned 30,000 job cuts imposed as part of the Gershon efficiency review. The strike in the Norwegian electricity sector at the end of the summer was over pay, allowances and outsourcing with a satisfactory outcome for the unions, including in particular an agreement over outsourcing aimed at preventing social dumping.

### **Social dialogue**

The **hospitals** social dialogue committee met formally for the first time in September, bringing together EPSU with HOSPEEM, the employers' organisation established by CEEP the overall public sector employers' body. The formal committee will continue to concentrate on the key themes developed in recent years in informal discussions – recruitment and retention, the ageing workforce and skills requirements.

In the **national administration** sector, informal social dialogue continued between the Directors-General of Administration and the EPSU-led trade union delegation. A joint statement on equality and diversity was signed in December followed by a joint statement on mobility of civil servants in June 2006. There is some optimism that progress towards formalising social dialogue in this sector will be made under the German EU presidency in the first half of 2007.

Health and safety, equality and diversity and employment have been among the main issues for the **electricity** social dialogue committee during the year. An updated statement on health and safety has been drafted taking account of equality issues in particular as well as recent legislation. An equality and diversity toolkit has been developed and progress made on updating a 2001 Commission study of employment. The European Commission has approved the setting up of a formal social dialogue committee in the **gas** sector and this will meet for the first time in March 2007.

In early 2006 the committee for **local and regional government** adopted a two-year work programme with the main themes of: strengthening social dialogue in the new member states and candidate countries through capacity building activities; supporting reform processes with a focus on demographic ageing and work organisation; promoting gender equality and diversity; and evaluation of different forms of local public services delivery through a joint study.

### **Collective bargaining co-ordination**

There has been some further progress in the three main initiatives EPSU has taken to try to improve the co-ordination of collective bargaining:

**epsucob@ network**: The network has now been in existence for three years and has over 100 correspondents from EPSU affiliates in 28 countries. The secretariat relies on these contacts to supply and distribute information on collective bargaining and has used the network to collect data on a range of issues.

**epsucob@NEWS**: The e-mail bulletin appears every two weeks, keeping readers up-to-date with the latest developments in collective bargaining and the articles can be accessed through a country index on the EPSU website. Most of the information continues to come from affiliates' websites and other sources of information on industrial relations. The newsletter is now circulated more widely with 220 recipients.

**epsucob@INFO**: Progress has been made in setting up a source of information on collective bargaining that can be used by EPSU affiliates via the internet. This database has been available for most of the year and contains basic data on around 70 pay agreements from around Europe. It includes links to *epsucob@NEWS* articles and reports on the EIRO website. However, more work needs to be done to extend and deepen the information available on each country and sector.