

SPEECH TUNED SPOKESPERSON CHARLES COCHRANE
DG/TUNED MEETING 29 MAY 2008, BRDO

1. Dear Directors General, it is a pleasure to report back on the implementation of our new test phase on topics and methods of a formal social dialogue as agreed on 11 December last in Lisbon. As part of this new phase it is very important to maintain our plenary biannual meetings to ensure involvement at a high strategic level.
2. From the river Tagus to the Lake Bled, I am most pleased to recommend, on behalf of TUNED, the adoption of the progress report before us today.
3. Under the smooth chairing of the Slovenian presidency, since last January we held 3 social dialogue working group meetings and 2 steering group meetings. Flowing from our joint workprogramme, we discussed issues of trust and violence at work, and prepared the workplan for the next Trio presidencies.
4. A few words on each these issues. First, trust which was the priority theme of the Slovenian presidency. For the first time, we have submitted a joint project to the European Commission, under the social dialogue budget heading, entitled *“improving trust in central government administrations through an effective social dialogue”*. It is a broad issue and as social partners it was natural to concentrate on the employee/employer relationship.
5. After some discussions it became apparent that critical factors of trust are stability, predictability and involvement of all stakeholders. This is why the project will focus on the role of social dialogue in anticipating and managing change in central government administrations, in view of some key challenges such as equality and diversity, transparency and information and consultation rights, and competence development.

6. The aim will be to identify good practices and a set of conclusions on building trust between employees and employers. Importantly, it will look at the quality of central government administrations against the EU background on good governance and fundamental right to good administration.
7. The project will also provide a framework to discuss an upcoming Communication from the Commission on anticipating change and restructuring. The state sector is often overlooked in this debate yet I can't think of a sector which is subject to so many reforms as ours. Providing a state sector response to the Commission's initiatives is also part of our responsibilities as social partners.
8. It is an inclusive project covering all EU and EEA member states and candidate countries (Turkey, Croatia and Macedonia). It is flexible allowing for fine-tuning as we go along. It will help build bridges between the national and EU levels of social dialogue during and after completion of the project.
9. The results of an external research and of our discussions will be presented to a conference on 29-30 April next year in Prague. We are much grateful to the Czech EUPAN representatives for hosting this conference.
10. Also thanks to Lionel Chaty for volunteering as the EUPAN project coordinator in view of the upcoming French EU presidency. The specific issue of anticipating change will be the subject of a working group meeting on 13 November in Paris.
11. Talking of predictability, we have not yet received the official green light from the Commission but had the project been rejected we would already know it. I therefore trust that it will go through starting in July until September next year.

12. Second we discussed, peacefully, the issue of third-party violence at work, that is to say physical or verbal abuse from customers or service users against employees. Whilst this is a minority phenomenon, it is growing and is more frequent than “internal” violence from colleagues and or management. The sectoral social dialogue committees most affected by this problem such as in hospitals, local and regional government and commerce have launched an initiative to explore further the nature of the problem. It is part of a follow-up to the European cross-sectoral agreement on violence and harassment agreed last year. This gave us a good opportunity to gain insights in a real “formal social dialogue” on an issue of concern to us.
13. You have before you a joint report of a workshop on this issue last March that an 18-strong EUPAN/TUNED joint delegation attended thanks to the support of the European Commission. The workshop confirmed that third-party violence at work is an increasing concern with a strong state sector dimension. The report identifies a number of issues which would deserve further attention such as the role of governments and social partners, quality and availability of public services, level of staffing, prevention policy, training, as well as the impact of outsourcing.
14. Those who are interested in following suit will examine the implementation of the Agreement on violence and harassment in our sector. A good starting point will be within CEEP membership as signatory of the Agreement but we hope that other EUPAN members are invited to join in.
15. Next on our agenda is the issue of stress at work, very much related to external violence. We are grateful to the French Presidency for picking this issue which is extremely relevant to our sector. Our French colleagues are quite keen on the topic given the ambitious state reforms currently underway in their country.

16. Importantly, like the issue of violence, it is anchored in a European cross-sectoral agreement, signed in 2004, so we don't have to start from scratch.
17. Stress at work is one of the most important health and safety issues affecting 1 out of 3 employees in the EU. It can lead to serious ill health, lengthy sick leave and even to death. It is not an individual issue but relates to work organisation and working conditions. It has implications for employees, employers but also for the quality of service delivery.
18. We look forward to developing our own sectoral approach on this. As a health and safety issue we hope we will reach another step in our test phase with a concrete and far reaching outcome.
19. Dear directors general, we recommend endorsement of the progress report. It will be translated and sent to all TUNED members and EUPAN network to ensure good dissemination of our activities at national level.
20. Only a year ago many thought that we would not be here today testing formal social dialogue. Admittedly, there is room for improvement, for instance duration and mandate of the steering group, but our initial evaluation is very positive.
21. Thanks again to State secretary Roman Rep, Ales Dobnikar, Mojca Ramšak Pešec, Branko Vidic, and his team, who were thrown in to the deep end in kicking off the test phase.
22. I also thank the forthcoming French Presidency for keeping smooth continuity in our activities in cooperation with the Czech and Swedish representatives of the EUPAN Trio.
23. I look forward to seeing you on 19 December as we continue to make progress together, and at the 5th Quality administration conference in October.