

Joint Statement on the Conference on Social Implications of the Electricity Sector Restructuring in the Candidate Countries

Union of the Electricity Industry - EURELECTRIC

European Public Service Unions - EPSU

European Mining, Chemical and Energy Workers Federation - EMCEF

Joint Statement on the

Conference on Social Implications of the Electricity Sector Restructuring in the Candidate Countries, 19-20 September 2002, Budapest

The joint conference brought together representatives of the trade unions, employers and governments from EU applicant countries to discuss the social dialogue between employers and trade unions in both EU and Candidate Countries. Concrete cases were presented of the effects of liberalisation and sometimes privatisation on companies, employees and customers in the EU. At the conference the social partners discussed the preparation of the Candidate Countries for membership of the European Union.

Enlargement is a major issue for the social partners in the electricity sector. EPSU/EMCEF and EURELECTRIC will continue to consider this in their social dialogue process, in order to contribute to a harmonious development of the social dialogue in an enlarged Europe. The candidate countries and the European Union face the twofold challenge of the profound economic and social reform, which is currently taking place in almost all candidate countries. The tasks to be fulfilled require active participation by social partners who must fully live up to their responsibilities by contributing to the enlargement process, both at national and European level. The social partners are convinced that social dialogue and participation of trade union and employer organisations are necessary for the success of the reform process and for the preparation for enlargement in the candidate countries.

The social partners also refer to their Joint Declaration from 7 November 2000, in

which important issues of common interest were outlined with regard to the social implications of the electricity market liberalisation.

EPSU/EMCEF and EURELECTRIC note that the applicant countries will adhere in full to the aims of Article 2 of the EU Treaty and comply with the European rules in the social field. In order to fully implement the "acquis communautaire", the social partners must be able to develop an independent social dialogue and fulfil their role in accordance with the "social chapter" of the EU Treaty.

In the aftermath of the Budapest Conference, the Social Partners wish to make the following points:

1. EPSU/EMCEF and EURELECTRIC underline the importance of the social dialogue both in the EU and in the Candidate Countries. The Social Partners recognise that in view of the significant challenges the social partners must develop the social dialogue arrangements and activities at all levels. The unions and employers can cooperate in developing an independent social dialogue. This allows them to participate in and contribute to developing Community social legislation, ensuring it is implemented fully and complied with scrupulously.
2. Social Dialogue should be recognised in the Candidate Countries. EPSU/ EMCEF and EURELECTRIC underline that in order for the accession negotiations and the transition to EU Membership to succeed, and for enlargement to work in the electricity sector, it is essential that the trade unions and employer federations in the applicant countries organise themselves as independent and representative organisations.
3. Social Partners in the candidate countries should be involved in the liberalisation process by the governments of the Candidate Countries at an early stage. The social partners have a major role to play both in the enlargement process, and in further policy development across the employment and social agenda. In order to be able to contribute to the process, the Social Partners wish to be informed on a regular basis on the process of the accession into the EU.
4. Along with the Social Partners, the European Commission should assist the candidate countries in establishing permanent structures and processes for social dialogue. EPSU/EMCEF and EURELECTRIC suggest that the European Commission logistically facilitate the participation of representatives of Candidate Country social

partners in the sectoral social dialogue committee and the working groups, in the form of translation and where possible reimbursement of travel costs.

In order to concretely advance the common goals, the social partners suggest more specific actions in Annex 1 of this statement.

Budapest, le Septembre 2002

EURELECTRIC EPSU EMCEF

Annex 1. Suggestions for actions

The actions to be undertaken by the European social partners should aim at strengthening the social partners' abilities to develop social dialogue in the applicant countries, along the lines of the common statement. The Actions could include:

I. Structuring social dialogue in the electricity sector

1. First of all, by drawing up an overview of social dialogue in the electricity sector in the EU Candidate Countries. Initially this work may consist in carrying out a survey perhaps in the form of a questionnaire, in order to identify the employers' organisations and trade unions and to assess how representative they are. The study should also clarify the roles and the relationships between the social partners.

2. In the second phase, it would be appropriate to carry out research on the institutional structures of social dialogue at a sectoral level, so as to get a better understanding of the relations between the social partners, as well as their capacity to enter into these relations. The Commission is to update its earlier study on the social partners of the electricity sector.

3. Next, by envisaging measures designed to improve consultation and to create and/or reinforce the autonomy of social dialogue at sectoral level in the applicant countries, in other words to reinforce or to create the social partners' capacity to independently negotiate agreements. This is achieved in particular through:

- The establishment of an overview of the right to collective bargaining in all of the Member States;
- A rationalisation of concertation within the representative structures;

- Finally, by strengthening the links between social partners in the applicant countries and those in the EU Member States, in particular through their representations at European level. This could be organised through organising exchanges of good practice.

This work could also aim at determining the way in which the social partners in the electricity sector can contribute to the final accession process, particularly with regard to the integration of the *acquis communautaire* concerning the liberalisation of the electricity sector.

II. Following-up the developments after the Budapest conference. In order to assist the social partners in the Candidate Countries, regional workshops are proposed, organised together with the European Commission in order to disseminate best practice.

III. Initiating a study on the qualitative impact of liberalisation of the electricity sector in the applicant countries (along the lines of the ECOTEC studies)

The aim of this study should be to clearly set out the characteristics of the labour force in the electricity sector (breakdown of the labour force according to age and gender, skills and qualifications), as well as to identify needs in terms of skills for future years.

IV. Establishing a good practice guide in order to promote the quality of social dialogue in the applicant countries.

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