

BREAKFAST DISCUSSION

"SAFE & HEALTHY WORKPLACES : A PRECONDITION FOR WELL-BEING, GROWTH AND COMPETITIVENESS IN EUROPE"

SUMMARY REPORT

This breakfast discussion, held the 12 January 2016 under the auspices of Ole Christensen (S&D), Karima Delli (Greens / EFA) and Georges Bach (EPP), Members of the European Parliament, was organized by four major European stakeholders in the area of occupational health and safety (OSH): the European Social Insurance Platform ([ESIP](#)), the Partnership for European Research in Occupational Safety and Health ([PEROSH](#)), the [European Forum](#) of the Insurance against Accidents at Work and Occupational Diseases and the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work ([EU-OSHA](#)).

35 participants from different backgrounds including the European Commission, trade unions and employer representatives discussed recent developments in the field of health and safety at work as well as future research and policy priorities at European level.

The following **key preconditions for safe and healthy workplaces in Europe** were identified in the discussion:

Development of a holistic prevention culture in companies

Active and healthy ageing to facilitate longer working lives in particular in highly demanding jobs, including the healthcare sector

Assessment of the impact of employees and the consequent adjustment of OSH-strategies

Strong cooperation between all stakeholders involved



Tackling these pre-conditions and investing in health and safety at work together will lead to a win-win situation for companies and society and will serve as basis for highly motivated and

productive employees in European businesses.

Brenda O'Brien (EU-OSHA) moderated the discussion and welcomed the audience together with Ole Christensen. Ole Christensen (MEP), rapporteur of the European Parliament resolution on the EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2014-2020 underlined that it is time to put forward proposals aimed at creating a more level playing field and further raising the level of occupational health and safety for all workers across Europe. Even though considerable progress has been made in the area of occupational health and safety much remains to be done.

Georges Bach (MEP) underlined that the most important topic for the future will be **digitalisation and its effects on the workplace**. Further, companies who are "sick of leaving" should not only look at the cost-side of occupational safety and health but rather have a closer look at the **positive effects of investment in OSH**. Spending on occupational safety and health is an investment that "pays off" for companies. Looking at the big picture and taking preventive measures at the workplace into consideration will reduce the level of absenteeism in companies.



Franz Terwey (ESIP President) referred to the [ESIP position paper](#) on the new EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work 2014-2020, where the respective social security institutions underlined the importance of ensuring a high level of OSH in companies, including SMEs, through a **holistic prevention culture**. This is not only beneficial for the individual employee but also for employers and insurers and therefore enhances the European economy. Employers with high occupational safety and health standards tend to be more successful and profit from lower sickness absence rates of their employees.



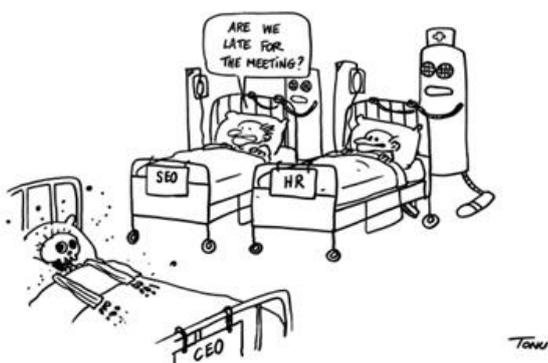
Dietmar Reinert (PEROSH Chairman) mentioned **ageing, psychosocial well-being, musculoskeletal disorders, new technologies and safety culture** as the key research priorities for the coming years. The so called [well-being tree](#) shows that the right human resources are essential for work to become fruitful. A healthy environment and a preventive culture therefore are the preconditions for a successful company. PEROSH proposes **four key future challenges** that

need further investigation in order to make Europe ready for 'the new world of work': First, the **prevention through design** approach should be integrated as standard for new and key enabling technologies (KETs) in EU region. Second, **integrated OSH concepts for large cross-country infrastructure projects** and new working environments (superskyscrapers, seabeds, tunnels etc.) need to be developed.

Third, **working in the digital world and the effects of flexibility of working hours and places at work** needs further analysis. Fourth, **physical activity and wellbeing at work solutions** should be developed for new working spaces and a fitter, more productive and pro-longed working life.

Zinta Podniece (European Commission) emphasized that there is a **need to develop a holistic prevention culture in companies**. Investment in health and safety at work should not only be seen as a cost factor but as a beneficial investment, a **win-win situation for companies and society**. She referred to the ongoing evaluation of the 24 EU directives on health and safety at work emphasizing that the aim of the Commission is to simplify the existing legislative framework but at the same time to keep the existing high level of health and safety at work standards. The Commission will also come up with amendments to Directive 2004/37/EC on the protection of workers from the risks related to exposure to carcinogens or mutagens at work.

WORKERS ARE AGING



The importance of the revision of the carcinogens Directive was confirmed by Matthijs Groeneveld (Dutch Presidency) explaining that it is a top priority of the Dutch Presidency and the subject of a conference on 'Banning occupational cancer in Europe' to be held in Amsterdam in May 2016.

Esther Lynch (ETUC) referred to activities that are likely to cause shorter life expectancies after or even before retirement. **There is a need for**

active and healthy ageing to facilitate longer working lives in particular in highly-demanding jobs. Most EU Member States are raising the statutory retirement age, and the present "reference" age of 67 is far from being the last "number". Therefore solutions have to be found to facilitate the working lives of those who work in strenuous jobs. In particular, the healthcare sector will be affected by ageing and needs to rethink and reform its health and safety conditions. In addition it must be recognised that many workers have not benefited from safe and healthy work throughout their careers and in other cases the arduous nature of the work means it is essential that early retirement is included in the discussions.



Joachim Scholtheis (Mars Chocolate) spoke about the health and safety culture at Mars. He

underlined the importance of promoting a good OSH culture in a company as **well-being, health and safety are the basis for**

SHOULD THERE BE CONSEQUENCES FOR COMPANIES NOT CARING FOR HEALTH AND SAFETY OF THEIR EMPLOYEES?



highly motivated employees and thus the key to success and competitiveness. He emphasised the implementation of an holistic OSH approach which is people-based in order to create more smiles among Mars employees in Viersen, Germany. With a view to the best-practice example of Mars Chocolate the audience discussed the idea of 'benchmarking' and the **need to reward good OSH practice**.

Opening the discussion to the plenum, **participants pointed to the impact of the digital revolution on work and jobs**. They considered assessing the effects of digitalisation on health and safety at work and the need to adapt existing health and safety measures accordingly, as well as taking digitalisation into consideration in new OSH strategies. Attention was also drawn to the **health and safety at work aspect of relations between humans and robots**.



Further, Mairead McGuinness (MEP) reported on the situation of farmers, in particular in Ireland. **Farming is still a hazardous occupation in Europe**. Many farmers have been killed or seriously injured as a direct result of agricultural work in the past years. Despite considerable efforts agriculture continues to be a difficult sector to achieve sustained improvements in safety and health performance.



To conclude the event, Karima Delli (MEP) called on the participants to **take over a moral responsibility to further improve health and safety at work** as we still have over 4000 people dying due to an accident at work every year and more than three million workers are victims of a serious accident at work leading to an absence from work of more than three days. The Member States and the European Commission will have to develop strategies and initiatives to further reduce this number. She welcomed the ongoing evaluation of the 24 health and safety at work Directives and underlined that **better implementation of regulations is of utmost importance** and that the Commission is in charge of supervising this. **A good and effective prevention culture should become a reality in all companies in Europe!**