

***Joint Statement***

***of the European social partners  
in the European Gas Industry***

***on the Memorandum of Understanding***

***on the social aspects of the Energy Community  
(for South East Europe)***

***April 2008***

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of the European social partners in the European Gas Industry  
on the Memorandum of Understanding  
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The European Social Partners for the European Gas Industry welcome the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding on the social aspects of the Energy Community by the concerned governments and the European Commission, 18 October 2007, Vienna. We appreciated the opportunity to participate in the discussions of the Conference and to present our work.

We also welcome the European Conference on Capacity Building for the Social Dialogue in Western Balkan countries organised by the European Commission, 19-20 October 2007, Belgrade. It provided another opportunity to discuss our work and issues concerning the implementation of the Memorandum.

The social dialogue in the European gas sector has been recognised by the European Commission recently and we had our first meeting 15 March 2007<sup>1</sup>. Despite our recent history we like to make the following observations.

***Economic development and social progress***

As European social partners we agree with the basic principle of the Memorandum that economic development and social progress need to go hand in hand. The Memorandum recognises to build a social dimension in the Energy Community; the importance of the social dialogue at all levels and the recognition of the need to provide high quality, accessible and affordable services meeting the needs of citizens and enterprises and to promote the interests of the consumers. It underlines that the implementation of the energy acquis should be accompanied by considering the social acquis and that the signatory partners will promote and facilitate an effective social dialogue,

The Memorandum calls on the European Commission to develop strategies on a range of issues including fuel poverty, district heating reform and others. We suggest that the Social Forum and the European social partners are informed and consulted on these strategies.

***Managing change***

The Memorandum recognizes that the introduction of the internal market for electricity and gas and other energy acquis, leads to restructuring and changes for the enterprises and employees concerned, which would primarily affect low-skilled and vulnerable groups of workers or geographically concentrated areas. It also recognizes the social dialogue as an important instrument to address the management of change. We do agree. As social partners for the European gas industry we have been involved in the recent study on *The employment impact of opening the electricity and gas markets (2007)*. It provides an overview of the many changes that take place when opening markets. It also has a number of case studies on how companies and trade unions have dealt with change including in the gas sector. Socially responsible restructuring is based on social dialogue, agreements, a policy of "no forced redundancies" and jointly searching for alternatives. We recommend that the study is translated in relevant languages.

We recommend that anticipating and managing change is an important part of the national social action plans to be developed. Such social road maps should have concrete time frames for

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<sup>1</sup> We did have a long informal social dialogue dating back to 1997/1998

implementing provisions of the Memorandum and give a time table for implementing the social acquis. The European Commission should consider which support can be provided to the social partners and the governments.

### **Key areas of the social dimension**

The Memorandum sets out four key areas as part of the social dimension:

- ▶ Workers' fundamental rights according to European Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms, the European Social Charter, the Community Charter of the Fundamental Social Rights of Workers and the EU Charter of fundamental Rights;
- ▶ Labour laws – in relation to the promotion of improved working conditions and standards of living;
- ▶ Health and safety at work – in relation to improvements in the working environment concerning the health and safety of workers in the energy sector;
- ▶ Equal opportunities – with a focus on the introduction, where necessary, of the principle that men and women ought to receive equal pay for equal work;

One of the instruments to implement the Memorandum and these key areas is the social action plan, to be developed in collaboration between the governments and the social partners. We recommend that the Social Forum monitors the social action plans and exchanges experience with the implementation. As European social partners for the gas sector we will participate and contribute to the Social Forum.

As regards the Social Forum we make the following observations:

- ▶ The Forum needs to develop a dynamic of its own. One meeting a year will be too little for this. We also suggest to explore a Steering Committee (of governments and the social partners) to stimulate, prepare and follow up the Forum. A specific working group on the development of the gas sector is recommended.
- ▶ We already mentioned that the Forum should consider the implementation of the Memorandum and especially the monitoring of the national social action plans.

As mentioned earlier our dialogue is recent and not all our methods and procedures are fully established. Even so we will explore how the social partners of the gas sector can be part of our work and we note that this can already be the case for those from Croatia and Macedonia.

Signed

For Eurogas

Martina Ifflaender-Weber

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Martina Ifflaender-Weber".

For EPSU

Didier Baur

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Didier Baur".

For EMCEF

Mr. Reinhard Reibsch

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "R. Reibsch".