

Editorial

Trade unions want a more ambitious REACH

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) called a major conference on the 11th and 12th of March on the REACH proposal to overhaul European chemicals legislation. The conference was both part of the wider agenda set by the ETUC's declarations¹, and constructive input by European workers to the development of the future European regulation. It gave the main stakeholders an opportunity to trade views, and be informed by a very wide range of positions.

Nearly 200 people attended the two-day discussions – a hundred-plus delegates from ETUC member organizations, along with many invited guests, including European Commission and Member State officials, MEPs, and representatives from industry, consumer groups and leading environmental lobbies.

The single concerted message that the ETUC and its members aimed to get over at the conference is crystal clear: European workers back the reform, but want specific provisions put back in or tightened up.

This special report on our conference proceedings starts with a review of the messages brought by our invited guests: Stavros Dimas, the European Environment Commissioner, Guido Sacconi, lead rapporteur on REACH for the European Parliament, Lucien Lux, Minister of State of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, representing the Council presidency, Jean-Paul Mingasson for UNICE, and John Hontelez for the European Environmental Bureau (EEB).

John Monks
General Secretary, ETUC



The first section, on the impacts of REACH, looks at the findings of the further impact assessment studies done by the chemical industry, and those of a study commissioned from the University of Sheffield showing that the economic benefit of REACH for European workers' health could outweigh its total implementation cost.

In parts two and three, papers given by a series of experts first set REACH in its European industrial policy context to inform the linkages with innovation and competitiveness, and go on to explore possible ways to achieve a smooth implementation of the reform.

The conclusions spell out and argue the case for the ETUC's proposals for improving the text adopted by the Commission in October 2003. The product of extensive discussions and dialogue between all ETUC member federations and confederations, the workers' proposals aim to optimize the expected cost/benefit ratio, especially the outcomes for workers' health and safety.

¹ Declarations on REACH adopted by the ETUC Executive Committees of 17-18 March and 1 December 2004. Published in the brochure *REACHing the workplace* and downloadable from www.etui-rehs.org/hesa > Main topics > Chemicals.



Since last March's conference, other sources have further informed the REACH debate: a KPMG impact assessment study published in May showed that the costs of REACH are easily manageable, while the outcomes of the SPORT exercise showed the reform was workable in practice.

This latest information strengthens the ETUC's case for the co-decision procedure to move forward, and for the European chemicals legislation reform to be adopted without delay.

European trade unions call on the European Parliament and Council to take their proposed improvements and resulting amendments into account.

The ETUC will continue tracking the REACH process, and seek to leverage it as a full part of the construction of a socially responsible Europe committed to developing a dynamic labour market with a plentiful supply of good quality jobs. ■

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