

Europe's energy sector needs a skilled workforce

- main theme of discussions in electricity social dialogue

(11 October 2010) There is a growing and shared understanding of the challenges the electricity industry is facing between employers and unions. One of the most important ones relates to the emerging lack of a skilled work force. The transition to a low carbon or even decarbonised economy, new technologies and demographic change pose challenges that employers and unions seek to address. This came back in several issues:

- Project on Just Transition

The Steering Committee members of the project presented the results of the discussions on the study by Syndex and the draft toolkit with the analysis of the survey. David Tarren, one of the researchers made a presentation on the results of the survey which has been undertaken. Employers and unions are converging on the main questions and explore which answers can be given. Interviews are undertaken with company representatives (unions and employers) to explore what is being done at workplace level. The project will also see a major [conference organized 13 December 2010](#).

- Skill councils

The social dialogue committee members discussed a proposal to explore what vocational education and training initiatives exist specific to the electricity sector and what they could contribute at a European level. A range of questions were raised with the main issues being the relevance of a European approach and concrete outcomes that could be expected. Both sides do consider there are advantages in a bottom up approach. The union proposal will be further explored. [For more information](#)

- Towards a new European energy policy

The social dialogue committee made a [joint contribution](#) to the consultation of the [Commission \(DG Energy\)](#)

on its Energy policy for 2011-2020. Main issues that were raised were the importance of being consulted in an early stage, being involved in the impact assessments and that the emergence of shortage of skilled and qualified workers in being addressed. The social partners considered positions taken by [MEPs](#) on this point and what could be done to support proposals that seek to address this. There is cross party concerns as well for the issue. The social partners will explore how they can address this together.

- Employment and the Energy Community

The Commission presented briefly the study that has been undertaken to explore the impact of the opening up of the electricity and gas sector on the Western Balkans on employment. The study makes clear that this impact can be significant if the industry is to aspire to European Union efficiency levels. The study services to alert the social partners and governments to forthcoming problems. The social dialogue committee underlined that the employment study should be addressed to the members of the [Energy Community](#)) as well as to the social partners. How to deal with the forthcoming problems should be part of the national Social Action Plans. The social dialogue committee also stressed that the Ministerial meeting should take account of the study results. The Commission representative noted that the study gives the impression that employers, unions and governments do not see the looming problems and that subsequently these are not sufficiently addressed in the National Social Action Plans. The Commission is also working with Moldova and Ukraine to ensure they sign the Memorandum of Understanding on the Social aspects of the Energy Community.

- Draft position on smart meters

The social dialogue committee considered on several occasions the roll out smart meters as foreseen in the 3rd package on opening the markets for electricity and gas. A draft proposal for a joint position was considered.

Other issues considered included the follow up to the [Commission staff working paper on the sectoral social dialogue](#). The social partners underlined also here the message that the Commission should consult and involve the social partners in the impact assessments. It was agreed to invite a representative of DG energy to present its working programme for 2011 to allow the social partners to consider the issues they would jointly contribute to. Further information on the impact

assessments would be provided.

The employers represented by Eurelectric and the trade unions met on 5 October 2010, Brussels. EPSU's Deputy General secretary participated. Other EPSU delegates came from Germany, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Netherlands, Slovenia.

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