

## 50 years of social dialogue in European Inland Navigation sector

Social dialogue can take on many forms, but mainly it is the joint effort of social partners as spokespersons of the European Employers and Workers, to consult, to discuss and to negotiate enhancement of both the social and economic well-being. Its final outcomes can be very varied and encompasses tools, guidelines, agreements and even regulations each with their own specifics regarding enforceability.

The formal form of sectoral social dialogue as we know it today was launched in 1985 by President Jacques Delors at Val Duchesse. For us it constitutes a corner stone in the European Social Model as it can enhance competitiveness and at the same time close legal loopholes that trigger unfair competition & social dumping practices.

That the European Trade Union movement has a high regard for European Social Dialogue can be demonstrated by the steep increase in numbers: where in 1999 there were only 19 economic sectors active in dialogue world, in 2016 we counted 43 committees.

As European Transport Workers' Federation we are a recognised social partner in 8 different Sectoral Social Dialogue Committees and Social Dialogue is embedded in the ETF's core tasks as via dialogue we:

- Contribute to and promote growth, quality jobs, social Europe and sustainable transport policy;
- Find balanced solutions to social questions, develop social cohesion at EU and national level.

From all European Social Partners' agreements that have been transposed into Council Directives, ETF concluded over half of them and thus we gained the reputation of being amongst the most productive ones. IWT concluded its Working Time agreement in 2012 and on 19 December 2014 the Transport Council adopted the Council directive. A milestone for the sector!

The conclusion of the IWT Working Time directive was a long process with some ups & downs, but the perseverance of both sides of the European IWT partnership succeeded in producing a unique piece of legislation. Remaining fully within the remits of the General Working Time directive, flexibility was introduced in a one of kind style. European inland shipping is not an easy to regulate sector, as a diverse scope of small owner-operated barges mingle with big shipping companies that have state of the art high tech LNG tankers. The additional complexity of an almost fully liberalized industry on Europe's main water arteries manned with multinational crews, had to be taken fully into account.

The ups & down were omni-present throughout the entire IWT Social Dialogue history. Where indeed the first informal steps were taken as early as 1967, it took the partners considerable time to get common trust and understanding established. At some point, a 7 year break up was the result of divergent views. But the reinforced conviction that together we could prepare the European IWT sector for the next era brought everyone back around the same table.

Although European Social Dialogue needs a framework in order to establish fluid conditions to meet, consult and discuss – the main strength of its success lies within the hands of those seated around the same table. The first, but most important threshold to pass, is to establish mutual respect. All partners share the same thrive forward with only the best interest of their constituencies in mind. Once this common denominator is established, steps can gradually be taken forward towards an economic and social viable sector.

Establishing social dialogue wasn't always easy and we suffered some setbacks in the 1990'ies, but the determination to succeed remained strong. The possibility of concluding a specific agreement on working time provided the foundation for re-constructing our committee and the long and detailed negotiations help to establish the atmosphere of trust and mutual respect which is essential for the success of social dialogue.

Whereas little over 10 years ago European Inland Navigation was in the hands of the main River Commissions, where the Rhine Commission with its 200 years of constitutional and governmental expertise established a huge head start. There was very little – or even next to non EU legislation applicable on the sector.

This reality has been left behind partially via the successful promotional programmes that put wind in the sails of the environmental friendly transport mode of navigation – Naiades I & II changed the scenery for good. But in all these programmes the voice of the social partners was always appreciated, but most and foremost heard and listened to.

Since then the scenery changed completely for the little brother of the transport sectors in Europe. Edinna – Education in Inland Navigation – established via a Round Table organised in 2008 by the CCNR assisted the social partners considerably when discussing the harmonisation of the professional qualifications in Europe – the STCIN. Another draft directive was the direct result – a directive which at this very moment is being negotiated in Trilogue – negotiations between the European Commission – the European Parliament – and the Council. Hopes are very high that it will be adopted before the end of this year.

And earlier this year EBU, ESO and ETF saw their very first European Social Partners project adopted by the European Commission. TASCS – towards a sustainable crewing system – a 24-month long process of assessing the work load of crewmember on board. The project triggered a big interest as even some governments requested to be admitted as observers into the Focal Group that will guide the research & ultimate assessment. Of course we gladly

extended the invitation as the more stakeholders participate in the process, the wider the ultimate support will be to introduce the project outcome for European legislation too.

Being one of the smaller transport sectors has as a big advantage that not only the Social Partners, but in a wider sense all other related actors, have established a deep sense of appreciation and cohesion. Beyond the traditional boundaries of organisations and establishments, in depth cooperation has resulted in tangible, balanced and productive outcomes.

Looking forward we are fully aware that we are not home-free yet. A lot of topics need our permanent attention and care. One of the first items on the draft work programme for the next 2-year period is the development of a unique time registration format and template for individual crewmembers using the digital tachograph. The Working Time Directive that has been debated for a full 7 years still produces some implementation issues that need to be addressed as soon as possible. But we are very confident that we will be able to come to acceptable solutions also in this area – it is time that the European IWT sector embraces its full potential within the larger supply chain approach. This will include new digital applications with both challenges and opportunities.

In the past we often were told to be more productive in our SSDC – we were even housed in obscure basement rooms to push us forward, but these things have changed too. Perhaps a word of thanks is in order.

A thank you to all Partners for contributing to our successful dialogue – we could not do it without you.

A thank you to the European Commission, and especially to Andreas who assists us in a more than professional way in getting our agenda's tabled and meetings functional. Thanks to Christa too for taking care of the administrative burden that comes with reimbursement of our participation.

A thank you to all other partners without whom we would only be a shadow of what we are today: CCNR – Danube Commission – Naiades – Platina - CESNI – Edinna – Aquapol - Unece, and so many more. Social Dialogue has helped establish the social partners as having an essential and active role in the strengthening of inland waterways transport.

I wish you all a safe voyage in the dialogue waters of tomorrow!

Nick BRAMLEY  
ETF IWT Section Chair