EPSU’s Utilities SC grapples with challenges of digitalisation and a just transition through social dialogue



2017.02.07 EPSU St Cttee Utilities

(9 February 2017) A packed EPSU Utilities Standing Committee grappled with the massive impact digitalisation is having on Europe’s utilities sector. EPSU’s Patrick Orr delivered a presentation which noted that the digital revolution is taking place at an unprecedented speed, leading to significant changes in employment conditions, working hours and employers expectations throughout the sector.

Attendees welcomed EPSU’s position paper ‘Smart Public Services in a Digital Age’, which reiterated that digitalisation must not be used as a cover for cuts, PPPs and outsourcing. The meeting agreed that the best way to safeguard public services in general and utilities in particular was though investment and effective staffing.

The way digitalisation has led to increased monitoring and surveillance of utility

workers through increasingly sophisticated tracking technologies, was also addressed. Those present gave examples of how workers performance, workload and work intensity is progressively being monitored, raising the likelihood of psychosocial damage in the workplace.

The Committee agreed to further study the both the potential damage and possible opportunities of digitalisation for the utilities sector.

The European Commission's proposals for a sustainable Energy Union, in terms of a pan-European integrated energy market, with targets for energy efficiency and eco-design, was also discussed at the meeting. These proposals, which are designed to support European integration, decarbonisation and market deregulation, are expected to have substantial impact on public service workers and European households in general. The measures initially called the Winter Package are now referred to by the catchphrase "Clean Energy for All Europeans".

The ETUC's Benjamin Denis talked about joint efforts by trade unionists to promote workers and citizens rights by pushing for a just transition and an end to energy poverty throughout Europe. How the social dialogue process can contribute to the just transition was also explored by Committee members.

Concerning the waste sector, the issue of health and safety in the context of the circular economy was also discussed. Regarding the European Citizen Initiative on the Right2Water, brought forward by EPSU in April 2012, attendees heard that there is still progress to be made on the part of the commission. The Standing Committee welcomed recent developments in Slovenia, where the Right2Water was legally adopted in November 2016 by adding it to the national constitution.

Report of the meeting (for our members only)

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