

**Event:** Healthy Workplaces Summit 2013  
**Opening Address, Working Together for Risk Prevention**

**Date:** 11 November 2013 (14:00hrs)

**Speaker:** Christa Sedlatschek – Director EU-OSHA

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Distinguished guests, ladies and gentlemen,

Ongi etorri Bilbora! Buenas tardes y bienvenidos.

It is a **huge pleasure** for me to see so many of you here today. You took the time and effort to make the journey to our wonderful home in the Basque Country for this, **the 11<sup>th</sup> EU-OSHA campaign summit**.

I am accompanied on stage by:

- Engracia Hidalgo, Secretary of State for Employment, Spain
- Juan María Aburto, Minister of Employment and Social Policy,  
Basque Government
- Bernadette Ségol, Secretary General of ETUC
- Kris De Meester, Chair of the Health and Safety Group,  
BusinessEurope

Two years ago we launched the campaign on *Working Together for Risk Prevention*, under the Danish EU Presidency. It was not without controversy. Many wondered if the theme was too broad, or too simplistic, too ideological or just too difficult to approach in a huge, decentralized campaign.

But we persevered because our own ESENER survey had **clearly shown us the way**. The results demonstrated that those workplaces that have **high management commitment** and **proper forms of worker representation** (such as health and safety representatives, trade unions and works councils) are nearly **ten times more likely** to have an occupational safety and health policy in place, than those workplaces without such commitment or representation.

**Really, ten times.**

So, *Working Together* as a title may sound a little obvious or even a little bland, but when you look at its component parts and you see **results like that**, you realize that there are very compelling arguments for **taking our campaign messages very seriously indeed**.

Over the last two years, I have visited 12 Member States, met with our Focal Points and in many cases with the Focal Point networks. It is very clear to me now that more than ever, social dialogue is important. It is true that in some countries, it is working better than others. Some Member States are struggling and we owe them our support. I think that **the reinforcement of social dialogue underpins all our work** – from capacity-building in accession countries to continuing our joint projects here in the agency and spreading the win-win message.

So much has happened during this campaign. With our Cypriot colleagues, we had an excellent Cyprus Presidency conference. We held our 11<sup>th</sup> Good Practice competition with a record number of entries, culminating in an awards ceremony in Dublin under the Irish presidency with Commissioner Andor conferring the honours.

And of course we recruited 87 Official Campaign Partners, **more than any other year so far**. These are companies and organizations who work in the European rather than the national context and who are multiplying our efforts every day by allowing us access to their valuable networks. These are people who value investment in workplace health and safety and who recognize that it makes good business sense.

And then we deepened our collaboration with the European Enterprise Network whose work I will tell you more about later this afternoon.

I am so indebted to you all for your engagement and your commitment.

The activities are too numerous to cover here – the partnership and stakeholder seminars, the benchmarking exercises, the media actions and exhibitions, the very many national events that we hear about from all over Europe.

Of course, without the work of the Focal Points, very little of that would be achieved. The Focal Points and their networks form the bedrock of our campaign. The campaign success depends upon them. I would like to extend a very warm word of thanks to you all for your great efforts.

And I would also like to thank the members of our Governing Board who tirelessly work on behalf of the Agency, showing just how valuable tripartism is in this troubled world. And they constantly jump in to help us when we need a chair for a workshop here or a jury member there. They are loyal and hard-working and very much appreciated.

There is so much work to be done. My hope is that our campaigns genuinely do counteract the negative rumours from some quarters. There are those who say that health and safety is an administrative burden on enterprises, particularly on SMEs. This is an important allegation and **must be questioned** because as we move towards economic recovery we are looking to SMEs – and in particular micro enterprises – to drive growth and jobs. The implication is that somehow economic recovery, in other words **European competitiveness**, will be held back unless we lower the standards on health and safety that we currently expect from employers.

**Happily, I can tell you that this is NOT the case: far from being a burden, health and safety is a key dimension of good management that contributes to long-term business success and to European competitiveness.**

And ESENER shows exactly this. **It is not the perceived cost or complexity of health and safety legislation that stops some workplaces from taking preventive action, but rather a lack of awareness about relevant workplace risks.**

And hopefully, that is where our campaigns and working together can continue to make a difference.

At the end of the day, **it is worth remembering** that while some of the cost items, such as lost productivity, healthcare, administration and insurance are **straightforward to quantify, others are not**. I am referring here to the **difficulty of putting a price on pain and suffering, a price on the death or disablement of a friend or a family member, a price on the premature ending of a promising career**.

### **Just how do we quantify those?**

Ladies and gentlemen, I'm looking forward to meeting as many of you as I can over the next day or two and I'm particularly interested in your reaction to the conference programme. I really hope that you find the mix of keynotes, workshops and discussions thought-provoking and inspirational. And I do trust that in between sessions, your networking opportunities and conversations will be enlightening.

Maybe this evening's event will also inspire us a little – but, I'm very sorry to tell you that I am not allowed to say any more about that...

Finally, I would like to leave you with a short video we made which we hope captures the essence of our campaign in all its diversity, energy and creativity. I hope you like it. And once again, **thank you all.**

*Working Together* really has been a pleasure.

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