



**EPSU**  
**Collective Bargaining and Social Dialogue Conference 2007**  
  
with the support of the European Commission  
***Future of European industrial relations in the public services***  
**Brussels, 3-4 December 2007**  
**Background document: future of European industrial relations in the public services – Summary**

**The past and present...**

A range of structures now exists that makes up a European system of industrial relations. These structures have mainly been created to allow for a process of social dialogue to take place where the social partners at cross-sectoral, sectoral and company level consult over many work-related issues such as health and safety, equality and diversity, recruitment and retention in the face of demographic changes, skills and training and violence and harassment at work.

At cross-sectoral level EPSU contributes to the ETUC's work in negotiating with the employers' organisations with a view to concluding framework agreements at European level that the social partners then implement at national level. More directly EPSU has been working for many years to deepen and extend the European social dialogue at sectoral level. Four formal social dialogue committees are now up and running in electricity, local and regional government, hospitals and gas and substantial progress has been made towards setting up a committee in national administration.

At company level EPSU has established a multinational European works council (EWC) co-ordinators group to co-ordinate its activities in companies involved in energy, waste and healthcare and has played a role both in the setting up of EWCs and in negotiating agreements between EWCs and European companies.

Going beyond these formal structures and the process of social dialogue, European trade union activity around collective bargaining has also been developing. The ETUC has a collective bargaining committee that debates and recommends policy to the ETUC Executive Committee and monitors bargaining across Europe in the light of its guidelines that focus on achieving pay increases that compensate for inflation plus a share of the increase in productivity.

In fact, activity at sector level pre-dates this ETUC initiative, with the European Metalworkers' Federation (EMF) setting the pace in terms of its attempts to co-ordinate collective bargaining policy among its affiliates. It set up a network of collective bargaining officers (initially "eucoba") that shares information and reviews annual progress on pay in terms of the inflation-plus-productivity guideline. More recently the EMF has joined with the energy and chemical workers' federation (EMCEF) and the clothing and textile workers' federation (ETUC/L) to create an extended network of collective bargaining contacts (now "eucoban"). In 2006, the

EMF took another step forward in agreeing a common demand for an individual right to training that each EMF affiliate would include in its next round of collective bargaining. The first evaluation of this campaign took place at this year's EMF collective bargaining conference.

Beyond these sectoral and cross-sectoral developments there has also been the Doorn Group regional initiative bringing together union confederations in Belgium, France, Germany, Luxembourg and the Netherlands to discuss co-ordination of collective bargaining across these countries in recognition of the similar economic and competitive forces affecting the region.

In 2003, EPSU followed the EMF example by setting up its own network ("epsucoba") which began to monitor collective bargaining developments across the public services. Through a series of annual conferences that are open to all affiliates, EPSU has been tracking pay negotiations as well as debating collective bargaining policies such on low pay and outsourcing.

The role and operation of EWCs raises some important questions which have been highlighted by the European Commission's recent proposal for an optional legal framework for transnational collective agreements. While acknowledging the potential value of such a framework EPSU has joined with other federations in expressing concern over which organisations can sign such agreements, how is their representativity determined and what right do they have to take action to ensure the implementation of such agreements. The EPSU EWC co-ordinators group is considering what kind of procedures are necessary to conclude agreements in multinational companies.

### **And the future...**

This year's collective bargaining conference gives us the opportunity to take stock of what has been achieved so far and to assess what our main aims should be in the next five to 10 years in collective bargaining and what kind of role EWC agreements and the social dialogue can play in achieving these aims. This is not just a question of policies that need to be continued or developed, but also more fundamental questions about how these processes work and what can be done to improve the way they function. As a starting point we have formulated in a series of specific questions:

### **Collective bargaining**

- What is the value of the collective bargaining network for national affiliates and how could and should it be improved?
- What is the value of developing policy in collective bargaining and should this be deepened in some area and/or extend to new areas?
- Is there value in trying to integrate collective bargaining issues more closely with those discussed and developed within the cross-sectoral and sectoral social dialogue?
- Is it possible to go beyond this level of an exchange of information and begin to talk about real and effective co-ordination, possibly following the example of the EMF with a common demand to be integrated into all collective negotiations?
- Would such co-ordination be feasible across EPSU sectors or is there greater scope for co-ordination at sectoral or sub-sectoral level and/or even at regional/cross-border level?
- To what extent should we be looking to co-ordinate bargaining within specific multinationals?