

Delegation achieves a preliminary agreement on equality

(20 February 2012) The delegation of the trade unions and management finalized the negotiations on the equality agreement. The outstanding issues were considered and compromises agreed. The negotiations started with a presentation on past work done in Suez in December 2010 with several meetings to achieve an agreement. The negotiations were led by the three European Federations with members in GdfSuez (EPSU, EMF, EMCEF)

The agreement covers a large range of issues:

- It refers to the legal context at national, European and international level which stipulate that discrimination between men and women is forbidden and which encourage the equal treatment at work, including equal pay for work of equal value. The agreement inserts a reference to European law which allows the company to take positive action regarding under- represented groups regarding employment, work and pay.
- GdfSuez recognizes that there are still gaps and that an agreement with the unions is needed to address equal pay differences where they exist and also to promote women to decision-making positions. GdfSuez commits to ensure equal opportunities, to mainstream and apply these principles.
- The unions and the company have the ambition of going beyond national and European legal standards. With the agreement the parties seek to reduce and suppress differences that exist and including with regard to pay (and the total package of pay elements)
- The agreement covers the geographic area of the European Union and European Economic Area and applies to all workers. Unions in the candidate countries can also avail themselves of the agreement and seek implementation in their countries. Currently GdfSuez has a work force in Turkey for example.
- The key part of the agreement are the so-called equality plans which have to include the concrete measures to improve the situation for men and women in the companies part of GdfSuez. The plans will be evaluated annually to examine if and how they have contributed to achieving the objectives set out. The texts foresees

that corrective measures can be taken if needed.

- A set of benchmarks is agreed to allow for the monitoring of the situation. These benchmarks refer to issues like wages, training, working time, part-time work etc.
- An ongoing and constructive dialogue is needed to achieve that the work place culture assists in changing mentalities
- The agreement will be communicated to different groups: all employees, the managers and HR Directors as well as representatives of the unions and works councils in the companies. The agreement commits the company to provide training on equal opportunities.
- GdfSuez commits to ensure more jobs become available to women, to break the glass ceiling and to ensure women are more represented in the company. This applies especially to technical occupations whereas the company also commits to address the jobs which are very much feminized.
- With regard to recruitment it will be ensured that positions are advertised in a neutral manner and that the description of jobs is not stereotyped. This will also apply to the recruitment agencies and temporary agencies. The processes of recruitment will be checked and verified to prevent that they lead to discrimination.
- The text take up the European non-discrimination principle, reaffirms that pregnancy can not be a reason to refuse women a job and spells out that it is forbidden by the Groupe to search for information to find out if a women is pregnant or not.
- It addresses career development and commits to improve the possibilities for women to gain access to positions of responsibility in the company. Women returning for maternity leave will receive special attention to ensure their return to work is done in the best possible manner. The same applies to those returning from parental leave. Maternity can have no negative effects on career and pay developments. The company further commits to take the necessary measures to ensure working conditions that do not expose them to dangerous substances or working time that has a risk for their health and safety.. The specificity of men and women will be taken into account with regard to health and safety and assessments.
- Workers have the right to their job or an equivalent one upon returning from leave under similar conditions
- The access of women to training and their participation in training will be analyzed to ensure that women can participate in an equal manner in training. The analysis will be part of the annual follow up foreseen with regard to the action plans for applicable companies

- A system of mentoring is established to guide and promote women towards decision-making positions
- The unions commit to promote women in their delegations, workers' representation institutions and ultimately in the EWC. It was underlined that management is not allowed to, can not and will not intervene in such processes by management.
- The agreement has a large section on equal pay. It underlines the importance of a transparent pay system and that practices that lead to direct or indirect discriminations regarding pay need to be suppressed; If pay differences do exist the company commits to address these. Individual cases have to be solved within three months and with retroactive effect.
- Regarding part-time workers the agreement commits the company to ensure a pay development similar to workers in full time positions.
- The negotiators also addressed work-life balance. The modalities of the work organization need to be addressed, also to increase the quality of life at work. Recognising that long and irregular hours are a hindrance for a good work-life balance the agreement says the working conditions have to be such that workers can fulfill their family responsibilities as well as their role as citizens. Parental leave is encouraged.
- Not in all countries paid paternity leave exists. The agreement stipulates that initiatives need to be taken to develop assistance to paternity.
- Prevention of sexual harassment is a key issue and will be addressed by a network to develop appropriate policies and a harassment free work place.
- Reorganisations and including outsourcing will need to be evaluated to ensure that they happen in a non-discriminatory manner.
- Suppliers and subcontractors will have to respect the principles of equality between men and women
- A follow up committee will be established to analyse progress with the implementation of the agreement. The European Federations will determine the criteria. It will be an equal balance between men and women. The agreement also foresees a complaint procedure.
- A non-regression clause is inserted in the agreement as well as an article that settles the evaluation and renegotiation of the agreement in 2016

Other issues agreed:

- A study will be undertaken to explore the different leave arrangements and in

particular those for paternity and parental leave. One of the areas to explore is the way different arrangements deal with preventing negative consequences for pay and career development so all can take up these leave possibilities. The study will be considered in the follow up committee and including the possible lessons to be draw from it to ensure an appropriate level of leave arrangements in the countries in which the company is active

- A working group will consider the benchmarks further and develop a guide to ensure appropriate use.
- A European seminar will be organized to bring together the trade union representatives and the Human resource managers from the different companies to consider the implementation of the agreement.

Some areas were not finalised and have been considered under reservation of one of the parties

- The threshold for the application of the action plans. While the whole agreement will apply to all workers in Europe, companies will obligated to implement an action plan if they have more then XX number of workers. Unions and management have different opinions as regards this threshold. The union position is that all should be able to benefit from the possibility to develop the action plans
- Another difference remains over the manner in which to consider the equality action plans and how to agree these.
- The re-negotiation clause needs to be further clarified.
- Resources to ensure a good implementation of the agreement at European level.

It is expected that the remaining issues will be solved shortly. The agreement will be evaluated against the mandate that the European Federations obtained from their members, the national union federations and forwarded for approval. If the agreement is approved the agreement will be signed by the European Federations on behalf of their members.

The negotiations took place 16 and 17 February 2012, Paris. EPSU's Deputy General Secretary and Nadja Salson participated. The [previous negotiations took place 7-8 September 2011](#).

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