

Competencies, qualifications and anticipation of change in the European electricity sector

A Joint Framework of Actions of European Social Partners in the electricity sector

I. Introduction

In recent years, the activities of the European Electricity Social Dialogue have focused mainly on the anticipation of change in the electricity sector caused by the transition towards a low-carbon economy and, in particular on how social dialogue can ease this process.

The European electricity sector is indeed at unprecedented cross-roads facing a number of key challenges to meet Europe's energy and climate objectives for 2020 and beyond. This transition towards a low-carbon economy will imply a complete transformation of our sector, strongly impacting upon today and tomorrow's skills and jobs needs, and requiring massive power investments in generation capacity and infrastructures. In this context, we - European Electricity Social Partners (i.e. EURELECTRIC representing the employers and EPSU and industriAll Europe representing the employees) - strongly believe that social dialogue at company, national and European level has a key role to play to anticipate those changes and allow for a smooth transition of our sector. In recent years, we indeed adopted a number of statements, toolkits to build our expertise on those developments and on how to best anticipate and mitigate them that are briefly summarised below.

1. **The European electricity sector has and continues to experience important changes of a regulatory and technological nature** such as the development of smart grids. The sector has experienced restructuring since the mid-nineties including in/-outsourcing of services¹.
2. **Several developments have impacted on the work place.** In particular the role of ICT has increased. We further have to take account of the demographic changes in most EU member States, the importance of a continued process of adaptation and the emergence of learning organisations².
3. **As Social Partners, we have addressed the issues of equality and diversity in our sector and how these can be mainstreamed.** Conditions have to be established in order to enable women to choose a career in the sector. That includes basic considerations of ensuring a work-life balance. Some national as well as European multinational companies have already tackled these aspects in a collective or transnational agreement with the unions³.

¹ *Restructuring in the Electricity Industry: A Toolkit for Socially Responsible Restructuring with a Best Practice Guide*, 2008; in: Social Dialogue Text Database, <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=521&langId=en>

² *Ibid.*; *Demographic Change in the Electricity Industry in Europe. Toolkit on promoting age diversity and age management strategies*, 2008; Joint statement on lifelong learning, June 2003; in: Social Dialogue Text Database, <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=521&langId=en>

³ *Equal opportunities and diversity toolkit / Best Practice Guide*, 2006; in: Social Dialogue Text Database, <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=521&langId=en>

4. The challenges of mitigation of, and adaptation to, climate change are more recent developments that have a huge impact on our sector, the companies and the workforce⁴.
5. The development of competencies, skills, qualifications is a central concern of the European Social Partners in the Electricity Sector. We have regularly addressed those issues and we highlighted them in our contributions to various consultations on European energy policy and in our lifelong learning statement⁵.

II. Way forward

The Social Partners agree on the importance of identifying early the competencies and qualifications that are needed in order to ensure a high quality service. This is well recognized and considered to be a factor of success for the companies. Competencies are of utmost importance for the workers, as they allow workers to pursue a career in the sector, to be able to work in other parts of the industry or in other sectors. The Social Partners are committed to retaining high education and qualification levels to ensure that the electricity sector delivers safe and secure and high quality services to Europe's citizens and businesses. This considers the various stages of education and training, i.e. initial, vocational as well as personal training. The Social Partners consider that good education and training standards are key factors in ensuring that people are equal members and participate in a society and in democratic processes.

- ➔ We reaffirm the role of social dialogue based on a shared interest to develop competencies and learning conditions for workers in the electricity industry. As Social Partners we underline that this needs to be addressed at all levels from the local/work place to the sector and at national and European level.
- ➔ Finding concrete solutions together at national/ sector or company level as appropriate is something we excel in. Lifelong learning is an individual and common approach at company or sector level and helps to create an attractive working and learning environment in our sector.
- ➔ To make the most of it a learning environment is to be fostered. The key elements will be the access to information for employees and to ensure the guidance and support that allow them to improve their skills and education.
- ➔ Public authorities should contribute to creating the conditions for good education by promoting and stimulating the education and training institutions. Good education and training need to be open and accessible for everyone in society. The involvement of Social Partners is key to ensure a strong link between the labour market and the

⁴ *Climate Change, Employment Impact and Just Employment Transition Principles for the European Electricity Sector – Study and toolkit*, 2010; in: Social Dialogue Text Database, <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=521&langId=en>

⁵ *Energy Roadmap 2050 – Consultation of DG Energy*, 2011; *Security and safety in the nuclear industry*, 2011; in: Social Dialogue Text Database, <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=521&langId=en>

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educational system as is also established in the EU 2020 framework for education. The public authorities should actively explore with the social partners and including from the electricity sector the use of the European social and other structural funds to improve education and training

- ➔ We agree on the need for the recognition and validation of competencies. It needs to happen in a transparent manner; allowing for the transfer of competencies and for transferable qualifications. It is national Social Partners' role to identify which body should be involved and how the certification should be done.

As European Social Partners in the electricity sector we have a special interest to develop a common understanding and overview of challenges facing the sector in order to inform the public authorities and the education sector about the qualifications and competences requested from the future workforce in our sector. At European level we work together in a project to map the existing skills, qualification and labour market research bodies and we are going to examine the results of this ongoing project in near future. The Social Partners also want to draw attention to the issues and concerns regarding attracting young people to the electrical sector, but also regarding retaining older workers in employment. While in some countries the restructuring processes are continuing, there are in general many developments that contribute to the creation of jobs such as smart grids, energy efficiency measures and the rapid expansion of the renewables sector. It is thus key to ensure that young people get an appropriate training so that their qualification corresponds to the needed skills in the industry, but also that we provide adequate training to older workers to update their competencies and thus retain them longer in employment. Moreover we consider that this issue should be discussed in a broader dimension, meaning we consider age management being an intergenerational issue where all age groups should be recognised. Social partners should be closely involved in the elaboration of concrete measures at company level to put in place a transfer of competences/knowledge.

- ➔ As Social Partners we are committed to ensure young workers also find jobs in the electricity sector. We are concerned about the persistent and high youth unemployment. This will be damaging to our societies. We support the attention of the European Commission to address youth unemployment in the recent Communication *Towards a Job rich recovery*⁶ and we welcome the Commission's consultation of Social Partners on "Towards a quality framework for traineeships"⁷.
- ➔ We are committed to address the problems as defined above at national and European level. This joint statement offers a concrete contribution to progress.
- ➔ More and more companies aim to develop competency plans for individuals. We consider it to be a role for work place representatives (with the skill to assist individuals) in assisting workers to remain in employment. An interesting example are the learning representatives in the UK while in other circumstances learning accounts have been set up to ensure room for personal development training.⁸

⁶ See: *Towards a job-rich recovery*, in: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2012:0173:FIN:EN:PDF>

⁷ See: *Towards a quality framework of traineeships*, in: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=SWD:2012:0407:FIN:EN:PDF>

⁸ See: <http://www.unionlearn.org.uk/about-unionlearn/who-we-are>.

III. Priority areas for action and commitment from European and national electricity Social Partners in the coming years

We – the European Social Partners in the Electricity Sector EURELECTRIC, EPSU and industriAll Europe – agree that within a period of three years the following issues will have priority and should be addressed at national and/or at company level as most appropriate.

- **Anticipation** of change in the electricity sector is a major issue for employers and trade unions. The mitigation of emissions and the adaptation to *global warming and climate change* are important drivers for change in our industry. We addressed this in our joint study on the impact on employment and skills of moving towards a low carbon economy, as well as in our response to the European Commission 's consultation on its Energy roadmap 2050 where the Commission proposed to move the electricity sector To a significant level of decarbonisation with 96-99% in 2050

Our commitments:

EURELECTRIC, EPSU and industriAll Europe's members commit to discuss together the impact the transition towards a low-carbon economy will have on the electricity sector, the companies and jobs in our countries. They will report on these discussions and on the potential follow-up actions undertaken, especially regarding training at company and national level, to the European Electricity Social Dialogue Committee.

- **Mainstreaming of equality** (no discrimination on basis of gender, age, religion, origins...etc) has been recognised to be of strategic significance for companies and is a major issue for employers and trade unions.

Our commitments:

EURELECTRIC, EPSU and industriAll Europe's members commit to discuss together how to evaluate training and recruitment processes in the electricity companies to ensure that all employees have equal possibilities for training and equal recognition of the gained qualifications. They will report on the outcomes of those discussions and on the potential follow-up actions undertaken to the European Electricity Social Dialogue Committee. The equality toolkit the European social partners have developed offers guiding principles for those discussions.⁹

- Ensuring that **young workers** enter the electricity sector is vital for the future of our industry. In our joint statement on life-long learning we have committed to increase the number of apprenticeships in the companies with a view to employing those young workers on a full-

⁹ *Equal opportunities and diversity toolkit / Best Practice Guide*, 2006; Social Dialogue Text Database, <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=521&langId=en>

time basis in our sector¹⁰. **Retraining of older workers** is an ongoing challenge and has been addressed in the joint toolkit we developed on promoting age diversity and age management strategies¹¹. The toolkit sets out a comprehensive 10 step plan.

- Ensuring that workers can choose to take on a job placement in line with their qualifications within the EU is one of the objectives of the EU 2020 Strategy¹² and of the resulting communication "New skills for new jobs"¹³. That means also for the electricity sector that it is crucial that training standards and certificates are mutually recognized. The Commission has addressed that issue in its Green Paper – Modernising the Professional Qualifications Directive¹⁴.

Our commitments:

EURELECTRIC, EPSU and IndustriAll Europe's members support the idea of a **youth guarantee**¹⁵ as now considered at EU level and will discuss together how to contribute and increase the number of young workers in training in the electricity sector.

They commit themselves to further explore the possibilities for a European electricity youth initiative to contribute to giving young workers a period of study or training (including work placements) abroad by 2020.

EURELECTRIC, EPSU and IndustriAll Europe commit to encourage their members to discuss together the **10 step plan** as developed in the Social Partners Toolkit on promoting age diversity and age management strategies and the retraining of older workers at national/ sector/company level as appropriate and inform the European Social Partners for the electricity sector of the actions they may have taken.

They will report on those discussions and on the potential follow-up actions undertaken to the European Electricity Social Dialogue Committee.

¹⁰ Joint statement on lifelong learning, June 2003; Social Dialogue Text Database, <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=521&langId=en>

¹¹ Demographic Change in the Electricity Industry in Europe. Toolkit on promoting age diversity and age management strategies, 2008; Joint statement on lifelong learning, June 2003; Social Dialogue Text Database, <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=521&langId=en>

¹² See: Europe 2020 – A strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, March 2010: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:2020:FIN:EN:PDF>

¹³ See: An Agenda for new skills and new jobs: A contribution towards full employment, November 2010: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2010:0682:FIN:EN:PDF>

¹⁴ In its Green Paper the Commission states: "It has long been recognised that restrictive regulation of professional qualifications has the same stifling effect on mobility as discrimination on the grounds of nationality. Recognition of qualifications obtained in another member state has thus become a fundamental building block of the Single Market. [...] Burdensome and unclear procedures for the recognition of professional qualifications were identified [...] as one of the main obstacles EU citizens still encounter in their daily lives when exercising their rights under EU law across national borders". Green Paper – Modernising the Professional Qualifications directive, June 2011: <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2011:0367:FIN:en:PDF>

¹⁵ See: <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?langId=en&catId=89&newsId=1731&furtherNews=yes>

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IV. Follow up

This text commits the members of EURELECTRIC and affiliates of EPSU/industriAll Europe.

EURELECTRIC, EPSU/industriAll Europe's members commit to consider carefully this joint framework of actions, to engage discussions at national/sector/company level as most appropriate on the three priority areas mentioned above, and to report to the European Electricity Social Dialogue Committee on those discussions and on the potential concrete follow up actions implemented as a consequence of this joint framework of action. Concretely it is agreed:

Our commitments:

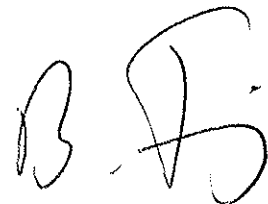
EURELECTRIC, EPSU and industriALL Europe's members will discuss this text and its follow up and possible practical implementation. These discussions can be formal and informal depending on the praxis. Equally, they can agree to discuss different elements of this text at different places.

- Within 6 months of adoption of this text EURELECTRIC, EPSU and industriAll' Europe's members will inform the Secretariats of the European organisations of the progress made so far.
- EURELECTRIC, EPSU and industriAll Europe's members will provide an annual report to the European Electricity Social Dialogue Committee regarding the outcomes of the discussions and the potential implementation and best practices of the priorities in this statement.
- After three years the European electricity social partners (EURELECTRIC, EPSU and industriAll Europe) will evaluate the text for a general assessment and appropriate review and follow-up.
- EURELECTRIC and EPSU and industriAll Europe's members encourage also members of relevant national bodies to also discuss and implement the statement to ensure a comprehensive approach in the European electricity industry.

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Jan Ruden (EPSU)
Vice-President of the European
Social Dialogue Committee in
the Electricity Sector



Emanuela Preiti (Eurelectric)
Vice-President of the European
Social Dialogue Committee in
the Electricity Sector

Bernd Frieg (industriAll Europe)
President of the European Social
Dialogue Committee in the
Electricity Sector