



## PRESS RELEASE

### **EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES AND DIVERSITY IN THE WORKFORCE: ELECTRICITY SECTOR SOCIAL PARTNERS AGREE TO DEVELOP A GOOD PRACTICE“TOOLKIT”**

The Social Partners in the electricity industry - Union of the Electricity Industry-EURELECTRIC representing employers and EPSU/EMCEF for the trade unions - intend to create a “toolkit” for companies wishing to align their approach to equal opportunities and diversity in the workforce with best practice. This project was conceived during a workshop in Brussels on 14 December, which examined the findings of a recently-completed study on the subject, and confirmed at a meeting of the sectoral Social Dialogue Committee the following day.

Evidently the recent liberalisation process is leading to profound changes within the European electricity sector, with important and varied implications for the composition of the workforce. Against this background, the Social Partners issued a joint statement\* in 2003 containing a commitment to undertake further action on issues surrounding equality of opportunity and diversity. As a first step, the Social Partners commissioned a study, which was carried out by a team from the Cardiff School of Social Sciences led by Professor Peter Fairbrother.

The report, which was the central focus of the 14 December workshop, sets out the legal framework and background to these issues in Europe and underlines the considerable variation as regards measures on equal opportunity and diversity that exists among the countries that make up the European Union. These variations are linked to the complexity of the economic, social, and political background across the wider European Union. As regards company policy and trade union activity, the report shows an “uneven approach” to equal opportunities issues “ranging from the comprehensive to the non-existent”.

During the workshop, EURELECTRIC, EMCEF and EPSU reaffirmed their commitment to equal opportunities and diversity in the workforce. Speakers stressed the value of a committed approach in this field, on both ethical grounds and recognising the value of a diverse workforce in meeting the challenge of new business practices and greater customer-orientation in the liberalised market framework. Other participants underlined the advantages of a formal company policy on equality and diversity, accompanied by concrete action and targets, rather than an ad hoc approach to the issues, and explained the need for support for these actions at the highest levels within a company if good practice is to take root within the enterprise.

Accordingly, the Social Dialogue Committee decided to work towards the creation of a “toolkit” setting out the various approaches, steps and practical measures which a company may apply in order to improve their practices in this field. Members felt this will *inter alia* help to raise awareness and promote a more homogeneous approach to the issues right across the newly-enlarged EU-25 territory. Partners will now seek funding for the project with a view to achieving this.

\* available on website [www.eurelectric.org](http://www.eurelectric.org) under *Documentation/Positions/Management*

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