

EFFAT – CEFS Conference “Improving employability in the European sugar sector in the context of restructuring”

28 OCTOBER 2009

THON Hotel Brussels City Centre Avenue du Boulevard 17 / 1210 – Bruxelles

Chairmanship : Harald WIEDENHOFER (EFFAT) – Norbert KAILICH (CEFS)

PARTICIPANTS

The EFFAT-CEFS Conference organized in Brussels on Wednesday 28 October 2009 brought together over sixty participants, members of CEFS and EFFAT, or external organisations and officials of the European Commission (See Annex 1 List of participants – Annex 2 : Agenda).

CONTEXT

(See Annex 3 : Briefing Note)

Harald Wiedenhofer (EFFAT) and Norbert Kailich (CEFS) recalled that, in a context of substantial instability due to restructuring, with 16,500 direct jobs lost in four years, the social partners focused more particularly on the need to improve employability in the European sugar industry. Observing at their plenary session in February 2008 that it is no longer possible today to guarantee long-term employment for employees in the same company, they applied to the European Commission for financing to carry out a project on employability (DG Employment – Budget Heading 04.03.03.01). Accepted by the European Commission, this project is essentially based on standard 7 of the Code of Conduct, which states that “in case of restructuring, the sugar industry acts in a socially responsible way. Steps are taken to improve the employability of employees”. It also implements standard 2 of the Code of Conduct concerning lifelong training. The present Conference aimed at presenting the first results of the work in course to the Commission and different external sectors.

I – PRESENTATION OF THE PROJECT

A. OBSERVATOIRE SOCIAL EUROPEEN (OSE)

(See Annex 4)

The joint work of the social partners began on 1st December 2008 and should have been finalised on 30 November 2009. An extension of three months will be asked for to the Commission with a view to final presentation of the working tool at the plenary session of the sectoral committee for the sugar industry planned for Friday 26 February 2010.

a) Contributions towards the project

A joint steering group was set up comprising experts from the CEFS and EFFAT. Chaired by Jean Pierre Pinasseau (S.N.F.S. – France) for the employers and Thomas Buder (Agrana – Austria) for the employees, this group consisting of twenty members from eight different countries already met on four occasions (1.12.2008 – 26.2.2009 – 6.5.2009 – 23.9.2009). The CEFS and EFFAT Secretariats coordinated the work. The European Social Observatory contributed towards certain aspects of the project, particularly in the identification of good practices and questions connected with European financing.

b) Content of the project

In particular, this project allowed the following questions to be examined in greater depth:

- Definition of the concept of employability in the sugar industry
- Good practices in the sugar industry or the agri-foodstuffs industry (8 examples)
- Good practices outside the sugar industry (5 examples)
- Itemised success and employability factors for good internal and external practices
- Possible recommendations on the basis of the success and employability factors analysed
- Skills currently required in the sugar industry
- Skills that should be developed
- Skills common to different trades
- European and national financing possibilities in 20 sugar-producing countries
- A practical lexicon defining different concepts connected with employability regularly used within the context of the project.

c) Presentation of the project (interactive tool)

The results of the work carried out on each of these themes will be presented in an interactive form with the help of corresponding computerised pages containing links and allowing direct practical access to the type of information sought by the user. For instance, users will be able to access directly the employability factors itemised internally or externally and, if they so wish, have access to all the corresponding example(s). They will even be able to consult the skills specific to the sugar industry, under development and/or common to different trades. They will also be able to obtain, in their own language, full information on the financing possibilities in their country and region.

The working tool will be available on the joint site www.eurosugar.org in course of March 2010, in three languages (French, English and German). It will be regularly updated, particularly as far as the examples of practices are concerned.

B. CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE JOINT STEERING GROUP

(See Annex 5 & 5bis)

Several Commission representatives provided their support for the work in course. A number of experts from the employability group reported on their experience in their own countries connected with their contribution to the project. Jean Pierre PINASSEAU of the French Federation (S.N.F.S.) presented the work in course on the “Skills” part of the joint project: present skills, skills being developed and skills common to different trades. Thomas BUDER reported on the measures taken in Austria to improve employability. Giorgio Sandulli (Italian Federation) described the specific situation in Italy and a few retraining projects undertaken by certain companies.

II - OTHER PRESENTATIONS

Several officials of the Commission brought their support to the works in course. Representatives of the external sectors also reported on their respective approaches in the field of employability and their achievements. The context specific to the sugar industry is analysed.

Marie Christine RIBERA

(See Annex 6)

Mrs Marie Christine Ribera, Director-General of the CEFS, clearly described the different challenges with which the European sugar industry was confronted, as regards both the reform of the sugar regime and the EU’s external trade policy, underlining the need for coherence between Community policies on agriculture, development and external trade in order to ensure a sound market balance.

Alessandro ALBANI (DG AGR)

(See Annex 7)

Mr Alessandro Albani (DG Agriculture – Sugar Unit) presented the vision of DG Agriculture as regards the reform of the sugar regime and took note of the different questions raised by the social partners.

Jean François LEBRUN (DG EMPLOYMENT)

(See Annex 8)

Mr Jean-François Lebrun, Head of the “Working conditions and adaptation to changes” Unit (DG Employment) presented the deliberations and work in course within the context of change, along with the working and anticipation instruments developed and the financing possibilities available. Mr Lebrun recalled that ten years ago he was already following the work of the social partners in the sugar sector in the field of health and safety (Leonardo Kit).

Frank SIEBERN THOMAS (DG EMPLOYMENT)

Mr Frank Siebern, Head of Department at the “European social dialogue” Unit (DG Employment) presented the latest trends in the social dialogue within the context of the Lisbon Treaty, together with the Commission’s expectations of the social partners. He also underlined the concern of DG Employment to ensure coordination among the different Directorates-General as regards the impact of

Community policies on employment. He welcomed the joint work by the social partners in the sugar sector for their pragmatic and anticipatory nature and their transparency, emphasising in particular that the sectoral committee for the sugar industry was one of the few to have a joint site.

Laurence KOPELMAN (Danone)

(See Annexe 9)

Laurence Kopelman described the functioning of Danone's "Evoluance" programme, aimed in particular at improving the employability and internal promotion of employees and enabling them to acquire skills through different diplomas and certificates.

Claude LARSIMONT (OSE)

(See Annexe 10)

Claude Larsimont from OSE presented the main features of the "Observatoire des Métiers" created by the French agro-food industry (Observia). This case was selected as an example of good practice external to the sugar industry.

Ilaria SAVOINI (EUROCOMMERCE)

(See Annex 11)

Ilaria Savoini, Eurocommerce representative, reported on the work in course in European commerce concerning employees' skills and the tools of forward management and anticipation that were currently being created.

III – PRESS CONFERENCE

(See Annex 12 – Press Note)

A press conference was organised in the presence Marie Christine Ribera (CEFS Director-General), Norbert Kailich (Südzucker), Jean Pierre Pinasseau (S.N.F.S.), Harald Wiedenhofer (EFFAT), Alessandro Albani (Commission – DG Agriculture), Eric Dresin (EFFAT Secretariat) and Dominique Lund (CEFS Secretariat). Five journalists had responded to our invitation: AFP, AgraAlimentation, Agence Europe, Agra-Presse and The Economist. It was a question in particular of restructuring and employability, the role of the European social dialogue and the place of corporate social responsibility, management of the sugar market faced with imports from third countries, and a specific request by the social partners on the subject of the appropriation of the unused amounts in the restructuring fund. This press conference gave rise to the publication of four articles.

CONCLUSIONS

Norbert Kailich (Südzucker) et Harald Wiedenhofer (EFFAT) drew the initial conclusions on the significance and prospects of the work in course.

They highlight that this project naturally goes beyond the simple management of restructuring in so far as – in addition to the reform of the sugar regime – companies are today faced with a constantly changing environment which requires a new integrated and dynamic approach to the concept of employability.

This tool has not been conceived as the completion of a series of analyses but as an instrument for dynamic reflection which – with the help of the experience acquired in the sugar industry and in other sectors – will progressively be enriched by new contributions, both internal and external. Essentially, it allows the exchange of experiences and its objective, by opening up avenues of reflection, is to serve as a source of inspiration. In a constantly changing world, the responses to employability must themselves be constantly readjusted within the framework of a dynamic process. It is up to each company and each employee to assume reciprocal responsibility for an appropriate response in an ever-changing industrial environment.