Promoting capacity building and improving social dialogue in the commerce sector for the organisations in new Member States and candidate countries

Project proposal to be presented for funding on the budget heading 04.03.01.01 – Industrial relations and social dialogue – Sub-programme “Support for European social dialogue

1. General background and previous activities with new Member States and candidate countries

Uni Europa Commerce and EuroCommerce are the representative European social partners for the commerce sector and their social dialogue has been officially active since 1998, after years of informal dialogue. A better involvement of their respective representatives in Candidate countries at the beginning, then in New Member States has always been part of the priorities of the social partners. They have organized workshops and round tables in almost all these countries between 2000 and 2007 with the financial support of the EU Commission in order to provide the representatives of social partner organisations with relevant information on EU social policies, sectoral social dialogue and to support them in the implementation of the EU social acquis.

In particular, EU social partners have organized dedicated workshop of their social dialogue meetings in Croatia (2007), Turkey (2008) and Poland (2009).

In 2010, the ITC ILO training center has launched two training projects for the commerce sector, the first one for employers and the second one for trade unions. Those projects have been implemented in 2011.

The project for employers was entitled: “CABEO – Capacity Building for employers organisations in the commerce sector. The main objectives of the projects were to improve the quality of dialogue between public and private players of the commerce sector, improving the understanding of social dialogue, the capacity for commerce employers to provide their members with better services and the strengthening of networks.

The following activities have been organized in the framework of this project:
- Survey on the functioning of employers organisations and their participation to sectoral social dialogue;
- Training workshop on lobbying and advocacy;
- Training workshop on social dialogue
- Training workshop on services to members.

The project for trade unions entitled “Strengthening social dialogue in commerce” had as main objective assisting trade unions in developing strategies tools and skills needed to play
The following activities have been organized in the framework of this project:

- Training trainers seminar
- 4 sub-regional seminars on the following topics:
  - Social dialogue in commerce at national and European level
  - Organising approaches and strategies: setting up strong and running trade union organizations
  - Strengthening the role of workers in representative structures (bipartite and tripartite)
  - Organising and recruitment of workers in commerce
  - Other issues: globalization and worker’s rights, implementation of resolutions etc.
  - The “social acquis” and exchange of information on collective bargaining

At the end of the specific trade unions and employers activities, a common closing workshop for the representatives who followed the training projects was organized in December 2011 in Brussels on the following topics:

- Presentation of the outcomes of the two projects;
- ILO approach to the social dialogue
- Developing social partnership at national and European levels
- EU support to social partners of the commerce sectors.

During various meetings of the social dialogue and following the conclusion of their respective training projects, the social partners have continued to discuss the possibility to develop a new project aimed at extending and reinforcing capacity building among social partners of new Member States and Candidate countries. They wish now to build on the positive experience gained and developed in the framework of the two previous projects as well as by following up on the final recommendations where areas needing more training and deserving more discussion were identified such as: developing sectoral social dialogue, reinforcing the institutional framework, addressing the deficiencies in labour law, facing the lack of commitment to participate in social dialogue at both national and EU level, strengthening weak organizational structures, improving collective bargaining, improving and/or addressing the lack of communication between social partners when relevant.

Therefore, social partners in the commerce sector decided to give further opportunities for training and allow more people to benefit from the project’s activities by jointly undertaking this project while ensuring the continuity and consistency with previous projects and initiatives. In addition, in their work programme for 2012/2013 approved during their plenary session last year, the social partners have committed to continue to support the development of employer and trade union organisations in new member states and candidate countries (capacity building) as a prerequisite for social dialogue.

Actually, during the last social dialogue meetings, EuroCommerce and UNI Europa commerce have promoted dedicated discussions on the desirability to give a follow up to the ILO projects and on what needs and activities were relevant for NMS and candidate countries. Furthermore, a letter was sent to social partners’ representatives asking in which areas they would like a new project to focus on.

Finally, in the last social dialogue meeting that took place on 11 June 2012, workers and employers’ representatives from new members states and candidate countries strongly demanded and supported a joint project to be developed for 2013 with the financial support of the European Commission.

2. Project aim and objectives

The present project proposal aims at extending and supporting capacity building among national social partners of the commerce sector in new Member States (EU 12) and candidate countries with the following objectives:
- Encourage, improve and strengthen the role, skills and capacity of social partners organisations in the new Member States and candidate Countries.
- Provide training to workers and employers representatives on selected topics (collective bargaining, sectoral social dialogue, employment policies etc.)
- Provide information, good practices and exchange of experiences of the structures and the functioning of social partner organization in the various concerned countries;
- Organise a structured exchange of information and experience among national social partners on industrial relations and collective bargaining;
- Sharing information on labour and social structures in the commerce sector in the EU
- Developing and strengthening partnerships and mutual trust between social partners organisations involved in the European Social dialogue and/or in other EU activities (e.g. projects, conferences, seminars, etc.) and those who started to participate recently or have not yet been involved;
- Building on the acquired knowledge and responding to the needs of particular geographical areas

As previous projects in this area show, in many cases social partners still lack the financial and human resources capacity to engage in a true social dialogue at sectoral level, their organizations are still weak and they face communication and language barriers. On the other, businesses are not always organized in employers’ associations (or are not part of them) and/or are not committed to social dialogue at both national and European level.

The European Social partners in the commerce sector will achieve these objectives by the implementation of the following activities:

- Organizing separate preparatory activities for each side in regional working groups
- Organizing 4 joint workshops on a regional basis on the most relevant topics at both national and European level
- Organize a final seminar on industrial relations, social dialogue and EU social policies in Brussels

3. Implementation/organization of the project

3.1. Coordination
This project will be coordinated by a steering committee composed by the representatives of social partners at EU level, 2 external experts (to be selected through a call for tender) and 2 members for each social partner with a good knowledge of industrial relations, social dialogue and preferably also of the situation in New Member States and Candidate Countries.

3.2. Preparatory action
At the beginning of the project, the social partners and their internal experts will have a first meeting in order to draft a call for tender to recruit 2 external experts (one for the trade union delegation, the other for the employer’s delegation) who will be in charge of the preparation of the pedagogical materials, the organisations of the various activities and the drafting of reports, self-training modules and conclusions. The social partners, assisted by the experts, will first consult their respective members to assess their specific needs and better target the specific activities to be organized (language needs, specific situations of countries/group of countries) also on the basis of the recommendations of the ILO project and the discussions in the European social dialogue committee.

Following to the outcomes of the consultation and after selection of the external experts, a steering committee meeting will be organized to prepare the regional workshop and the final conference. The two first meetings of the steering committee will be considered in the budget, while the following ones will take place just prior or after the social dialogue meetings to reduce costs.

The first preparatory meeting will we used to discuss the logistics and preliminary programme of the project and to take a decision on the selection of the external experts. The
second one will be aimed to discuss a draft questionnaire to be used for the consultation and to finalise the work programme prior to the organization of the workshops.

The first steering committee will take place at the end of the year further to the approval of the project proposal and launch the call for tender to recruit the external experts.

At the second steering committee, some preparatory documentation will be approved and sent to the potential participants together with a “save the date” for the regional workshops and possibly also for the final conference.

The following preparatory documentation will be prepared:

- Analysis of the capacity gaps of the affiliates and current policies regarding the issues to be discussed during the seminars and in particular:
  - The integration of young people and women on the commerce labour market (included some case studies)
  - The current financial crisis and its impact on the commerce labour market
  - Industrial relations and social dialogue in the concerned countries at bipartite and tripartite level: strong and weak points (for reminder from the outcomes of the previous projects)
  - Strengthening social dialogue at national level: possible issues to be further defined according to the group of countries
  - Improving the capacity of social partners in New Member States and Candidate countries
  - Data gathering and analysis of the changes/ deficiencies in labour law (especially in link with the implementation of the EU social acquis) to favour and promote a more effective sectoral social dialogue and collective bargaining

3.3. Main action

The main action will consist of 4 regional workshops and 1 final conference.

Since 16 countries should be involved (Bulgaria, Romania, Cyprus, Malta, Hungary, Estonia, Lithuania, Latvia, Poland, Czech Republic, Slovak republic, Slovenia, Croatia, Turkey, Montenegro and Macedonia), each regional workshop would gather representatives of 4 countries.

Group of countries will be organized as follows:

- Poland, Baltic countries (Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia) workshop in Warsaw (PL)
- Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary and Slovenia: workshop in Prague (CZ)
- Romania, Bulgaria, Cyprus and Malta: workshop in Bucharest (RO)
- Turkey, Macedonia, Croatia and Montenegro: workshop in Istanbul (TR)

Repartition of the countries and location of the workshops could be changed for practical reasons without any budgetary impact.

The workshops will take place between March and October 2013 and will involve 15 people for each delegation (trade unions and employers), therefore 30 participants for each regional workshop.

Each regional workshop will have the following structure:

**Day 1: one seminar for the trade unions to discuss the following issues:**
- Collective bargaining, freedom of association,
- Workers representation in multinational companies
- Social Dialogue at sectoral and company level
• Strengthening trade union organizations and building stronger trade union structures
• Addressing the needs of workers according to their specific needs: young, women, part-time, fixed contracts, elderly etc.
• Thematic discussion to prepare the joint workshop

One seminar for the employers (EN) to discuss the following issues:
• State of play regarding the implementation of the EU social acquis in the various countries and gaps in national labour law and other relevant legislation;
• Address the needs and challenges of employers organizations
• Relations with the governments (tripartite vs bipartite social dialogue, implementation of EU legislation related to the commerce sector in general)
• State of play of industrial relations in the various countries
• Presentation of a good practice at national level (expert of EU 15)
• Thematic discussion to prepare the joint workshop

Day 2: a joint workshop on the following issues (further selection to be done after the consultation of the affiliates, with possible difference in the content according to the group of countries)
• How to improve the functioning of industrial relations and social dialogue at national level at times of crisis (including relations with governments)
• The integration of young people and women in the labour market
• Active ageing and demographic change
• Promote a better use of EU funding for capacity building projects at national and local level
• Main developments of EU policies and the EU social dialogue: how can it be used to better support national social dialogue?

The final conference for 50 participants will be organized in Brussels, to allow the participation of the main EU decision makers and stakeholders (Commission, Parliament, EESC, social NGOs, etc.) in November 2013.

The agenda could be the following:

• Welcome and introduction by the Commission
• Presentation of the outcomes of the project:
  o Trade union delegation
  o Employers delegation
  o Joint activities
• Presentation of 4 national cases (one for each workshop); followed by a discussion
• Expectations of the candidate countries (introduction by a Commission rep, followed by an exchange of views with the representatives of candidate countries)
• Panel composed by: MEP, Commission rep, social NGO rep, national and European Social partners regarding the future challenges of labour market in new Member States and Candidate countries
• Presentation of recommendations for future work
• Conclusions by a Commission representative

For both the regional workshops and the main event, expert speakers from both trade unions and employers from all EU countries, included from Western Europe (EU 15) will be invited as expert speakers. For the regional workshops, 2 national experts will be involved and for the final conference, all the national experts participating in the regional workshops will be invited to share their experience.

Experts speakers will be selected according to their knowledge and expertise on the different issues addressed and the specificity of each country and regional area, as well as on the basis of their availability to deliver a presentation. They will be selected by the steering committee during the preparatory meetings.

3.4. Follow-up
After the end of the project, the steering committee will organize a meeting aimed to assess the outcomes of the project and to discuss further working plan, included the dissemination. The intermediate and final results will be also be shared and discussed at the EU sectoral social dialogue meeting with social partners representatives and when needed with the European Commission.

It is also intended to prepare a website with all the project materials, aimed also to put at the disposal of all the participants of the project the main existing outcomes of the European Social Dialogue for Commerce to allow a multiplier effect in each country. Project presentations, reports, documentation provided to the participants, important data and all relevant materials will also be put on the website.

4. Dissemination plans

It will be duly specified in the project materials and in the website that the project has been implemented with the financial support of the European Commission. Regular updates on the state of play of the projects will be given to the UNI Europa and EuroCommerce members during the social dialogue meetings. The website which will be prepared at the end of the project will aim to a wide dissemination of the project outcomes among all the EuroCommerce and UNi Europa Commerce members.

5. Staff involved in the project

Project management
The project will be headed by Dr Christian Verschueren, EuroCommerce Director-General and by Mr. Fabrice Warneck, Head of Operations, UNI Europa

Project administration
The responsible person for the operational aspects of the project will be Ms Laila Castaldo, Policy officer, on behalf of UNI Europa Commerce and Ms Ilaria Savoini, Senior Adviser Social Affairs on behalf of EuroCommerce

Project Secretariat
Mr William Fox, Project assistant at EuroCommerce will we in charge of the administrative aspects of the project and Mr. Vicente Garcia Arenas, Administrative assistant at UNI Europa

Project accountant
Ms Patricia Wyns, Accountant at EuroCommerce will be responsible of the accounting of the project budget.

Other staff
Mr Jürgen Noack, webmaster at EuroCommerce will be in charge of coordinating the work related to the website of the project as well as of the web publishing.