



Brussels, March 2005

EACB COMMENTS ON
THE COMMISSION' COMMUNICATION
“PARTNERSHIP FOR CHANGE IN AN ENLARGED EUROPE:
ENHANCING THE CONTRIBUTION THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL DIALOGUE”
(COM(2004)557_FINAL)

Introduction

The European Association of Co-operative Banks (EACB) is one of the main associations of the European credit industry. Its core objective lies in defending the professional interests of its members. The EACB is involved in the European Social Dialogue Committee for the banking sector since its creation in 1998.

The association represents one of the leading banking groups in Europe. Its membership base of more than 30 organizations comprises co-operative banking groups from the European Union Member States, but also from Central and Eastern European countries. These represent 44 million Members, over 126 million customers, over 674,000 employees in more than 50,000 business points and deposits of about EUR 1,209,000 million.

The activities of the EACB's members are mainly focused on their respective national or regional markets. Even where they are identified as having an international dimension, they are nonetheless groups that are composed of medium-sized or small-scale institutions. Co-operative banks are among the leading providers of capital to small businesses and private customers in Europe.

The EACB analysed the communication and would like to underline the following comments:



Key messages

The EACB understands that the Commission's text, among others, recalls that economic long-term success would not go without modern systems of social relations and efficient and proactive management for change. Particularly, the communication:

- calls on Member States to build partnerships for change involving the social partners and other stakeholders in accordance with national traditions;
- takes stock of the European Social Dialogue and aims at raising its awareness and understanding its results;
- invites the social partners to devise a more extensive framework for the European Social Dialogue in the context of a newly enlarged Europe where various social relations model exist;
- makes proposals to change the European Social Dialogue in its interaction between different level of industrial relations.

The EACB appreciated that the Commission continue to see the role of the Social Dialogue as an important successful actor to the achievement of the Lisbon objectives.

The EACB would like to take this opportunity to re-emphasise its full support and commitment to the sectoral European Social Dialogue. Since the creation of the European Social dialogue committee for the banking sector in 1998, the EACB participated in the constructive dialogue between the bank social partners, who have initiated work on issues of common interest, such as

- Non-bank competition
- IT employability
- Round Tables in the accession countries
- Life-Long Learning
- Social affairs aspects of Corporate Social Responsibility.

The EACB wishes to continue working in such a constructive dialogue based on mutual respect and understanding of both parties. It is not the purpose of the European Social Dialogue, which characteristics are based on compromises and do not allow to share out high level mandatory provisions with all countries and all companies, to come to agreements. Indeed, none of the social partners present in the Committee have any mandate to reach European-wide agreement.

The EACB has strong reservations that the Social Dialogue organisation deviates from the following well established principles:

- the autonomy of the Social Partners, i.e. they remain self-governing and responsible for the organisation of the social dialogue, the issues covered and the results achieved, within the framework of the EC Treaty;
- the principle of subsidiarity, i.e. interaction of industrial relations, whether originating' at EU or national level, is complementary and may differ depending on the issue tackled.



It is the EACB's belief that the Commission should respect the above and not interfere as proposed in its Communication. The statement that the legitimate Commission's right of initiative can be exercised at any time is unacceptable. Nor is the conception of synergies between the European sectoral level and the company level, particularly the inappropriate link with the European Work Council.

Moreover, the EACB considers that the Commission's proposed typology of texts, although broadly accepted as reflecting the variety of available results, must not be seen as a pre-requisite to comply with when initiating work. Any attempt to render mandatory any pre-established typology of results that social partners would have to comply with will hamper the autonomy of the social dialogue and of stakeholders. The EACB also warns the Commission that any attempt by the Commission to interfere with the monitoring by the social partners of their own results will also jeopardise the principle of autonomy of the social partners.

Finally, the EACB also welcome the Commission's emphasis on its interest for modern industrial relations in the new Member States. In this respect, the EACB would like to recall that further to a successful project on cooperation with the social partners of the candidate countries, bank social partners have launched at their own initiative a follow-up project aiming at developing further their relations with the new Member States – for which EC funds were successfully granted. The EACB would like to reiterate the spirit of this project in line of the communication: anyone should resist from any temptation to apply a "one size fits all" approach or a specific model since situations and traditions in the new Member States vary greatly from one to another and where social partners will need to take varying different routes.

Conclusion

The EACB urges the Commission to recognise that promotion of the social dialogue requires leaving the responsibility of shaping the dialogue to the social partners themselves. As UNICE, the EACB believes that going in another way would render the Commission's approach far too interventionist and run in contradiction with the Commission previous statements emphasising the necessary autonomy of the social partners.