

**Meeting of the EU Directors General  
for public administration and trade  
union delegation**

**10 June 2005  
Luxembourg**

**Speech by Peter Waldorff**

**Spokesperson of the trade union  
delegation in national administration**

1. On behalf of the trade union delegation, I thank the Luxembourg Presidency for this very good initiative and the Troika members for having endorsed it. I also wish to thank the Commission for the expertise and financial support.
2. Today's meeting is a key opportunity to examine together the functioning of the European sectoral social dialogue. What it means in concrete terms and what it can offer to improve national administrations and meet the interests of public sector workers and users. To do so I will say a few words about the social dialogue committee in local and regional government that offers much guidance for our future work.
3. But before, I think we can all agree that Europe is at a crossroad. The "Non" in France and the "Nee" in the Netherlands show the gulf between decision-makers and the electorate. An effective social dialogue is part of the answer to try and redress the democratic and social deficit in the EU. This must start at the workplace. And modernising and improving public administrations must start off with a well-functioning social dialogue. Reforms cannot be passed over the heads of public sector workers. It is not only wrong it simply does not work.
4. A basic requirement for any kind of dialogue is that it takes two to tango with a shared understanding over the steps and direction to take.

5. I am pleased that today's meeting is the second time in 2 months that we can meet as a **single and united trade union delegation**. This is a great achievement that follows on from the EPSU/CESI agreement struck last February. Our delegation today includes colleagues from *Austria, Belgium, the Czech republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Germany, Luxembourg, Slovakia, Sweden, the UK as well as Norway*. We have also managed to find common ground with Eurofedop. As a whole, the new trade union delegation represents an overwhelming majority of all unionised workers in the state sector, covering all EU member states. This is as inclusive and representative as you can get. It is a concrete contribution to the mandate you received from your Ministers in Rome in December 2003 to examine ways of improving the social dialogue in national administrations. We are glad that this mandate was renewed last Wednesday by yours ministers:

6. **Now that we have achieved legitimacy and representativity, we need a partner.** We look forward to the outcome of your discussions, in the framework of EPAN, on the best ways to represent your interests as employers of about 50 million civil servants in the EU. It is positive start that a majority among you wish to improve and formalize the social dialogue, as has been shown in a survey carried out by the Belgian DG, Mr Monard. This position is consistent with many situations at national level. It is also consistent with the EU heads of government and state who reconfirmed, at the European Summit last March, that the social dialogue is a central tool to implement the EU Lisbon and Employment strategies.

7. How do we see the future of our social dialogue, as a process of information, consultation and negotiation, shaping up?
8. So far out of 31 sectoral social dialogue committees, 2 are in public services: the imbalance needs be redressed. We are opposed to simplistic “cut and paste” of the private sector onto the public sector. We are opposed to the orthodox views that the private sector is more efficient than the public sector. This is simply not true. However I must say that on the EU social dialogue front, the state sector can learn from the private sector, which is what we will do later on today.
9. On the question of whether the social dialogue should be formal or not, in a way it is something we need to discuss and agree jointly. In any case, an informal social dialogue is a necessary transitory stage to clarify rules, objectives, demarcation lines of our sector, and build trust between us.
10. But ultimately it is our position that only a formal social dialogue, on the basis of the articles 137-139 of the EC treaty, will arm us with the following:
  - **A right to information and consultation on the Commission’s initiatives**, legislative or otherwise, relating to public administrations and social policy. We note that it will be part of your ministerial mandate to examine how this right can become real.

- **A right to jointly discuss and draw up** common minimum social and public sector standards and indicators. The cross-sectoral social dialogue provides a useful entry for this. We are fully engaged in this process. Most recently we struck agreements on stress at work, which strongly impacts front-line public sector workers and levels of productivity, and on gender equality. Soon negotiations will start on violence at work.
  
- Only a few of you, those who are members of CEEP, are involved in the cross-sectoral social dialogue. However not having an impact does not mean no implementation. And on this we could clearly cooperate on the best ways of implementing in the state sector the agreements on telework, lifelong-learning, stress at work and gender equality. In turn our implementing capacity will influence the future shape of cross-sectoral negotiations.
  
- Last but not least **a right of initiative**: this would clearly show that national administrations can, in some well-defined areas, drive the EU agenda. And here is a question to you, do we want to leave it to the Commission alone to drive the agenda on administrative simplification, administrative cooperation, on what is the public interest and what is not, on public/private partnerships? Or do we aim to consider these issues jointly, as sectoral social partners? We say: we need to provide the direction of ongoing reforms, we need to be proactive, both in the interests of users and employees concerned.

11. Let me turn now to the example of the **sectoral social dialogue committee in local and regional government** to help illustrate how and what we can do to move our cooperation forward.

12. This committee was set up in January 2004 by EPSU and the employers' platform in CEMR (Council of European Municipalities and Regions). They have since then set up working groups and adopted joint statements on a number of issues:

- ✓ Modernisation of public services.
- ✓ The EU employment strategy;
- ✓ Equal opportunities:
- ✓ Telework
- ✓ Public/private partnerships

13. Clearly these are examples from which we can draw inspiration for national administrations. (You have here on the table copies of these statements).

14. Now it will not have escaped you that these are not binding agreements. These are statements based on shared evaluations, surveys and commitment to prepare the ground for future work. They however convey the strong political message to EU players that the voice of local and regional government and workers must count when decisions affecting them are taken.

15. So why can't we adapt this model to the national administrations?

16. The argument that because national administrations are outside EU competence, there is no room for a real social dialogue is reaching its limits. It is also an unconvincing legal argument. The Social dialogue is a voluntary process. **It means it is up to you and us to take the decision to move it forward.** Your work programme and the next one for 2006-2007 includes many issues that are part of social dialogue and collective bargaining in many Member States: performance-related pay, pensions, mobility, training, public sector ethics, e.government, employment, privatisation, the Lisbon strategy etc.

17. A joint approach on these issues as part of the wider debate on work organisation and human resources management is really needed. We could first establish working groups on some of these issues, commission surveys that clearly include employees' views and needs, and develop common indicators and benchmarking. As your working group on the Lisbon strategy has rightly emphasised there is an urgent need to step up the role of national administrations in the Lisbon strategy to boost more and better jobs. The whole issue of anticipating change and citizens' future needs is also central to the trade union work.

18. We need to develop a dynamic process together. I think we can agree that the past situation was not satisfactory. We can now

build trust and confidence to start a new cooperation. (*Equality and diversity is a possible area of joint work under the UK presidency. Work-related stress was highlighted as a possible theme also for the Quality Administration Conference under the Finnish Presidency. Lifelong learning is an issue we discussed under the Dutch Presidency.*)

19. Our experience both at national and EU levels with social dialogue shows that it is a learning and evolving process through fine-tuning over the years. It takes time, openness and efforts from both sides notably to overcome possible misunderstandings and tensions sometimes due to differences in national situations and social dialogue traditions. The European social dialogue is **a voluntary, autonomous and flexible process**. It means that there is much scope to find ways of accommodating it to the public administration interests.

20. At times when the Commission and EU leaders recognise social dialogue's essential role for jobs and competitiveness, when EU citizens call for more social Europe, national administrations cannot stay behind. There are good prospects to establish a European social dialogue in the hospital and gas sectors. Now, do we want national administrations to be laggards in this tested form of modern governance? On the trade union side we have made our choice. We are ready to opt-in in a real social dialogue with you. And looking at the growing impact of the EU on public administration, the opt-out is clearly not an option.