

Resolution Nr. 2) proposed by the UNI Europa Commerce Steering Committee

A Europe for Commerce workers: how to make a difference in Europe through European Social dialogue and advocacy work:

The Commerce sector and EU lobbying opportunities and strategy

The sector has gone through a huge transformation with the emergence of new business models and the increasing investment of retail companies into the on-line business. The new era of digitalization in commerce and the use of new technologies have huge implications on work organisation, working time and employment relationships. This has been at the core of the discussion within the HLG on retail competitiveness of which UNI Europa is an active member. Issues such as work life balance, skills anticipation, transferability, update of training programmes and qualifications and a European framework for quality apprenticeships are among the topics discussed. While the “new way of doing business” in retail is offering new opportunities for growth to many companies, one should not forget that a fair and inclusive growth means also increasing the opportunities to offer quality jobs and avoid a further precarisation of employment in the sector.

Through its lobbying work, UNI Europa Commerce shall continue to defend the interests of workers and the right of the unions to have an equal voice in all consultative processes set up by the EU Commission. Through its lobbying activities, it shall ensure a correct balance in EU Commission policies. Providing a regulatory framework enhancing the competitiveness and productivity of business shall go hand in hand with the promotion of quality jobs that respect, enhance and improve the wellbeing of workers and their families. This includes increasing visibility of UNI Europa and UNI Europa Commerce in the newly born European Commission DG GROW (incorporating the old DG MARKET and DG Enterprise) as the focus on the retail sector will continue to remain on the EU Agenda.

UNI Europa Commerce shall use its voice to prevent the current neo-liberal one-sided approach whereby the scope of all EU regulations is limited to reducing barriers to cross-border operations while important regulations, such as those on health and safety, are regarded solely as regulatory and/or administrative burdens. All legislative initiatives shall be weighed against their economic AND social impact. To be effective in this regard, UNI Europa Commerce shall develop a network of legal and economic experts and contacts within its affiliates with knowledge and expertise on the matters discussed on EU level in order to advise the UNI Europa Commerce Secretariat.

Developing a network of MEPs, in particular, with members of the Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) and/or the Internal Market and consumers' protection (IMCO) Committees should be one of the objectives of the next four years. At present, contacts with MEPs are still very occasional and there is no consistent and regular dialogue with MEPs close to the trade union movement. Affiliates should cooperate with UNI Europa and UNI Europa Commerce in identifying MEPs with a particular interest in the sector in order to develop their support for UNI Europa Commerce demands and policies. Regular meetings together and in coordination with relevant national affiliates shall be arranged with a view to increase our political influence.

European social dialogue in the commerce sector: investing in quality jobs, education and a better working environment in Social Europe

Re-launching the EU Social dialogue, with a better involvement of social partners in EU policy making and in the European Semester together with a reinforced social dialogue at the national level, has been announced as main priorities of President Juncker's Commission and also the scope of a thorough review started with a high level event on 5 March 2015.

While the objectives per se can be agreed upon, they must be achieved according to priorities established by social partners themselves and not by the Commission.

It is important to recall that the European Social Dialogue (ESD) is an integral part of the European project as well as of the measures and policies that promote employment and growth. However, social dialogue at European level is based on the wealth of social dialogue at national, regional, cross-sectoral and company level. This is not the reality in some European countries, especially in Eastern Europe where a structural, trustworthy social dialogue at sectoral and company level is non-existent. The economic crisis and the high level of unemployment in certain countries together with the imposed EU austerity measures have weakened the bargaining capacity and the representativeness of certain trade unions, especially in Southern Europe and Ireland. The capacity to influence the European Social Dialogue and, in turn, implement its outcomes at sectoral and company level, is linked to the strength of the national social dialogue. However, the European Social Dialogue can support capacity building by promoting social dialogue in weaker countries with specific and tailored measures. The capacity building project carried out in 2012 by UNI Europa Commerce and EuroCommerce and the adopted Action Plan was a first step in this direction. However, more needs to be done.

To conclude, European social dialogue needs to be strengthened and the work of UNI Europa affiliates needs to be more proactive including the capacity to make suggestions on concrete steps to be taken for a more social Europe.

Additionally, the European social dialogue should be an integral part of the global sectoral strategy reflecting objectives and priorities of other UNI Commerce campaigns and other areas of trade union activity where UNI Commerce is involved. This could be achieved, as a first step, by ensuring that ESD activities have more visibility in UNI Commerce and UNI Europa Commerce statutory meetings and by encouraging those attending the ESD meeting on behalf of their trade union organisations to report back to and discuss with their national constituencies about the outcomes of ESD.

UNI Europa Commerce and its affiliates will together develop and implement the following actions:

UNI Europa Commerce will

- Appoint a European Social Dialogue (ESD) coordinator The appointment shall be done by the UNI Europa Commerce Steering Committee but can be chosen from among all UNI Europa Commerce affiliates; The affiliates have to support the secretariat in its work in the social dialogue.
- Rethink ESD by setting up a strategy group that will develop and endorse a vision on ESD that is relevant for affiliates at national level. Such a strategy will include concrete measures to assist the Secretariat in the discussion with EuroCommerce
- Develop a network of legal and economic experts to support the lobbying activities of the Secretariat vis-à-vis the EU Commission and advice the Secretariat on topics such as competition law, labour law, etc.
- Develop a network of MEPs supported by affiliates and organise regular meetings and exchanges of views with them in Brussels; explore possibilities of cooperation on issues such as freedom of association, social dialogue and collective bargaining;
- Identify projects and EU funding opportunities with a view to implementing the work programme and the strategic objectives of the ESD. This includes gathering existing expertise among UNI Europa Commerce affiliates;
- Increase the cooperation with EuroCommerce to fully implement the action plan aimed at improving the participation of Central and Eastern European countries in the ESD;
- Encourage affiliates to organise national events where UNI Europa and EuroCommerce can discuss with Unions and employers their joint activities. This could take the shape of national round tables or regional events to disseminate and raise awareness of the importance of ESD.
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