

Report of the 10th Anniversary Celebration of SSDC HS - 02.12.16

(14 December 2016)

At the Plenary Meeting 2016 held on 2 December, **EPSU and HOSPEEM celebrated the tenth anniversary of the Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee for the Hospital and Health Care Sector** (SSDC HS). An all-time record number of more than 70 colleagues from HOSPEEM members and EPSU affiliates from a total of 24 EU Member States attended the event. The committee was set up after about four years of preparatory work, negotiations and a test phase with an inaugural meeting held on 20 September 2006.

EPSU and HOSPEEM were honoured and delighted by the presence of Michel Servoz, Director General of DG EMPL, and Xavier Prats Monné, Director General of DG SANTE. The EU-level sectoral social partners see their participation as an expression of interest and support by DG EMPL and DG SANTE for their past achievements, the numerous activities and projects undertaken and the fruitful cooperation and finally also as an encouragement for the joint work planned in the next months and years. In the afternoon session of the Plenary Meeting discussions on the Joint HOSPEEM-EPSU Work Programme 2017-2019 substantially advanced and both organisations hope to be able to finalise it by end of February 2017.

The **main results and key activities** of the first ten years of European sectoral social dialogue were illustrated by a presentation of important milestones and joint documents (see at the bottom of this article). The EPSU and HOSPEEM Secretariat had also prepared a table with a comprehensive overview all key activities and outcomes of the SSDC HS for the period 2006 to 2016 (again see at the bottom of this article) that was also shared with the two guest speakers.

The celebration provided an excellent opportunity to stress the crucial and positive role played by the EU-level hospital sector social partners for dialogue and cooperation on legislative and non-legislative initiatives of the European Commission impacting on the hospital/health sector workforce and on the health

care systems. It also allowed HOSPEEM and EPSU to **showcase the importance of the hospital sector social dialogue to advance joint reflections, to engage in joint activities between employers and trade unions and to negotiate on joint documents and agreements** with regard to 1) effective recruitment and retention policies (including the broad range of topics linked to professional qualifications, skills, competences and knowledge), 2) the improvement of the health and safety at the workplace and more generally of the well-being of the workforce, 3) to access to continuing professional development and life-long learning for all health workers and 4) to capacity building to allow for an effective involvement in the work of the SSDC HS.

In this speech, **Xavier Prats Monné** highlighted the need to react to changes in the delivery of health care in a context characterised by continued financial pressure on health care systems, by demographic challenges entailing an increasing number of elderly people at the risk of dependency and affected by multi-morbidity and by fast technological change (e-health, telemedicine, use of robots in care). These changes could only be successfully addressed with skilled and motivated health workers and based on measures to improve the recruitment and retention conditions of the professional and support staff in hospitals and in broader health and social care sector. The Director General of DG SANTE identified an important role for the social partners in the hospital sectors to address these challenges relevant across the whole Europe, and to facilitate access to continuous professional development. Mr. Prats Monné called for a stronger focus in the health system on preventive measures to reduce the number of premature death in European societies and as a consequence a high number of productive years lost in the EU economies. He reminded the participants of the need to more effectively spend the money in health care, implying reforms with regard to models of care, skills of the health workforce and interdisciplinary working. Mr. Prats Monné finally invited HOSPEEM and EPSU and their members to support efforts and initiatives involving DG SANTE to combat antimicrobial resistance (AMR).

Michel Servoz stressed the good functioning of the Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee for the Hospital and Healthcare Sector that over the year has produced a number of documents and successfully undertaken various projects with a positive impact on the workforce in the sector across Europe. In his view solutions to labour market problems including professional qualifications and health and safety at the workplace can often be better addressed and negotiated by the social

partners than by government. The Director General of DG EMPL in his speech focused on three major challenges faced by this sector on which social partners have a major role to play, namely professional qualifications and skills, the creation of jobs and innovation. He highlighted that the health sector of the future would be characterised by a high need of qualified jobs and positions and a workforce able to adapt to new competences, knowledge and skills needed. Mr. Servoz saw a key role of the health care sector and their workforce as being on the frontline of a number of risks and problems of our modern societies, including poverty and social exclusion. As Xavier Prats Monné he recalled the need for joint efforts in the search of the organisation of health service planning and delivery in a way to effectively spend public and private money for health care. In this context Michel Servoz finally underlined the need for investing in a healthy, safe and qualified workforce.

Jan-Willem Goudriaan, EPSU General Secretary, in his intervention highlighted the positive contributions of the hospital and health care sectoral social dialogue to a more comprehensive and effective prevention, management and reduction of key occupational hazards such as injuries with medical sharps, aggressions on health workers or their harassment by third parties, musculoskeletal disorders and psychosocial risks and stress at the workplace, to two most frequent health and safety risks in the sector. He welcomed the commitment of EPSU and HOSPEEM to look – under the forthcoming Work Programme 2017-2019 – into the possibility of adopting a Framework of Actions on occupational safety and health to complement public policies focusing on the improvement of patient safety. Mr. Goudriaan recalled the necessity for EPSU and HOSPEEM to address a number of issues in relation to professional qualifications (including vocational education and training and continuing professional development), competences and skills, to new models of care and to the appropriateness of task shifts between health professionals. For EPSU this also means a focus on the large number of support staff in the hospital sector. He invited HOSPEEM to continue working towards attractive working and pay conditions and career options based on safe and effective staffing levels to support a broader range of retention and recruitment measures by social partners and governments. EPSU's General Secretary also called for financial and political support by the European Commission to build up and/or strengthen the capacities of national social partners in the hospital/health care sector, empowering them to actively contribute to the EU-level sectoral social dialogue and to use insights and outcomes they intend to make use of “back home” vis-à-vis their governments, in collective bargaining, etc.. Referring to the Joint EPSU-HOSPEEM Guidelines to

address an ageing workforce in the healthcare sector Jan Willem Goudriaan highlighted the contribution of a sectoral social dialogue committee to the elaboration of a cross-sectoral framework agreement, in the concrete case on “Active Ageing and Intergenerational Solidarity”, agreed upon on 1 December 2016.

Margret Steffen, Chair of EPSU's Standing Committee Health and Social Services, in her contribution reflected on the conditions under which EU-level social dialogue can have a positive effect in the EU Member States: 1) A sector needs to be characterised by similar trends and challenges for the further workforce development across Europe; 2) EU-level legislation and regulation – e.g. in the field of health and safety at the workplace or with regard to the recognition of professional qualifications – has an impact on the development of the sector; 3) The European Commission actively supports the use and implementation of results of European social dialogue; 4) Trade unions and employers' organisations have a joint interest in the regulation of aspects of employment relations and workforce policies; 5) Topics worked on and issues negotiated upon are also on the agenda of a critical number of countries and insights and results from the EU-level social dialogue can be made use of "back home" in the context of health care policy making, collective bargaining or workforce-related policies; 6) Last but not least what is needed are people with the will to move forward things and to achieve improvements for the workforce in a given sector. Margret Steffen illustrated the relevance of these pre-conditions for successful cooperation in the framework of European sectoral social dialogue by referring to the EPSU-HOSPEEM Code of Conduct on Cross Border Ethical Recruitment and Retention as an example for a tool to support cross-border workforce development and mobility and to Directive 2010/32/EU on the prevention from sharp injuries in the hospital and healthcare sector as an example for a negotiated outcome aiming at the realisation of healthy and safe working conditions and at a better well-being of health care workers. She expressed her profound deception about the lack of support by Commission Services for the implementation of the sectoral agreement to improve the health and safety of hairdressers. With a view to the further development of the SSCD HS Margret Steffen called for the definition of topics of common interest and the identification of joint objectives with regard to the improvement of the recruitment and retention conditions for the workers in the hospital/health care sector. In her view such an approach would also help to strengthen the social dimension of Europe and – based on the defense of social rights and of quality employment – the fight against Euroscepticism and populist ideas.

In his speech to conclude the ceremony, **Tjitte Alkema**, HOSPEEM Secretary General, paid tribute to the commitment and active involvement of HOSPEEM and EPSU members in the hospital social dialogue, saying that it had been, and would

always be, fundamental in achieving results of good use for the national members. He reminded the participants of key outcomes of the SSDC HS, including the Code of Conduct on Cross Border Ethical Recruitment and Retention (2008), the Joint Framework Agreement on prevention from sharp injuries in the hospital and healthcare sector (2009) implemented by the Directive 2010/32/EU on the prevention from sharp injuries in the hospital and healthcare sector and the HOSPEEM-EPSU Framework of Actions "Recruitment and retention" (2010). He also mentioned the Riga Declaration of May 2011 – signed by the social partners from the hospital sector in the Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania together with HOSPEEM and EPSU – as one outcome of the joint capacity building project "Strengthening social dialogue in the hospital sector in the Baltic countries". Tjitte Alkema referred to recently finalised project activities aimed at the promotion of occupational safety and health in the fields of musculoskeletal disorders and psycho-social risks and stress at work. HOSPEEM's Secretary General also expressed his expectation that the recently adopted Joint HOSPEEM-EPSU Declaration on CPD and LLL for all health workers in the EU will be used to create new and innovative solutions to make CPD and LLL work more effectively and to contribute to policy initiatives and actions concerning CPD and LLL at European and national level. Last but not least Tjitte Alkema underlined the ability of HOSPEEM and EPSU - in the last decade - to build up a climate of mutual respect and trust.

For **further reading** and for the documents referred to above:

- SSDC HS 2006-2016: [Presentation "Main activities and results 2006-2016"](#)
- SSDC HS 2006-2016: [Table "Main documents and outcomes 2006-2016"](#)
- Illustration of practical work from a recent joint activity: Conference "Addressing psycho-social risks and stress at work in the hospital sector", 10 November 2015, Helsinki: [Film with selected extracts](#) (duration: 6 min)
- Read here the [article](#) on the event published by HOSPEEM.



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