COP21 UN Climate Change Conference

EURELECTRIC/IndustriAll Europe/EPSU Joint Press Release on addressing measures to mitigate social impacts

(22 September 2015) European Social Partners for the Electricity Sector have committed to “the development of skilling and reskilling programmes, the creation of quality jobs and a Just Transition” in a joint position on addressing measures to mitigate social impacts relating to climate change and the upcoming COP21 Conference in Paris.

The three organisations – consisting of EPSU and IndustriAll for the trade unions and EURELECTRIC as representatives of the employers – all agree that mitigation and adaptation measures which account for the interests of workers and companies are crucial for ensuring a smooth social transition to a more sustainable and environmentally-friendly economy.

A joint project completed by the committee - *Towards a low carbon electricity industry: employment effects & opportunities for the social partners* – will therefore assist with this required anticipation and management of adverse effects for the employment and employability of workers. Looking forward beyond COP21, the partners have also “agreed to include the ‘Energy transition’ as a key topic in our 2015/2016 work programme” stated Emanuela Preiti - Vice-President of the social dialogue committee for Eurelectric, the employers association. In addition, she reasserted the partners’ “mutual determination to support this transition process through social dialogue at both sectoral and European level”.

In recognizing that a joint approach which combines effective measures to fight climate change with social fairness is needed, the social partners are calling on policy-makers “to commit to long-term action to fight climate change”. They argue that such a long-term approach – consisting of investment in Europe’s industry, infrastructure and generation capacity which is consistent with climate change goals - would contribute to a strategic and sustainable recovery within the sector. The commitment of all parties to implement social adaptation plans will also ensure that compulsory assistance mechanisms are available to support those regions and sectors that are particularly vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change.

Regarding employment, Jan Ruden - President of the social dialogue committee and representing EPSU – observed that “climate change will have serious and inevitable implications for workers and (future) employment in the electricity sector”. Consequently, he stressed the need “to undertake social impact assessments in order to avoid negative social impacts” while he also called for the introduction of mechanisms “to compensate those who are affected disproportionately”.
As for customers, the parties wish to ensure that electricity remains competitively priced for all; in particular for those on lower incomes. **Bern Frieg** - Vice-President of the committee for IndustriAll Europe - maintained that these measures can only be achieved through effective collaboration between policy-makers, public authorities and social partners at European, national and local levels. Going forward, he reaffirmed that engagement of local communities in the policy-making debate and follow-up actions will be “crucial” in order “to ensure the necessary commitment, creditability and accountability of these proposed climate actions”.

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