

**2nd European conference - Promoting paritarian social funds
in the construction industry**

19-20 October 2010, Bucharest (Romania)

Session 1 : The contribution of the “Warsaw conference” to national social dialogue

***Intervention of Luisa Todini, FIEC President
Check against delivery***

1. Introduction

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to be here today in front of such a large and distinguished audience.

It is also very motivating to see the large number of countries represented and of participants from the “new” member States. Not only from Social Partners organisations, but also from national authorities and in particular labour inspectorates.

As Mr. Schleicher reminded, we decided to organise this 2nd conference at the request of some organisations of the “new” member States and this first session aims precisely at exchanging our views about what has happened over the last 2 years since the conference in Warsaw.

Of course, the best placed for answering this question are the representatives of those countries on which we focused in Warsaw, namely Poland, Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic, who will intervene in the second part of this session.

I would therefore like to tell you from our perspective of employers organisation and of European sectoral social partner why we consider important to continue this collaboration with our colleagues of the EFBWW and of the AEIP for promoting the development of paritarian funds and social dialogue in our industry.

2. The role of the social partners

First of all, our industry bears some specific characteristics which make it very different from other industrial sectors :

- it is very fragmented, because it is mainly made up of SMEs;
- it has particular working and employment conditions (in order to take into account weather conditions for example);
- it is highly labour intensive;
- the workforce has a high degree of mobility;
- there is a specific production process : the final good is immobile and the "factory" is mobile, which is just the other way round in other sectors.

Because of these specificities an important role is played by the social partners, who are the best placed for taking decisions on how to address and if needed regulate these particular conditions.

It is therefore important to have strong social partners organisations, at national as well as at European level.

3. Importance of the paritarian funds in the “old” member States

In most of the “old” member States the social partners have decided to address some of the specificities of the construction industry by setting up paritarian funds, many of which have been operating for quite a long period now.

From our employers’ perspective the overall picture is rather satisfactory and we will get a better overview of what can be achieved through these paritarian funds this afternoon on the basis of very practical examples.

We are convinced that the social partners have to maintain a strong political and strategical role in the management of these funds, in order to optimise the services provided to their affiliates.

We also believe that despite several common features, the structures and the functioning of each fund can change significantly from one country to the other, because of the possible different needs and specificities of each country. It is very important that paritarian funds adequately take them into account.

4. Importance of exchanging our experiences

Our main objective both in Warsaw, 2 years ago, as well as today, is mainly to exchange experiences and to learn from each other.

Despite the possible differences between our countries and between the existing funds, there are certainly some elements or approaches which can be of interest for others and which can be transposed or adapted to other socio-economic and legislative frameworks.

On this specific issue I am very interested to listen to the speakers from some of the “new” member States who will intervene later this morning, in order to hear what kind of added value our first conference in Warsaw has brought to them.

I would like to underline here that our aim is certainly not to impose specific models. Our objective is mainly to provide our colleagues from the “new” member States with our own experience, with the purpose of facilitating and encouraging the development of strong and structured industrial relation models, in order to be able to transform the challenges that our industry has to face into real opportunities.

5. Challenges

What are these main challenges ?

1. First of all the global economic crisis : with some delay, compared to other sectors, the construction industry has also been strongly hit by the global economic crisis, although there can be significant differences between countries and between sub-sectors and this crisis has strengthened and accelerated the effects of globalisation and the competitive pressure on enterprises.
2. Secondly the demographic changes, in particular the ageing of population in the EU, combined with the structural difficulties of our sector in attracting and maintaining young people; this has, amongst others, a significant impact on our national and sectoral pension schemes for example.
3. In the area of health and safety : despite the improvements observed over the last years, there is still a lot to be done, in order to further decrease the number of victims from accidents and professional diseases.
4. Finally the policies linked to climate change, energy efficiency and energy supply : they will require considerable anticipation and adaptation from enterprises and workers, in particular as regards the required skills.

Most of these issues should be addressed jointly by the social partners within the most appropriate structures.

The instruments that they have at their disposal can be very efficient and strong and can sometimes even replace the intervention of the legislator if needed.

It is also for this reason that “paritarian funds” have been set up, namely to allow the social partners, who understand and know best the needs of the industry, to jointly develop and manage instruments which are not only tailored for intervention in specific areas, such as training and health and safety for example, but also for solidarity between the actors concerned.

6. What can be done at the EU level ?

What can we do at the EU level both for the development of social dialogue and of “paritarian funds” ?

As FIEC, representing employers, we have already very good relations with the EFBWW in the framework of our sectoral social dialogue “construction” Committee and we have of course to continue in this direction. The framework that the EU Treaty provides us in this respect is extremely important and we have to make good use of it, always trying to be as pragmatic as possible and as close as possible to the real needs of our respective affiliates. Some of our members from the “new” member State are very active in this field, but we would like to see more involvement from the others as well.

Since the “Warsaw conference” we have also progressed in the collaboration with our friends from the AEIP : we now participate on a regular basis in their “task forces” meetings where we exchange our views and information on issues of mutual interest and the conference of today is also a very practical example of our good collaboration.

It is certainly our intention to continue the work undertaken so far.

However, as I said earlier we cannot and we don’t want simply to try to impose our views and our models. We therefore need to listen and to understand what are the real wishes and needs from our colleagues in the “new” member States. Some of them expressed some rather clear requests to us in Warsaw and we are still working on some of the follow up actions that had been identified. Our discussions today and tomorrow will certainly highlight further matters to be addressed and we will take them on on our agenda.

7. Conclusions

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The fact that we are all here today clearly demonstrate our interest and our conviction about the important role that “paritarian funds” play in our industry, as well as the important role played by the social partners.

Our presence also shows our willingness of dialogue and of exchange of experiences. Although the realities in our respective countries differ significantly one from the other, we can certainly learn a lot from each other.

I am personally convinced that despite our differences in our cultures, in our industrial relations models, in our construction processes, this exercise will be extremely beneficial for the reinforcement of the national social partners in the “new” Member States, which in return will also imply a reinforcement of our respective European organisations.

Thank you.