

Good morning to you all,

My name is Daniel Guillot and I am the National Secretary, not of FUPT CFDT, because the post and telecommunications union has now become part of a new union, CFDT Communication Conseil Culture (union of communication and cultural workers), which was set up two weeks ago. However, I speak to you today as Vice-president of the telecoms social dialogue committee. Let me reassure those of you who want to visit this beautiful city of Lisbon or want to do a spot of shopping that I will not take up the full 30 minutes that I have been given.

On behalf of the social partners in the telecoms sector who belong to our social dialogue committee, I should like to thank our friends and hosts for their wonderful hospitality. I refer of course to Telecom Portugal which gave us a good demonstration yesterday of their support for cultural activities. But there are also our friends Manuel da Silva and Manuel Gonçalves, whom Paul Litchfield mentioned yesterday evening, and who play an active role in the European social dialogue and more particularly in the working group on health and safety. I would also like to thank the European Commission for its support, and I am sure that Antonio Cammarota has been able to see at first hand how useful this support as well as that of the agency in Bilbao has been.

Allow me also to thank all the speakers who have made it possible even for non-experts like myself to understand what at first sight seem to be highly technical subjects, allowing us to get a feeling for the coming challenges.

This meeting has been most useful I believe for us all. It was the fruit of a considerable amount of work and time on the part of the trade unions affiliated to UNI Europa Telecom and the ETNO companies that are members of this group. I won't mention them individually, dear Are, but without them nothing would have been possible. We are very pleased that so many of you have attended and also that there are a significant number of representatives from the new member states.

We are also very pleased with the quality of the research conducted in co-operation with the university of Birmingham insofar as the bibliographical work is concerned, as well as with the Prevent study which compares the bibliographical and statistical data with results obtained from its field research.

The amount of ground covered is quite impressive. The study encompasses 500000 workers in our sector, and the social partners, and in particular the companies involved in the European social dialogue, have shown a real commitment to the project.

Paul reminded us yesterday that occupational health and safety issues have been on the agenda in the telecoms social dialogue for more than twenty years. I would add, however, that the environment in which we operate today has changed entirely. A new regulatory framework has been introduced for the telecoms sector in which the status of the companies has changed, markets are wide open and competition has been allowed to develop.

Twenty years ago the European Council met in Val Duchesse to adopt the Single European Act. The man behind this initiative was Jacques Delors who set in motion the European social dialogue. This was followed six years later by a joint proposal from the social partners, and in 1998 an EU decision was taken to establish the sectoral dialogue committees. In our sector the joint European telecoms committee is to be replaced by a social dialogue committee.

Our telecoms social dialogue committee is thus very young but nevertheless has already proved to be one of the most dynamic. That being said, we still hope to be even better in the future. The discussions at this conference have demonstrated that the social partners, with the support of the Commission (which plays such an important role in our sector), are capable of producing results for the benefit of workers, companies and, beyond them, society at large. We are convinced that the social dialogue is a vehicle for progress, competitiveness and prosperity.

The example that we have been considering over these last two days says a lot about the current situation. Musculoskeletal disorders are one of the scourges of society today, and we are convinced that everything should be done to prevent or at least reduce the number of sufferers. Once again the presentation given by Emmanuelle Brun served as a useful reminder.

Let me make it clear that this is not just a moral issue, but one that is in the general interest. As we heard yesterday, MSD are not only highly painful for workers and a cause of their marginalisation, but they also represent a cost for companies and for the whole of society.

Thus it is both a public health issue and a cost factor for businesses and society. The question of so-called "older" workers is also something that needs to be addressed in Europe and in our companies. The measures that have been taken to date have reached their limits, and the MSD issue complicates matters further. Now that lifelong learning is being given greater focus, it is interesting to note that on-the-job training also includes good practices that need to be implemented. These good practices are recommendations we should all take to heart, and apply not only to companies operating in our sector but also to sub-contractors. Our approach is firmly rooted in the principle of corporate social responsibility, a subject that will again be discussed by the social dialogue committee at its meeting next week.

There are some who doubt the usefulness of, or even challenge the European social model, one of the pillars of which is the social dialogue. We believe, on the contrary, that it should be expanded, not only in terms of content but also scope. Within this context we need to strengthen our ties with our colleagues in the new member states and do more to publicise our work.

What prospects lie ahead? Paul hit the nail on the head yesterday when he said, paraphrasing a popular slogan that was coined in Paris almost 40 years ago, that this was the end of the beginning. Research results clearly point the way; good practices need to be revealed, recognised, developed and put into effect. This is the message we heard from Bernard Siano and Marc Moris this morning. This means that we need to increase our efforts not only at the national and at company level, but also at the workplace.

What are our goals in the short term? The working group will be meeting in the near future and will have discussions with the Commission in December. The working group held a meeting yesterday evening in order to sound out immediate reactions and to chart a course for the future.

We will revisit these issues next week during the plenary meeting of the sectoral dialogue.

We would urge you to make use of the results of the working group and of this conference, as well as of the ETNO and UNI websites, not to mention the special website that has now been set up for this purpose.

We shall also keep UNICE and the ETUC informed of our activities so that people outside our sector know what we are doing.

In 2001 both sides signed a charter for teleworking, and the guidelines set out in the charter have been widely taken into account in an interprofessional agreement. We have also signed an agreement on call centres and intend to establish a monitoring instrument. Be assured that the question of occupational health will be on our agenda.

In the medium-term, and without wishing to anticipate the conclusions of the working group, we intend to establish a joint programme of action. To this end, the working group will submit concrete proposals to the Commission at the meeting scheduled for December. One of the issues we shall raise is the lack of evaluation instruments and prevention policies.

We have always underlined the importance of the independence of the social partners, but that independence has no meaning unless we play a full role as social partners in the sectoral dialogue, and that we accept responsibility for the implementation of the agreements we sign when we return to our countries and our companies. Let us not forget that the health of workers is at stake.