

## Local government meeting covers Congress preparations, European social dialogue, digitalisation and socially responsible public procurement



(6 April 2018) Public procurement is a key priority for the local and regional government sector. The latest public procurement package published by the European Commission (EC) last October contains a workstream on 'professionalization' of public procurers, including the development of a European competence framework. Local and regional authorities are mentioned in the Communication as in need of professionalization. There are arguments about whether the EU level is best placed to address this but whatever the level, professionalization of procurement needs to be linked good governance, quality public services and sustainable procurement, i.e., to ensure public money is well spent in the broad sense.

Regarding public services, in many cases it may be better - and more efficient - to keep services in-house or to use alternatives to public procurement (and PPPs contracts). Professionalization of procurers should not, therefore, be split off from good governance or professionalization in general and the objective of providing good local public services, developing communities etc. The European Commission also refers to the need for skilled and motivated staff and, among other things, to career management processes, institutional incentives and excellence awards for staff. However no mention is made of the role of social partners and social dialogue or collective agreements in determining the employment conditions of staff. Here the social partners at all levels should play a role.

The Committee also discussed 'sustainable' public procurement. EPSU lobbied on both the 2003 and 2014 Directives and welcomed progress in the latest Directives on clarification of the right to submit in-house bids, to use a wide range of social criteria and to respect collective agreements. The EC will revise the 2011 guide on socially responsible public procurement. In a preparatory questionnaire the EC asks if there should be sectoral case studies. EPSU thinks concrete examples across sectors are always useful, but from our experience it is even more important to illustrate how a wide range of social criteria can be integrated / taken into account throughout the public procurement process.

The new Directives make it easier not to confine social procurement to the 'contract performance' phase and for us this is an important step forward. Also for the 'mandatory' social requirements, the new Guide could illustrate how these can be more effectively (and more easily) guaranteed in practice (for example, excluding bidders that do not respect mandatory e.g. social, (including collective agreements), tax and social security requirements. Public authorities (and the EU is its funding programmes) have flexibility regarding what social and environmental criteria should be included over and above this and here positive actions, targets and political commitment are needed. The new Guide should have cross-references to green procurement and provide integrated examples, as green and social should go hand in hand.

The Committee said farewell to vice-chair Heather Wakefield (in photo) who is retiring from the Committee. Heather has been active in the Committee for 20 years and in her own union, UNISON, for 30 years.

More information about the meeting can be found on the EPSU website LRG section.



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