

MUNSTER SEMINAR, 6 AND 7 DECEMBER 2006

MINUTES

'The transposition of European employment policy in the rural service enterprises sector'

The Munster seminar represents a first step towards the validation of the approaches commenced by the working groups at their previous meetings.

The location for this 1st seminar was chosen for a host of reasons, including:

- From a historical point of view, for Munster represents the place where for the first time, the social partners in the sector decided it was relevant to develop a social dialogue specific to the sector.
- Because of the show staged by the enterprises involved in technical, agricultural, rural and forestry work ('DeLuTa'), whose event is held every two years.

This seminar took place in two stages:

1. A meeting and specific exchanges with union and employers' representatives from the countries of Central and Eastern Europe;
2. A generalised meeting of all the union and employers' representatives in order to validate the survey to be launched after the seminar, and to establish the political thrusts of the European social partners, particularly with regard to the development of the social dialogue in the rural service enterprises (RSE) sector.

I. EXCHANGE BETWEEN REPRESENTATIVES OF THE DELEGATIONS FROM CENTRAL AND EASTERN EUROPE

The objective of this meeting was to present two subjects of genuine importance vis-à-vis the representatives from the CCEE¹, and to make use of the opportunity of the show staged by the enterprises involved in technical, agricultural, rural and forestry work to enrich their technical knowledge with regard to the products presented at that show.

1. Presentation of the questionnaire resulting from the working groups

A number of meetings were held in Brussels, in the framework of the presentation of this project. One of the objectives related to the quality of the jobs in the sector, and their permanence. It was in this context that the draft questionnaire emerged, with the purpose of measuring the various training modalities within the profession, with an eye to gradual harmonisation.

Holger BARTELS, for EFFAT, presented a rapid overview of the issues and the weight of the farming sector in the wide sense, within the EU. The scale of the number of people working in the sector was put forward, with an emphasis on the forms suited to the structures of enterprises (SME, crafts), as an essential vector for local development, and as a player in the protection of the environment. This speech was supplemented by Eddy KLÖCKER (CEETTAR) in particular with regard to the need to organise a process to capitalise on the skills of the workers in order to better accompany the development of the RSE sector.

These speeches were revealing for a number of the participants, who accepted the principle of organising a specific branch aimed at the development of the skills of the workers.

2. Pursuit of the reflections on the timeliness of creating a specific space for the development of the sectoral social dialogue

The presentation of the sector (Rural Service Enterprises – RSEs) and the issues involved represents a motivated introduction to an in-depth discussion on the

¹ CCEE: Countries of Central and Eastern Europe

necessity to create a specific space in which to conduct the exchanges between unions and employers at the European level. In reality, this reflection was embarked upon three years ago, with a view to giving institutional status to the bipartite relations between unions and employers.

For the participants from the CCEE, this speech delivered a wealth of lessons, notably on the evolution of the sector, which was very visible within the old EU members, while the individual situation of each state represented during this part of the seminar gave evidence of situations:

- Which contrasted globally compared to the old EU members;
- Which differed depending on the states represented (level of progress in the development of the sector);
- But which were gradually moving towards a market structure, which must be organised and accompanied.

The speech allowed an exchange of points of view and shed light on the reasons behind the approach presented: to structure a specific social dialogue in the RSE sector. The Polish union representatives expressed their wish to be more precise with regard to the framing of the expectations in the common statement proposed for reflection. This demand also showed that the social partners in that state should hold more regular exchanges in order to get to know each other better.

3. Visit to the technical, agricultural, rural and forestry show ('DeLuTa')

After the meeting, the participants had the opportunity to familiarise themselves with the new technologies presented at the technical, agricultural, rural and forestry show. During the exhibition, they had the opportunity to participate in a presentation of the issues facing the sector, in Germany, by the vice Minister of the Region and the President of the 'Environment' Committee of the national assembly.

II. GENERAL MEETING

The second part of the seminar brought together all the participants to try to draw up some avenues for action based on the elements provided to each participant, supplementary information and presentations, and debates. It had 4 objectives:

- An exhaustive presentation of the European social partners, both from the union side and the employers' side, together with their joint actions in terms of social dialogue in a developing sector;
- The validation of the reference questionnaire designed to build up a training resource at the level of all the Member States;
- A presentation of the economic and social issues in the farming sector;
- The validation of a statement designed to promote the social dialogue within the rural service enterprises.

2.1. Presentation of the social partners

Arnd SPAHN (EFFAT) gave a relatively exhaustive outline of the history of the situation in the farming sector, focusing on the weight of this sector within each state. In parallel, he expressed regret that the governments had not always fully taken account of the measure of development of the Rural Service Enterprises, and stressed the current and future contribution of such enterprises, whether at the economic, social or environmental level. From his point of view, the place now occupied by these enterprises and their employees was a good reason for the specific problems to be tackled at a sectoral level, so that the sector could organise itself and contribute to local development. Arnd SPAHN used his speech to explain that EFFAT had undertaken some steps three years ago to ensure the recognition of an institutional process. He highlighted several examples of good practice (as in the case of France), where the organisation of the sectoral social dialogue operated in the direction of what was appearing necessary today.

Eddy KLÖCKER (CEETTAR) was satisfied that all the states, practically, were represented within the seminar. He was anxious to follow a coherent path in order to ensure that the necessary institutions were set up to promote the social dialogue within the RSEs. He concluded his speech by demonstrating the determination of the social partners in the sector to work on joint subjects. From that point of view, training

emerged as a priority issue. The two previous meetings in the framework of this project had justified this necessity and proposed a questionnaire designed:

- To identify more clearly the organisation of sectoral training within the Member States;
- To provide a better assessment of the content of the training and its diversity;
- To promote a concrete action to harmonise practices in that field.

2.2. Reference questionnaire designed to build up a training resource

The motivations had been explained earlier. Eddy KLÖCKER (CEETTAR) proposed a reading of the questionnaire and provided all the explanations necessary so that the participants could gain a common vision of its usefulness. He stressed the need for every organisation present at the seminar to reply within the deadlines set, in light of the second phase: the proposal of a model which could be extended to all of the EU Member States.

Arnd SPAHN (EFFAT) thanked the representative from CEETTAR, calling on the participants to exchange their views and discuss the content.

For the Italian employers' delegation, Demis UBALDI stated that he was convinced of the justification of this approach.

Claes JONSSON (CEETTAR SWEDEN) recognised that this project was extremely important, although he regretted that the questionnaire was drafted only in three languages: he felt that translation into every national language would make it easier to understand the questions and would increase the quality of the replies.

Arnd SPAHN (EFFAT) agreed with this observation and proposed that the questionnaire be translated into 6 languages.

Erwan CHARPENTIER (CEETTAR FRANCE) proposed adding the themes of the environment, health and safety. This request would be included in the definitive document.

2.3. Economic and social issues in the farming sector – Philippe TABARY, European Commission

The contribution by Philippe TABARY related to some questions of definite importance, focusing more on the future of the agricultural policy and the new CAP², which was a priority for the Commission. He emphasised the role of the players in the sector in terms of material and non-material investments, making clear to them what their responsibilities were. He recalled that over several decades, European farming, thanks to its players, had undergone radical changes, and allowed the development of easier access to products for consumers.

He stressed the importance of the new CAP, explaining that it had to respond to the problems of the future, notably with regard to the questions relating to the protection of the environment and the quality of the products, as well as technological developments.

These expected changes, which would be supported by the Commission, called for an open social dialogue, in particular in the RSE sector, whose missions would be expanding at the European level (specifically, stewardship of the landscape and diversification of energy sources).

Pedro SERRA-RAMOS (CEETTAR PORTUGAL) pledged his support for the speech, but was disappointed that the RSEs, which played a definite role in the construction of a new farming world, were still not being recognised in their rightful place. There was still not a full understanding of their exact role and participation, notably in the definition of product traceability. Similarly, he continued his speech by asserting that the landowners were not the ones who were developing the technique. The Commission representative explained that the RSEs had not been forgotten in the CAP mechanism, and recommended that the representatives participate more regularly in the exchanges and discussions with the EU.

² CAP: Common Agricultural Policy

Claes JONSSON (CEETTAR SWEDEN) indicated that the co-operation between RSEs and farmers needed to be continued and strengthened.

In conclusion, Eddy KLÖCKER (CEETTAR) recognised that relations between the Commission and the RSEs needed to be strengthened, and that the latter should know how to make their voices heard.

2.4. Statement designed to promote the social dialogue within the RSEs

Klaus PENTZLIN (President, CEETTAR) proposed a reading of the common statement suggested for validation by all the participants. He outlined the content of each of the themes addressed in this statement then called for some reactions and validation by the participants.

Pedro SERRA-RAMOS (CEETTAR PORTUGAL) was anxious that the directions and actions should be further specified in this statement, and wondered about the need to separate the RSEs from the farming enterprises. Klaus PENTZLIN recalled the context of this statement, and in particular the lack of a reply from COPA/GEOPA to the request by CEETTAR to be allowed to benefit from observers within the representative bodies.

Once this additional information had been provided, the common statement was validated and secured a broad consensus.