



European Chemical Social Partners' Roadmap 2015 / 2020

Introduction

Challenges and Opportunities for the Social Partners of the European Chemical Industry in a Changed Industrial Landscape

For over ten years now, the Social Partners of the European Chemical Industry – ECEG and industriAll Europe – have been meeting on European level. They have been conducting a successful social dialogue with the support of the European Commission for all these years.

In their common position on an institutionalised European Social Partner Dialogue of the chemical industry and their joint declaration on the establishment of a formalised Sector Social Dialogue Committee for the European Chemical Industry from 2004, the European Chemical Employers Group (ECEG) and the European Mine, Chemical and Energy Workers Federation (EMCEF) declared the main aims for their dialogue were to contribute to the creation of a favourable climate for the competitiveness of the sector and the employment in the industry and to further develop the social dimension of Europe. To this end the dialogue would not be limited to social affairs but focus as well on business issues, general economic conditions, environmental and other questions. Moreover, it would concentrate on achieving common understandings and consensus in areas of common interest specifically related to the chemical industry and its employees which are not traditionally already covered by national level collective bargaining.

Working groups of the Sector Social Dialogue Committee have debated on the following broad subjects: “competitiveness and employment”, “industrial policy, climate change and energy policy”, “training, education & lifelong learning” and “health and safety and Responsible Care”. The intense discussions in these working groups have become a rich breeding ground for the plenary meetings, Social Partner Conferences and several Social Partner Projects. From tentative dialogue at first, our meetings have with time turned into firm social dialogue discussions, and current topics such as the economic crisis and restructuring, demographic change and the need for qualified workers, occupational pensions, sustainability and a level playing field for the European Chemical Industry vis-à-vis global competition have become the subject of mutual declarations. Among other documents a framework agreement on competence profiles has been signed.

On the occasion of its 10th anniversary, the history of our Social Dialogue was summed up in an activity report. And yes ... we should be proud of ourselves. The Social Dialogue for the European Chemical Industry is still young but, thanks to the European Commission that provided us with the necessary financial means, it already has a solid track record. Above all, we would like to thank the many active participants whose experience have given the discussions meaning, always with the ambition in mind: to contribute to the creation of a favourable climate for the competitiveness of the sector and the employment in the industry and to further develop the social dimension of Europe as it was stated in the founding documents by the Social Partners.

To move forward, we need to look back, evaluate and learn from the past. This is the objective of the Social Dialogue for the European Chemical Industry, and our joint application to the "Call for proposals - Support for Social Dialogue - 2014" enabled us to develop our "European Chemical Social Partners' Roadmap 2015-2020". With eight steering group meetings, two conferences and two evaluation meetings in 2015, 2016 and 2017, this project will undoubtedly lead to even more dialogue, cohesion and cooperation in the sector.

For several decades now, industry in Europe, including the chemical industry, has been fundamentally transitioning. New technologies, automation, robotics, digitisation, product innovation; all these new trends have transformed our sector. Increased productivity and capacity utilization have helped defending the competitiveness of companies. Today, the debate has shifted to sustainability: how can people; planet and profit go hand in hand? A "greener" industry, a competitive energy policy, recycling as well as the attention to safety and health are all links that will shape the chain of sustainability in the future.

Furthermore, social partners need to address the issue of energy transition and its implication for the chemical sector as well as chemical industry's contribution to the environmental issues.

The subject of sustainable economy leads us to social responsibility. Employment holds a key position when it comes to sustainability. The high youth unemployment rate in large parts of Europe is one of the main challenges for governments and social partners. Providing employment/jobs to all the young talent that is wasted today would help as well to manage the current budgetary challenges.

Not just the industrial landscape is changing. The chemical industry is becoming more and more global, and in this global economy we have to find a balance between economic and social needs. To this very day, social policy in Europe is to a large extent determined at Member State level, which in itself is useful. However, if Europe wants to compete with the new global economies, a higher degree of cooperation is essential. Thanks to the "Roadmap 2015-2020" project, the Social Dialogue for the European Chemical Industry can make a solid contribution. This Roadmap gives us the opportunity to develop a number of actions that can lead to common positions between the social partners across the Member States.

Our vision for 2020 is that of a responsible, sustainable, competitive and innovative European Chemical Industry. In order to meet these challenges, the Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee has determined five general priorities that will enable us to contribute to this goal and thereby to continue to work towards the creation of a favourable climate for the competitiveness of the sector and the employment in the industry and the further development of the social dimension of Europe as we have done since 2004 in the Sector Social Dialogue Committee:

1. Competitiveness, RDI, anticipation and management of change

Innovation and structural change is one of the main pillars for guaranteeing a strong and competitive European chemical industry and employment growth in Europe. The chemical sector develops new substances, plastics and components that are used in many other industries. It is of vital importance for the industry to continuously develop both product and process innovation. An innovative work organisation is essential for companies to face these challenges and provide sustainable employment. Through this priority, we aim to encourage and support innovative projects and continuous change. In order to do so, good practices must be shared and promoted. Innovation and the conditions needed for it to take place must play a pivotal role in European and national social dialogue as must the exchange with the political institutions about the necessary framework conditions for a competitive Chemical Industry with regard - among others - to the broader industrial, trade or energy policies and regulations.

2. Occupational Health and Safety, Responsible Care

The European chemical industry has continuously shown its social responsibility in matters relating to health and safety. With REACH, the European Regulation on Registration, Evaluation, Authorisation and Restriction of Chemicals, the analysis of all chemical substances is a guarantee for general safety and public health as well as for the workers who handle the substances. Both inside and outside of companies, an intensive prevention policy for health and safety remains a priority. Zero accident and disease tolerance is key. Every accident is one too many and every work-related disease should be avoided. Timely dissemination of information about new technologies and substances like e.g. nanotechnologies and the safe use of nanomaterials deserve our attention. The memorandum of understanding on Responsible Care (RC) signed between CEFIC and the social partners ECEG and EMCEF in 2003 will now take the form of a wider platform on cooperation.

3. Employment and demographic change

Competitiveness and employment are synonymous with prosperity. Despite the economic crisis which started in 2008 and which is still not overcome in all member states, employment rates in the chemical industry have held up reasonably well compared to other industries, both in terms of direct and indirect employment. The needs of a competitive production in the globalised economy of the 21st century requires companies and employees to be more flexible than in the past and to take this flexibility into account when planning and developing careers. HR policies and skill development have to support employees in this task. Inter alia, as a result of demographic changes, a new field has started to develop in social dialogue. Work-life balance, youth employment, knowledge transfer, organising longer working lives, inclusion of women in the sector, work mobility and employability of workers are themes around which concrete actions are considered.

4. Education, Training and Lifelong Learning / Framework Agreement on Competence Profiles

Lifelong Learning has been a topic on the Social Dialogue agenda from day one. Issues regarding innovation and employment have shown that workers will have to keep dealing with change. New techniques, new processes, digitisation; the speed of change was never this high. All this will have to be taken into consideration in personnel policy, as workers will continue to be faced with the need for new competences. Human talent is an important factor in HR policy. Employees and employers have to perceive LLL even more as an investment in the future than they did in the past.

5. Regarding the last point of our Roadmap, the **Framework Agreement for Competence Profiles**, action has been taken by the Sectoral Social Dialogue Committee with the introduction of an addendum namely to reinforce the dissemination of the agreement and its profiles. We count on the cooperation of the social partners in all Member States that have so far participated in the sectoral social dialogue for the European Chemical Industry to contribute to this joint initiative and to conduct yet another evaluation by 2020.

These are the five general priorities based on which the social partners of the European Chemical Industry have jointly determined concrete objectives forming the body of this Roadmap. We consider these objectives as opportunities from which the European Chemical Industry and its workforce will benefit both in terms of competitiveness and employment for decades to come.

This is an ambitious programme that we will evaluate jointly at the end of the project in 2017 (mid-term) and after the conclusion of the Roadmap in 2020.

1. Competitiveness, RDI, anticipation and management of change

Topic:

Working towards a favourable climate for the competitiveness of the European Chemical Industry and the employment in the industry has been at the heart of the work in the Sector Social Dialogue Committee since its start and it will continue to be. Innovation and constant change and adaptation to new situations is necessary for companies in order to stay competitive in global markets; this is especially the case in innovation driven and high-technology sectors like in the chemical industry. These necessary changes have to be managed properly and management and workers alike have to work together constantly in order to make this happen.

Since the establishment of the sectoral social dialogue committee for the chemical industry, social partners have recognized innovation and R&D as key drivers for economic growth and jobs. Our Working Group meetings on competitiveness and innovation and a number of joint positions and statement/declarations that social partners signed throughout the last ten years prove this point. We acknowledge the positive change on the EU level in regards to the recognition of these vital pillars, after the European Council's adoption of the Communication "Towards an Industrial Renaissance" in March 2014.

Goal:

In addition to our work on the broader framework conditions for a competitive Chemical Industry a specific goal from the sectoral perspective will be to further support EU' policies and programmes that promote development of innovation and increase investment in R&D as vital components for European competitiveness in the global economy, while fostering job growth and fair and effective transition through the exchange and promotion of best practices. Innovative work organisations must aim at delivering competitive answers to the challenges companies are faced and also deliver added value towards sustainable employment.

Actions:

- 1) The social partners will communicate through a joint statement within the social dialogue the importance of innovation.
- 2) Wherever appropriate, innovation efforts will be encouraged; good examples of innovation practices and how workers adapt to it will be disseminated.
- 3) The social partners will advocate the EU for fostering an innovation friendly environment in which innovation can grow and give the EU a leading- position in innovation processes. Issues such as digitisation and nanotechnology will be addressed, through awareness raising campaigns for example.
- 4) A special attention will be given to the impact of innovation, and in particular digitisation, in the chemical industry; i.e. joint assessment of digitisation of work. The social partners will define a number of national associations from different parts of Europe for case based studies/assessments. Monitoring and impact assessment will be actively followed by the social partners on the European level for further best practice exchange and dissemination.

- 5) Cooperate with the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (Eurofound) especially regarding workplace innovations.
- 6) Joint actions relating to distinct situations in specific sectors as for example the pharmaceutical, rubber and plastics sectors will be organised during the period covered by the Roadmap.

All these actions will be monitored and evaluated at the end of the roadmap project.

2. Occupational Health and Safety, Responsible Care

Topic:

Health and Safety remain top priorities in the European chemical industry. The European Union and member states have already established well-developed legislation on the handling of chemical agents, the use of technical installations and ergonomic measures. The Chemical Industry has a good record and high standards with regard to Safety and Health at the workplace.

In addition the REACH regulation offers a good framework for a harmonised and standardised approach that helps ensure safe, responsible and sustainable chemicals management (including for nanomaterials in its annexes and ECHA guidance documents). Voluntary initiatives such as Responsible Care are useful tools as well and have been supported by the Sector Social Dialogue Committee since its beginning.

Goal:

The social partners will continue focusing on the subject of safety and health. Preventive actions and zero tolerance for work related accidents and diseases remain important challenges in the battle for a result-oriented safety and health policy. New risks arise and whilst innovations must be boosted to ensure the competitiveness of the European chemical industry, new risks which sometimes can be connected to such innovations must be managed carefully and adequate protection, information and training must be provided for workers to handle all products and substances safely.

Actions:

- 1) Participate in EU-OSHA campaigns 2016-2017 and 2018-2019 if these are deemed relevant for the European Chemical Industry.
- 2) Draft a joint, general statement on occupational health and safety in the European Chemical Industry including all aspects and issues being relevant in this area today.
- 3) As a follow-up to the joint declaration of the Social Partners on the inclusion of nanomaterials in the annexes of REACH, draft a joint statement supporting awareness-raising activities amongst our respective members to ensure the safe use of nanotechnology and nanomaterials.
- 4) Based on the memorandum of agreement on Responsible Care, signed in 2003 between the Social Partners and CEFIC, start to develop a wider active platform encompassing RC as well as other issues and initiatives of relevance to all social partners.

3. Employment and demographic change

Topic:

With approximately 2.25 million direct employees in more than 16,000 companies, the chemical industry (including the sectors chemicals, pharmaceutical, rubber and plastics) is one of the biggest and most dynamic industries in the EU. The industry thereby not only plays an important role in improving the quality of life for citizens, but provides direct and indirect employment for many Europeans. In order to continue to be an attractive employer, the sector must continuously improve its image and its attractiveness to the outside world.

While specific demographic challenges vary from company to company, there are a number of areas for joint activities of European Social Partners. Due to demographic change many Member States pursue a policy in which the retirement age is raised. In this respect it is essential to organise sustainable working lives in Europe. Sustainable employment is key not only to enable older employees to stay longer, but also to attract young people and women to a sector where the average workers age today is over 45.

Goal:

Stimulating young people to choose for a technical and/or scientific education is a priority and attracting women in some careers where their numbers remains insufficient is a matter we want to address; the management of work and private life should also be looked into. Workers retiring at an older age is a reality to which the sector and its employees need to adapt (this includes the development and introduction of innovative, new measures to enable a more sustainable working life including change of working post, different time schedules, part time work for older employees, etc.).

Action:

Prepare and implement a voluntary agreement on sustainable employment and career development in 2016, which will include chapters on youth, older workers (including adaptation to longer careers) and female workers.

4. Education, training and lifelong learning

Topic:

In order to ensure the competitiveness of the European Chemical industry, to enable further creation of productive and efficient jobs, it is crucial to have high competence level of all employees at all levels in the sector. Therefore Lifelong Learning has been a topic on the Social Dialogue agenda from day one. Issues regarding innovation and employment have shown that workers will have to keep dealing with change. Giving employees the ability to acquire new skills and qualifications throughout their life in order to adapt to change and possible shifts in their career will remain a major challenge and a joint responsibility for companies and employees.

Goal:

The chemical sector wants to support the EU 2020 strategy by developing actions to promote education, training and lifelong learning. With a special focus on youth employment on one side and on active ageing on the other, the sector wants to contribute actively in increasing the activity rate in Europe.

Actions:

- An apprenticeship – type training will be developed in a certain number of countries with the aim of improving the technical knowledge and the positive attitude to work for young people
- The sharing of best practices on the above mentioned apprenticeship programmes as well as on specific programmes to provide young people without school leaving certificates with the basic skills needed to successfully start apprenticeship programmes will be actively organised
- The transfer of competences by elderly people during the latest stage in their career will be promoted. Possible systems of tutoring & mentoring will be explored

All these actions will be monitored and evaluated at the end of the roadmap project.

5. Follow-up to the Framework Agreement on Competences Profiles

Topic:

During the preparatory phase of the project, a survey was carried out to assess the outcomes of the Framework Agreement on Competence Profiles, signed by the Social Partners of the Chemical Industry on 15th April 2011 so far. This survey namely revealed that in those countries where social dialogue is well developed, the agreement had been widely disseminated, that it had had no major impact on competence profiles in big companies but that it could however still be put to better use in SMEs. Despite some success in Central and Eastern Europe, better dissemination was still needed in some countries and developing a couple more profiles in the agreement might be useful to this end.


Goal:

Based on this evaluation of the Framework Agreement, the Social Partners aim to highlight that competence profiles are an integral part of social dialogue, to continue disseminating the agreement, to monitor it more regularly, to enlarge its scope with new profiles or update it if necessary during the period 2015-2020 and to put the focus on SMEs.

Action:

With this goal in mind, an addendum to the Framework Agreement on Competences Profiles has been drafted as an integral part of this Social Partners' Roadmap and will be signed separately on this date. It will henceforth be attached to the agreement signed in Brussels on 15 April 2011.

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