

D I S C U S S I O N P A P E R S

Towards a European Trade Union Perspective on Sustainable Development

S E P T E M B E R | 2001 |



**ETUC
European Trade Union
Confederation**

The European Trade Union Confederation's membership comprises 74 national trade union confederations in 34 countries and 11 European Industry Federations. The ETUC represents 60 million working men and women inside and outside the European Union.

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Towards a European
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Foreword

In a resolution on “Putting environment policy at the heart of a European employment policy” passed in the run-up to the June 2001 Göteborg Summit, the ETUC called on the Heads of States and Governments for an approach that integrates the environment into all the European Union’s economic and social strategies.

It wants to see a sustainable development strategy pursued at EU level which accommodates work life issues - especially social and employment rights - and builds on the Stockholm Conclusions’ emphasis on employment measures to develop not just more, but better, jobs.

Accordingly, the ETUC asked the TUTB to start giving thought to what contribution trade unions can make to a European sustainable development strategy. Since being set up in 1989, the TUTB has built up union workplace and industry experience into a body of European trade union legal and technological expertise in working environment issues. This has been gradually expanded to bring in wider aspects of the external environment.

This paper, produced by the TUTB with the help of Kees Le Blansch, first takes stock of union activities on environmental issues. It shows how trade union action has built on workers’ rights to focus on the challenges they have to meet in leveraging those rights to influence management policy on the company’s working and wider environments.

The sustainable development debate goes to key issues for trade unions, like hazards, democracy, the principles of justice and access to natural resources. These issues are also central to the current debates on the future and international role of the European Union.

This paper aims to inform discussions within and outside trade unions; it identifies the focal points of the strategy needed and puts forward a set of proposals in need of being implemented ten years on from the Rio Summit.

Emilio Gabaglio, General Secretary of the ETUC

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Executive summary

This paper deals with a major challenge facing trade unions throughout Europe, i.e. the need to develop a new perspective on interest representation in the light of changing economic, social and environmental requirements. At EU level, important policy developments, transitions and reallocation of resources are taking place, either in the context of explicit sustainability strategies or in connection with industrial reform, EU enlargement and disappearing trade barriers in which sustainability issues are an important shaping factor. With this paper, we are proposing to the ETUC a strategy for the development of a collective European trade union perspective on sustainable development, as a means for shaping the new role which trade unions can and have to play in these transitions within Europe. A proposal is made to forge a trade union role in the process following the launch of the EU sustainability strategy at the Council summit in Gothenburg, as well as to prepare a contribution to the Rio + 10 / Earth summit of 2002, as first steps in a five-year ETUC strategy.

First review

A first look at the way in which trade unions have incorporated environmental issues in their strategies in the last ten years shows first of all that unions have been responsive to these challenges and have taken active measures. In general, however, environmental issues have been mostly addressed separately from socio-economic issues, and often in a formal way (by developing rights and systems). Development models are dominated by a risk management approach from both the chemical industry and unions. In many cases there is a gap between what is advocated and shopfloor practice. And finally, in practical issues, trade unions often face dilemmas between socio-economic and environmental demands.

Sustainability challenges

The challenges presently facing trade unions, are a consequence of the fact that key sustainability issues, related to *risks, resources* and *democracy and equity* (including equal *access to resources*), can and will no longer be dealt with separately, nor be confined to chemical industries. Instead they will pervade – in combination – all Community policies. Therefore trade unions will need to respond to the fact that these issues are co-drivers of, and also dependent on, the societal and industrial transformation process that is under way. Trade unions have a role to play in the shaping of this transformation. They negotiate corporate and industrial change. They can however no longer do so by defending traditional socio-economic interests only. They are challenged to develop a new perspective on the quality of the change that they are committed to bring about. A trade union perspective on sustainable development is therefore required, aiming at a development in which environmental, social and economic objectives are pursued in a co-ordinated and mutually compatible way.

The next five years

In order to strengthen the development of this trade union perspective on sustainable development, and thereby create conditions for trade unions effectively to participate in key European debates, a five year programme is proposed to the ETUC. Through this programme a limited number of key sustainability issues is addressed – which, by their nature, are also key-socio-economic issues – on which it is proposed that trade unions work in mutual adjustment and with an ongoing exchange of information.

The proposed programme is subdivided into four themes :

1. Tackling chemical risks
2. Clean energy for sustainable work
3. Sustainable food production and consumption
4. Strengthening environmental competence

On each theme a working group is installed that will serve as a platform for exchange of experience, for the development of working models and for framing policy options. On top of that, the first theme (chemical risks) will also be a priority issue for an international and cross-sectoral campaign in the next few years, through which European trade unions will mark their renewed commitment to contributing and playing their role in the move towards sustainable development. It is proposed that the ETUC's technical bureau (the TUTB) assumes a role to support the development of a common and lasting strategy through secretarial functions and research.

Towards a European Trade Union Perspective on Sustainable Development

Kees (dr. C.G) Le Blansch, QA+ (Questions, Answers and More BV), The Hague

1. The need for a trade union perspective on sustainable development

The need for a common perspective

Combinations of economic, social and environmental issues are increasingly dominating political agendas. Policy-makers at all levels of society are addressing these issues in an increasingly integrated fashion. This can be in the context of sustainability strategies like the EU sustainability strategy, launched by the Council at the Gothenburg Summit in June 2001, or where diverse issues like food safety, improvement of infrastructure or innovation policies are concerned. Thus, common trade union strategies either to ignore environmental issues or to address them as separate, progressive items, face defeat. In reality, key trade union interests are at stake, connected to democratic industrial reform, the allocation of major resources and societal management of risks, ranging from enterprise to European level. Trade unions accordingly find themselves challenged to develop new ways for negotiating societal and industrial reform from their own perspective on the economic, social and environmental improvements that are required, or, in short, from a trade union perspective on sustainable development.

Trade unions are facing at least three major challenges at European and international level where economic, social and environmental issues interact :

- **Industrial restructuring and reform** : Particularly through the Cardiff and Lisbon summits, the European Council has explicitly acknowledged and set its focus on a European development model for a competitive (also liberalised), knowledge-based economy with social cohesion. Accordingly, its policies will be strongly oriented towards the development of a post-industrial society in which new balances are sought between quantity and – social and environmental – quality.
- **The EU enlargement process** : With, and especially after, the accession of the Central and Eastern European countries (CEEC) to the EU, the Community is facing a combined social, economic and environmental challenge of tremendous scale. Full compliance of the CEEC to the Community acquis (including stringent environmental requirements) demands major investments and resource allocations.
- **Trade liberalisation** : World trade policies are being revised as a consequence of the WTO Millennium Round negotiations, which may seriously affect social and environmental quality. A world trade system will emerge, that may, or may not, be responsive to social concerns. Similarly, it may, or may not, further constrain the ability of countries to pursue effective social and environmental protection policies.

A positive strategy

The development of a new vision on ways to reconcile economic, social and environmental interests should not just be seen as a reaction to these and other challenges. It can be a *positive* strategy in which trade unions take up their position in the debate on sustainable development, in order to have a decisive effect on EU and national policies. This debate is now rolling as part of the development of the European Commission's 6th Environmental Action Programme and its sustainability strategy launched at the Gothenburg Summit. These activities are also loosely co-ordinated with the Rio + 10 process which is taking place 10 years after the world community launched its Agenda 21 at Rio de Janeiro in 1992. Rio + 10 aims at establishing a comprehensive review of the agreements that were made then, to be carried out by "major groups" (including trade unions), and to be discussed at the highest political level. Clear channels exist, therefore, for trade union inputs to find their way to relevant (including EU) policy makers and policies.

The concept of sustainable development – i.e. "development that meets the needs of the present generations without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs" – is in itself closely interrelated to trade union interests. It has received wide acknowledgement as a combined quest for a world in which there is equity and solidarity between people here and there, now and in the future, in being able to live a productive and rewarding life in good living and working conditions. As such, the debate on the implications and implementation of sustainable development is highly relevant to trade unions, but is even more pressing as it reaches the stage in which it has practical repercussions.

About this paper

This paper aims to identify and address present challenges, particularly those contained in the Gothenburg Council decision for an EU sustainability strategy. The paper proposes concrete steps for the development of a collective European trade union position (and, through this, for a contribution to the Rio + 10 / Earth summit of 2002). A preliminary review is presented of the unions' approach to environmental issues since 1992 (Rio) in section 2. The nature and impact of present environmental and sustainability challenges are explored in section 3, and a European trade union (ETUC) strategy is proposed that should meet these challenges in section 4. For the execution of this strategy a concrete 5-year work plan which could be co-ordinated through the ETUC's technical bureau (TUTB) is suggested.

2. Where are trade unions now ?

How have trade unions addressed environmental issues in the last ten years ? This question lies at the heart of an assessment of trade unions' abilities to take the environment on board in their dealings with social and economic matters – and thereby their ability to take the broader perspective that is required for effective participation in the practical shaping of the Gothenburg sustainability strategy. Also, this question is central to the comprehensive review that is called for in the Rio + 10 process.

In the textbox below a general overview is presented of efforts and achievements of trade unions in the EU addressing environmental issues. (In the annex to this paper a more detailed overview is presented of trade unions addressing environmental issues.)

Trade unions in the EU addressing environmental issues

- **Programmatic** : In all European countries trade unions have adapted their political programmes to face the environmental challenge, and issued statements accordingly.
- **Corporate environmental management** : Mainly in the larger firms throughout the EU, trade union members, health and safety representatives and works councils have taken initiatives to improve the standard of environmental management, through the development of courses, training and consultation structures to raise awareness, knowledge and skills company-wide.
- **Collective bargaining** : Environmental issues have been raised in collective bargaining by trade unions in several EU countries. Different environmental topics, like hazardous substances, traffic, and waste handling, have been put on sectoral, regional and company agendas. Also, through these agreements, workers' representatives and trade unions have acquired rights to take environmental initiatives, to join in discussions and to give advice on environmental management plans.
- **Laws on quality of work and participation** : EU legislation on quality of work and workers' participation (the Framework and Seveso Directives) have received extended interpretation so as to enable workers and their representatives to protect occupational health and environmental issues in a combined fashion. Moreover, in some EU countries trade unions have succeeded in bringing about new laws and regulation in which workers' rights to participate in environmental decision-making at company level is secured. Consequently, in many companies, the workers' committees that used to deal with health and safety are now called HSE committees (the "E" standing for environment).
- **Initiatives to influence state policies** : Several trade unions have developed – sometimes international - initiatives for environmental tax reform, eco-labelling of products or promotion of green jobs.
- **Participation in societal debates** : In all countries, trade unions are participating in environmentally-relevant debates (often with a European dimension), in which attempts are made to take the broader ("sustainable") view on the issues at stake. These issues include the production and use of different types of chemicals (pesticides, (repro) toxics, chlorines), structures and methods of agricultural production, infrastructure and systems for transport and traffic regulation, the climate change debate, energy saving and use of renewable sources, waste management, water management.

- **European initiatives** : At European level, the trade unions have repeatedly called on employers and the Commission to join in common initiatives for combined environmental/socio-economic action. This has led to several unilateral and multilateral activities, concerning amongst other things green jobs, eco-taxation and worker participation in EMAS¹. Also, through the Commission's agencies and in particular through the Dublin Foundation, unions have co-operated in promoting dialogue on sustainable development.
- **International initiatives** : Internationally, trade unions have contributed to sustainability debates through the ICFTU and other international trade union organisations (for instance, concerning food and agriculture, and on climate change and jobs), and in forums like the OECD (see, e.g., the common declaration on climate change) and the CSD. These inputs have often been of a programmatic nature and have found their ways into common approaches and protocols.

Reviewing the last 10 years, the following preliminary, and overly generalised, critical assessment can be made. First of all, it must be concluded that trade unions all over Europe, on all levels and in all sectors, have shown themselves to be sensitive and responsive to environmental challenges, and have taken active measures to address these challenges as well.

This positive assessment requires, however, qualification :

- Firstly, trade unions often address environmental issues separately from socio-economic issues. On a corporate level, environmental issues are often conceptualised as "external environment", as an extension of "internal environment" or "working environment" (OHS conditions). Participation in EMAS is focused on environmental rather than social aspects of production, product or sector issues. The issue of jobs and environment is often equated with "environmental jobs", i.e. jobs in the waste handling, cleaning or clean technology sectors.
- Many actions undertaken by trade unions on environmental issues concern the creation of formal rights for either workers, their representatives or trade union activists. Formal participation rights include rights on information, consultation and initiative, in issues like environmental management, reporting, system auditing, training, HSE consultation, and are created through bargaining and agreements or by law. A further drive on the creation of formal structures is constituted by the dominance of the management system approach (certified through BSI, ISO and EMAS). Notwithstanding the numerical success of this approach, formal rights do not promote influence if those whom the rights concern lack the competence to exercise them. This appears to be the case in many companies and sectors, where the creation of formal rights lacks material follow-up.
- The chemical industry, including chemical trade unions, has been quite active in taking up environmental challenges. Its societal legitimacy was seriously threatened after a number of major incidents. The industry (and especially particularly large enterprises) therefore took proactive measures, including through *Responsible Care and Product Stewardship* programmes, and actively involved trade unions in these. Besides the positive outcomes of these actions (increased operations safety and eco-efficiency), they also tended to narrow down the environmental debate to a matter of risk management by the chemical sector.

¹ Eco Management and Audit Scheme.

- The combined effect of the latter two limitations described above, is a limited implementation of environmental measures at the workplace. Not only is there a wide gap between programmes and reality where practices of environmental decision making and implementation are concerned, there are also several sectors in which risks and environmental dependencies emerge that are hardly involved or represented in trade union environmental strategies. Also, in many Member States and sectors, the environmental awareness of employees is still at a low level.
- Where trade unions address environmental issues in their practical implications (instead of dealing with them in a formal or programmatic sense), they often find themselves trapped in (pseudo) dilemmas between what counts today and what counts tomorrow, and between socio-economic and environmental interests. Several overviews have been presented of cases where trade unions felt forced to choose between direct employment benefits (or prevention of employment losses) and longer-term environmental gains (i.e., advocating the continuation of polluting production practices versus depleting economic and social costs in the case of changing production patterns). Here lies both a strength (being *in principle* able to simultaneously assess environmental, economic and social costs and benefits) and a weakness of the trade union position (in being hostage to the given socio-economic order, particularly on the level of direct interest representation).

In conclusion, it can be said that trade unions have responded actively but, overall, poorly to the environmental challenge. Moreover, this reaction has clearly been losing impetus in recent years. In the following chapters it will be shown that a key challenge for trade unions lies in overcoming these weaknesses, particularly at the European level.

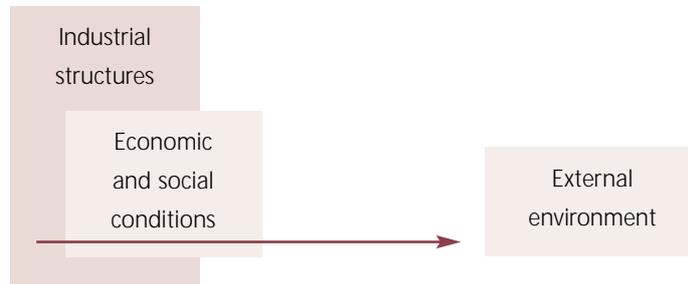
3. The challenges facing trade unions

The main challenge that faces trade unions, is the need to develop a new perspective on interest representation in the light of changing combined economic, social and environmental requirements. At EU level important policy developments, transitions and reallocation of resources will be taking place, either in the context of explicit sustainability strategies (particularly Gothenburg) or in contexts of industrial reform, enlargement of the Union and disappearing trade barriers in which sustainability issues are an important shaping factor. Therefore, the environment will no longer be an external cause, as part of trade unions' extended responsibilities outside of their core domain. Instead, it is intrinsically connected to core trade union issues, and moreover, is part of the challenge for trade unions to develop their place in the post-industrial knowledge society (*cf.* Lisbon summit).

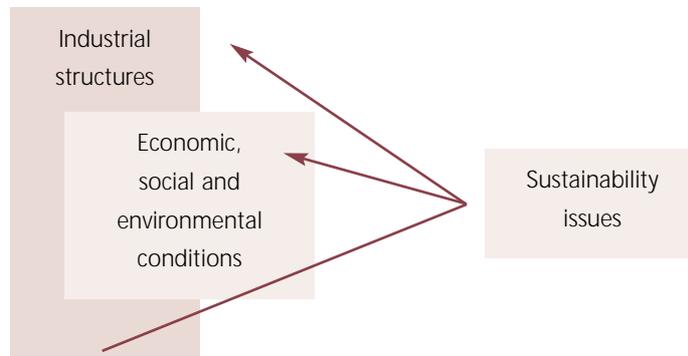
A closer look at core issues in present environmental and sustainability debates can serve to illustrate this point, as well as to identify key issues on which trade unions are required to act. Therefore in Table 1 on page 16 a comparison is made of priority issues from present environmental and sustainability debates.

Figure 1 Changing challenges

I. Environmental issues as extended responsibility



II. Sustainability issues affecting core responsibilities



The priority issues that are presented derive from European environmental and sustainability policy documents and, in the case of Rio + 10, documents with high relevance for European policies. In the case of European environmental policy, its development in itself can already serve as an example for the ever-growing integration of environmental and other policies. While the 1st to 4th Environmental Action Programmes (EAP 1 to 4) were largely concerned with combating pollution in different compartments and sectors, the 5th EAP started aiming for a cross-cutting approach across all sectors and causes of pollution. This change coincided both with the Treaty of Amsterdam, which enshrines the principle of sustainable development as one of the European Community's aims, and with the 1992 Rio Earth Summit which called on the international community to develop new policies as outlined in Agenda 21. Following on from the Vienna European Council meeting, all Community institutions were (and are) obliged to take account of environmental considerations, in all their policies.

The concept of sustainable development, originally perceived as a purely environmental matter, is more and more seen as the only viable social and economic model. In order to strengthen the practice of integrated sustainability approaches, the Community has prepared to take a next step with the decision on a Sustainability Strategy taken at the Gothenburg Summit this year. In all this, co-ordination is striven for with the global debate, including by both delivering input for Rio + 10, and awaiting the output of this process for a further strengthening of the Community's sustainability strategy.

As can be seen from the table 1, three orders of key point can be distinguished: *risks-related*, *resources-related*, and *democracy- and equity-related* (including equal access to resources). As a consequence of the developments described above, these issues will no longer be dealt with separately, but will – in combination – cut across all

Community policies. Therefore, the challenge facing trade unions is *not* that they should have their own bio-diversity or waste management policies. Instead, they need to respond to the fact that these issues are co-drivers of, and also dependent on, the societal and industrial transformation process that is under way. Thus :

- **Management of risks** is not, or not just, a matter of a chemical-industrial order that needs to gradually improve its risk management capabilities. This model has largely failed². Instead, risk management is to be seen as a matter of product and production quality that will have to be managed in changing trade relations (OECD and WTO interventions), changing economic constellations (enlargement), changing policy approaches (chain management, extended responsibilities) and changing scientific insights (e.g. endocrine disruptors). For trade unions, risk management may therefore become far more a political debate than the "expert" issue where it tends to reside today.
- **Management of resources** is not, or not just, a matter of promoting eco-efficiency. Acknowledged resource scarcity will be one of the factors bringing about economic and societal transitions that affect production and consumption patterns that will have consequences for industrial structures. Equally, changing quality standards, the drive for a competitive, social and knowledge-based European society, the enlargement of the Union and strengthening of the single market (including transparency and liberalisation) are all factors to be considered here. For trade unions faced with this, a prime interest representation must above all be about safeguarding a just (i.e. democratic and equitable) transition process.
- **Democracy and equity** are not just a matter of collective agreements combined with co-determination at plant level. With the changes at hand, democracy and equity are less about "dividing up the cake", and far more about "the shape of the cake". Where risks are concerned, in particular, as well as concerning qualitative arrangements in a knowledge based society, expert judgement is not enough in which to ground representative decision-making. New ways of decision-making, representation and ways of involving stakeholders must be developed in order to secure fairness, distributional equity and trust.

² This can be concluded from negative assessments of the effectiveness of today's EU existing chemicals management structure. Also, the European survey on working conditions shows that a large majority of workers are concerned about the impact of their work on their health, and for several good reasons.

Table 1 Key points from environmental and sustainability agendas

Type of key issues	Present EU environmental policy (5 th EAP + assessment)	EU 6 th environmental programme (provisional)	EU sustainability strategy (Gothenburg)	Rio + 10 agenda
Risks	Risk management : industrial accidents, nuclear safety and environmental emergencies	Protecting human health (still problems with chemicals and noise, also emerging problems like endocrine disruptors)	Public health	Environmental security
	<i>Emerging : chemicals / GMOs</i>			
	Urban environment			
	Acidification and air quality			
Resources	Climate change	Climate change (concerning amongst other things industry, transport and other sectors)	Climate change	Climate change
	<i>Emerging: efficient use and management of resources</i>	Resource and waste management	Resources	Energy
	Waste			Protection and sustainable management of water resources
	Water			
	Nature protection and biodiversity	Protecting nature and biodiversity	Land-use and mobility	Biodiversity including bio safety
	Coastal zones	<i>Emerging: soil</i>		
Democracy and equity	<i>Emerging: Involvement of citizens and stakeholders</i>		Exclusion and poverty	Poverty and sustainable development
				Access to financial resources and technology
				Education
				Distributional equity
			Ageing and demography	

4. ETUC taking up the challenges

The objectives of a trade union strategy

Pulling together the arguments advanced above, the requirements for a new strategy can now be formulated, both in terms of objectives and content. As to the objectives of the new strategy, the table 2 shows the gap between present trade union approaches and the nature of current challenges.

Table 2 The gap to be bridged

Present trade union approaches	Nature of new challenges
Environment treated separately from socio-economic issues.	Environmental issues appear integrated with social and economic issues on policy and reform agendas.
Dominance of risk management from chemical industry.	Environmental risk (management) is not restricted to chemical industry, nor are environmental issues restricted to risks.
Formal approach. Limited shopfloor implementation. Hampering dilemmas.	Sustainability issues need to be addressed with a longer-term perspective, at other levels and/or on behalf of other (also non-industrial) parts of trade union constituency.

Important changes are taking place in today's European economy and society, involving industrial structures, trade relations and the accession of new Member States to the internal market, amongst other things. These changes have far-reaching impacts on the interests represented by trade unions. Trade unions have a role to play in the shaping of these changes. They negotiate corporate and industrial change. They can however no longer do so by defending traditional socio-economic interests only. They are challenged to develop a new perspective on the quality of the change that they are committed to bring about. A trade union perspective on sustainable development is required, aiming at a development in which environmental, social and economic objectives are pursued in a co-ordinated and mutually compatible way.

The table 2 illustrates the magnitude of this challenge. It is clear that no definite perspective can as yet be presented. Instead, it is proposed that new working structures are developed within which such a new perspective can be dynamically developed through common trade union activities on a number of concrete, key sustainability issues. It cannot be clear, beforehand, what the concrete outcomes of these activities will be. Through active participation and mobilisation by all trade unions concerned, and through continuous exchange of views and experiences, common positions should be developed on the selected key issues, which in turn serve as examples of concrete trade union perspectives on sustainable development.

It is proposed, therefore, that the ETUC agrees on a 5-year strategy to address a limited number of key sustainability issues – which, by their nature, are also key-socio-economic issues – and work on these in mutual adjustment and with an ongoing exchange of information, so as to achieve the following outcomes.

The aims of a trade union strategy for dealing with selected key sustainability issues

Overall aims :

- **A European trade union perspective on sustainability**

Through working on concrete issues trade unions will develop a common perspective on what sustainability means for their existing and future European constituency, what relations exist between social, economic and environmental requirements, and how to negotiate towards a just and equitable transition process that is to take place in all sectors of society.

- **Effective trade union participation in key European debates**

The strategy proposed in this paper should enable trade unions legitimately to claim a position at the table where major European changes are shaped and negotiated, and to have an agenda of their own for the change that is to be brought about.

Objectives for each selected issue :

- Raise awareness
- Develop new types of effective measures on different levels
- Promote participation (competence)
- Learn through exchange of good (sustainability) practice
- Develop European policy options

The choice of key issues

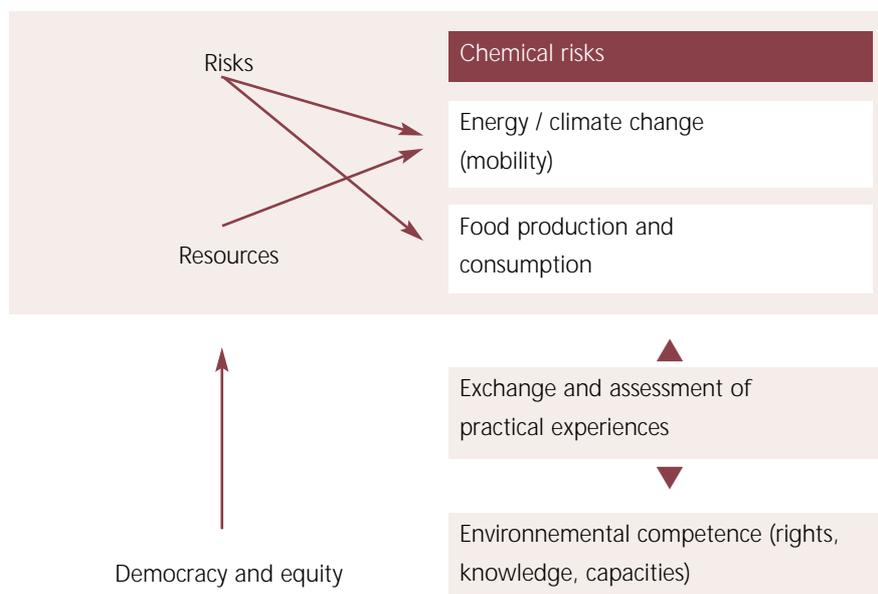
What key issues must be addressed ? A number of criteria can be listed.

Firstly, the issues must be core to the sustainability challenge (not least as being addressed by the EU sustainability strategy, Gothenburg). Therefore, the suggestion is to select issues concerning *risks*, *resources* and *democracy/equity*.

Secondly, the work on these issues must be productive in two ways: it must strengthen existing national trade union practices (and therefore have links with national initiatives and priorities), and it must strengthen trade union representation in key European debates (and thus help develop effective trade union strategies to meet challenges in EU political and policy arenas).

Thirdly, it should be cross-cutting in nature, meaning that it should overcome a dominance of risk management by the chemical industry, and allow for learning across trade union sectoral boundaries.

Figure 2 Proposed key issues



All in all, these criteria lead to 4 key issues, that are depicted in Figure 2, and that will be presented and clarified below:

Key issue 1 : Tackling chemical risks

Key issue 2 : Clean energy for sustainable work

Key issue 3 : Sustainable food production and consumption

And, of a somewhat different nature as it is connected to the democracy and equity challenge thereby cross-cutting the approach of the above mentioned issues:

Key issue 4 : Strengthening environmental competence

Moreover, it is proposed to use key issue 1 (tackling chemical risks) as the theme for a priority campaign to be run by European trade unions in the coming years, to signal their renewed commitment to contribute and play their role in the development towards sustainable work.

Key issue 1

Priority campaign theme : Tackling chemical risks

Current methods of production and consumption create many grave chemical risks, to which all members of society are exposed, and of which our present knowledge probably represents little more than the tip of the iceberg. Chemical risks are a priority theme (and merit being the focus of a priority campaign), for the following reasons:

- The issue of "chemical risks" is closely tied into the priority "public health" theme of the EU sustainability strategy launched at the Gothenburg Summit in June 2001. Furthermore, chemical risks are a core sustainability challenge, particularly in the light of increasing awareness of this challenge vis-à-vis failing approaches to contain these risks through risk management in the chemical industries. Chain management, extended responsibility initiatives and increased expressions of social concern will also confront other sectors with economic and social consequences.

- Such sectors are manifold, thereby proving chemical risks to be a *cross-sectoral* issue. They concern workers (health and safety), the general public (public health) and the environment. They affect not only, and perhaps not even primarily, those who work in the European chemical industry. Workers in industries where chemicals are applied may be more exposed (e.g. printers, painters, metalworkers). Moreover, workers in other sectors (farming, health care, cleaning), as well as female, migrant and elderly workers and even future generations (through their parents during conception and pregnancy), may be running much higher risks. Also, outside Europe, workers and the general public may run high risks from European chemicals, as a consequence of poor production standards of local subsidiaries or sub-contractors, or because of waste dumping practices.
- Strategies to reduce chemical risks can be developed through mutual reinforcement with existing national and European trade union activities, as many unions are already advocating stricter health and safety measures and initiating substitution campaigns. The reinforcement should come from taking the broader approach, by including also the social and economic perspective, as well as the public health and environmental concerns.
- Chemical risks are a core theme in the present debate on trade liberalisation vis-à-vis risk management, as a consequence of which current European approaches towards chemicals management are challenged. From the environmental and public health domains, too, new approaches are being advocated, leading to both a European and global debate on the revision of the (European) chemicals management structure in the years to come.

From a sustainability point of view, trade unions have an important role to play in the reduction of these risks. The main aim should be not to contain these risks, but to avoid them by effecting substitution to other products and processes, by stimulating innovation to more sustainable technologies and by phasing-out strategies for dangerous substances according to the precautionary principle. This requires a transition process in which both patterns of demand for and supply of new technologies must change. As this demand is mainly originating from existing use in many non-chemical sectors, trade unions are challenged to work together with many different user groups in negotiating for substitution, influencing usage patterns and changing legal, technological and economic conditions, thereby improving the social and environmental conditions.

It is proposed that concerted efforts be made at different levels of society :

- at the workplace : for demand and supply of practical, more sustainable solutions;
- sectoral : building awareness and concerted action among affected workers;
- national : seeking support and change in the legal conditions with social partners;
- european : exchanging national experiences with campaigns, problems and feasible solutions, and forging linkages with the implementation of the Commission's sustainability strategy and its 6th environmental programme;
- global : organising for concerted actions with US and other trade unions, and creating linkages with work done at the CSD, WTO and OECD.

Key issue 2

Clean energy for sustainable work

"Energy" is proposed as a priority theme for trade unions to address collectively at European level on several counts.

- Firstly, the energy issue is related to *big sustainability problems* like climate change (including through CO₂ emissions), nuclear risks and exhaustion of natural resources (all three priority strands of the EU sustainability strategy launched at the Gothenburg Summit in June 2001: "climate change", "public health" and "resources"). The energy issue poses a serious threat to economic production functions, the social order and people's livelihoods.
- In addressing this key issue, mutual reinforcement can take place with initiatives of several trade unions, which are presently exploring positive and proactive approaches towards clean, renewable, non-nuclear energy production for reduction of CO₂. In so doing, these unions are showing that this can result in industrial innovation and net employment gains (both in production and distribution, and both in industry and services – while recognising regional and sectoral losses). The new technologies then lead to productivity rises that can also serve to reduce the possibility of occupational hazards and increase public health and well-being.

Trade unions have a long-standing involvement with the energy issue, for instance through their roles in debates on eco-taxation, and also within the context of liberalisation policies. These issues are in turn related to some key European policies, to which we will turn now :

- The energy issue is connected to several *key European policies*. It is not just part of the global and European debates on climate change and resource management. It also relates to the European agendas for industrial reform and CEEC enlargement, particularly by further opening of the internal market and liberalisation of energy production and distribution. This has important repercussions on both the economic, social and environmental quality of energy production and distribution. Liberalised energy markets allow for more decentralised production and for opening up to renewable energy production at different scales. They may also introduce dominant economic principles in areas where vital societal functions and social conditions (cost of living, fuel poverty) are at stake. Therefore, the energy issue is connected to key debates on societal reform in public and private infrastructures, production and consumption patterns and social and environmental quality. An integrated perspective on these issues is required and needs to be brought into, and coordinated between, several European Commission policies.
- The energy issue is not, and will be increasingly less, restricted to the energy production and distribution sector. It concerns mobility, modes of industrial production and organisation of services. Therefore, it requires a *cross-sectoral approach*.

To date, trade unions have advocated several novel approaches in order to effect concerted change, consisting of measures like :

- promotion of new technologies and new economic activities around clean energy production and distribution;
- workplace social and energy assessments;
- social impact analyses;
- employment impact analyses;
- formulation of "just transition programmes";
- identification of necessary financial and economic measures.

Further initiatives can be jointly developed, shared, improved and broadened by exchanging views on such measures as well as reviewing the effects of present changes and policies throughout the EU, and monitoring the effects of trade union initiatives that have already been undertaken in different EU countries. Along these lines a common trade union position may be developed on EU requirements for the societal transition towards clean energy and sustainable work.

Key issue 3

Sustainable food production and consumption

The third key issue to consider concerns sustainable food production and consumption.

- First of all it is a *key sustainability issue*, from the point of view of risks and resources (both of which are priority strands of the EU sustainability strategy). It is related to the number one health issue in the EU in recent years, mainly as a consequence of food safety problems. Non-sustainable forms of animal (animal food pollution and spread of diseases) and crop farming (pesticides, fertilisers, monocultures, soil dehydration, GMOs) have led to health problems and consumer concerns, detrimental working conditions, serious environmental damage and loss of nature quality and biodiversity, which in turn threaten the economic vitality of agriculture and food production in the EU and outside. Also, clear connections exist with world hunger and poverty, child labour and exploitation of the self-employed, home workers, family workers and female workers.
- It is in many ways connected to *current trade union activities*. Several aspects of this key issue already have the attention of national trade unions, like fertiliser and pesticide use, and the working conditions of home and family workers. On the issue of reforming the structure of agriculture, unions at international level have drafted important policy documents. Proper trade union responses to the challenges arising out of European structural reform may still be lacking – which itself militates for the development of a common European perspective.
- It is to be expected that *future EU policies* will seek to respond to the present crisis by making structural changes in agricultural and food production, with potentially far-reaching economic, social and environmental consequences. On top of that, the accession of CEEC countries (e.g. Hungary) through enlargement may involve major changes in the EU's farming capacities and structures.
- Finally, the theme is cross-sectoral in that it affects farming, industrial food production, as well as retailing and consumer issues.

A trade union sustainability strategy must address these issues through connecting global (ICFTU/CSD) and local trade union initiatives, including on eliminating pesticide use, organic farming, self-sufficiency strategies, land reform, co-operative strategies. It will be crucial to derive from examinations of these and other initiatives a trade union perspective on what sustainable structures for food production and consumption might be, in order to be able to play the role required at European level in the coming years, i.e., to negotiate a just transition.

Key issue 4 Strengthening environmental competence

Industrial reform will wreak major changes to peoples' working and living patterns and conditions in the coming years. Such changes will be a blessing to some and a curse to others, and will affect larger groups as much individual circumstances. For these changes to come about in a just and acceptable way, appropriate democratic structures need to be in place and to be accessible for those involved to take joint decisions on the nature of these changes (and, given the more powerful position of labour in a knowledge-based society, there is real potential for organised labour to have significant influence on the manner and effectiveness of these changes).

Trade unions themselves are both the means and symbol of workers' demanding influence over their own working lives. In recent years, efforts have been directed at extending this influence into the environmental sphere, including through EMAS and extended OHS, works councils and trade union representative rights. These efforts need to be stepped up in three directions :

- participation rights are not equally extended throughout the EU and across all sectors;
- the "material" use of "formal" rights is still limited; and
- the exercise of these rights is too often directed at discrete environmental issues, disconnected from related social and economic issues.

As the fourth key issue, it is therefore proposed to direct attention to the strengthening of *environmental competence for a democratic and equitable transition* (which is also tied into the priority "exclusion and poverty" strand of the EU sustainability strategy)³, in two ways :

1. By developing initiatives to extend environmental participation rights, knowledge and capacities throughout the EU, by means of :
 - applying EU funds (e.g. LIFE, cohesion funds) for the development of courses;
 - collecting and disseminating instances of good practice in effective and broader worker participation in EMAS, in sustainability strategies and in corporate social responsibility strategies;
 - promoting the introduction in other Member States and at EU level of extended participation rights, either through agreement or – where applicable – law.
2. By cross-cutting the approaches on key-issues 1 to 3⁴, by feeding and tapping into them in order to (a) promote democratic reform on these issues, and (b) learn from the approach developed on these issues about effective ways to effect participation.

Persevering the strategy : organising for a stronghold and support

These four key issues are not new for trade unions. All national trade unions are confronted with them on a day-to-day basis and are struggling to deliver effective, qualitative answers. Many unions developed innovative initiatives to tackle the problems at hand. No union has come up with final answers. All face day-to-day changing circumstances and new challenges, which make it all the harder to persevere with the initiatives that have been developed.

³ Moreover, this priority issue may also be connected to the Commission's preparation of new Directive (COM(2000) 839), aiming to establish new ways for public participation.

⁴ Hence the vertical arrows in Figure 2.

Given the difficulty of developing a common and lasting strategy in complex and hectic conditions, it is deemed highly recommendable to organise for a certain level of continuity and support.

From one, or perhaps multiple organisational strongholds, such as the TUTB, different functions can be performed to facilitate exchange and the build-up of a common vision and strategy: a secretarial function, a platform function, an observatory role and, on occasions, a spokesperson's and representative role. Also, from this position proper working relationships can be established with EU and other research and policy bodies.

Proper support can be pivotally important to bridge different local initiatives, and to focus attention for a long enough time span for a common trade union sustainability vision and strategy to emerge.

Annex : Trade unions addressing environmental issues

This annex offers a general overview of (examples of) trade union environmental initiatives at sectoral, national and European level. It follows broadly the same order as text box p. 11, whilst simultaneously serving to illustrate the critical assessment presented in section 2 of this document. The overview is based on a literature⁵ and Internet search, as well as on consultation of a number of international experts⁶.

Among examples of trade union environmental initiatives at sectoral, national and European level are the following :

Trade union programmes addressing the environment

Rooted in a longer history of broader interest representation and specifically responding to actual environmental challenges, trade unions in all EU Member States developed environmental perspectives of their own and issued statements and work programmes accordingly from the early 90s onwards. In most countries brochures and booklets became available, which served both political and consciousness-raising purposes, and which were often connected to trade union training and education programmes. Certainly in the first half of the 90s, the conceptual relation between the environmental and other fields of trade union activity was weak, and was mainly restricted to links with health and safety ("working environment") and participation issues. In the second half of the 90s more proactive positions were taken by some unions, in which also links were made with employment issues ("green jobs", "sustainable employment"), fiscal policies (particularly on eco-tax) and industrial policies (including on energy production). Still, integration with overall trade union policies remained either weak (treating environmental issues separately from socio-economic issues), or was so complete as to entirely subsume the environmental issue ("all trade union activities will be aimed at sustainable development, in particular its social pillar", as one programme states). So far, "sustainable development" appears to be mostly a buzz-word for trade unions, except in selected cases in which more extensive reflection takes place on the possible implications of the concept. A good example of this is the German *Arbeit und Ökologie* project, in which several scientific institutes cooperated with trade unions to investigate possible implications.

⁵ Among the main scientific sources are publications on European comparative research carried out by the IRENE network, as published by the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, the Hans Böckler Stiftung and elsewhere (particularly Oates and Gregory (eds.) (1993), *Industrial Relations and the Environment : Ten Countries Under the Microscope*; Hildebrandt and Schmidt (1994), *Industrial relations and the environment*; Hildebrandt, Schmidt and Le Blansch (1994), *Industrial relations and the environment network in Europe* (IRENE); Le Blansch, Hildebrandt and Pearson (eds.) (1994), *IR & the environment; case studies book*; Klemisch, Hildebrandt und Kluge (eds.) (1994), *Betriebliche Umweltinformationssysteme und gewerkschaftliche Beteiligung*; Transfer (quarterly of the ETUI) (August 1996): "Special issue on industrial relations and the environment"; Gregory, Hildebrandt, Le Blansch and Lorentzen (1999) "Industrial Relations and Protection of the Environment: Research findings from a new policy field", in *European Journal of industrial relations*.

⁶ The author wishes to thank Elena Battaglini, Denis Gregory, Eckart Hildebrandt, Thomas Ritt, Francesc La Roca and Eberhard Schmidt for their kind assistance.

Many unions throughout the EU built up – mostly limited – capacities of their own to take the environment on board. Staff members were appointed who were to develop expertise, policies and information products about environmental issues. In most cases such staff members combine tasks on different fields of work, either in health and safety matters, economic matters or technology matters. In some cases separate organisational entities were formed (like the Stiftung Arbeit und Umwelt of the German IG BCE, or ISTAS which is closely connected to the Departamento de Medio Ambiente de la Confederacion Sindical of the Spanish CC.OO (which also issues the widely acclaimed *Daphnia*). Also, institutes with strong affiliation to trade unions served as think-tanks (like the German Hans Böckler Stiftung or the Austrian ArbeiterKammer).

Trade union campaigns on environmental issues

In many EU Member States, trade unions have organised or taken part in campaigns with their membership in order to change (specific) environmental practices in specific sectors. Examples are :

- **Tatort Betrieb** : a campaign by the German metalworkers union for the substitution of cutting, degreasing and cleaning fluids for health and environment reasons.
- **TCO 92/95 and 6E labels** : the introduction of now widely-accepted labels for HSE labelling of monitors and offices by the Swedish white collar workers' union.
- **"Environmental competence"** : a campaign by the Danish LO to promote workers' and representatives' abilities to use their environmental discretion and exercise their environmental rights, through awareness raising and training and education activities.
- **Campaigns on the substitution of organic solvents** : in almost all EU Member States, trade unions have initiated or participated in campaigns to reduce or ban the use of organic solvents in paints (in Denmark and the Netherlands to name just two), cleaning agents in the printing industry (the Subprint project, in Denmark, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, Spain, the United Kingdom and elsewhere); concrete mould release agents in the construction and building industries (the Sumovera project, ranging from the Netherlands to Portugal and from Finland to France).
- **Campaigns on the introduction of EMAS** : in many Member States, trade unions have actively campaigned through their branches for EMAS to be implemented in companies, and for workers to be involved in its implementation (e.g., Austria, Germany (IG Metal and the DGB Bildungswerk have done projects and courses), Finland, and Italy). In most cases, unions called for implementation of the EMAS model according to the European standard, without adding requirements of their own such as on social aspects of production, or product or sector issues. Lately, trade union activities on EMAS seem to have been slowing down.

Alongside these "positive" campaigns, several instances are known of cases where trade unions actively campaigned for socio-economic as opposed to environmental interests. In such campaigns also contradictions come to the fore that appear to exist between on the one hand umbrella trade union organisations / confederations, and on the other hand sectoral trade unions. Five older examples from the Netherlands illustrate this point:

1. Coal-fired power station in Amsterdam: FNV-Amsterdam in favour, the environmentalist movement and FNV confederation against;
2. Phosphate-free washing powders: the environmental movement and FNV confederation in favour, the union at Hoechst against;

3. Banning of Dinoseb (a chemical company): environmental movement in favour, trade unions against;
4. Reclamation of Markerwaard: several unions in favour, environmental organisations against; and
5. Abolition of travel cost subsidies: environmental movement in favour, unions against.

These are all older examples, and positions have shifted somewhat since (both the Dutch FNV and CNV have, in actual instances, proved able to reconcile environmental and social requirements in more proactive terms). Comparing different types of programmes and campaigns, however, brings a similar distinction between confederations and sectoral unions to the fore. Confederations are typically able to join in broader debates on more general terms – as far as accepted by their sectoral union memberships, and with limited direct implications for shopfloor implementation (they are "quasi-invisible" – see also below in this annex). This can for instance be seen in the broad views propagated by the German DGB (together with the Hans Böckler Stiftung)⁷ and the Spanish CC.OO. On the other hand, sectoral unions are far more restricted to "vested" workers' interests in the established socio-economic order, and are therefore far less able to take widely progressive positions. Instead they focus more on formal participation and competence rights (see for example the campaigns mentioned above, on the implementation of EMAS and on "environmental competence"). Compare also, for instance, the broad array of environmental topics and issues addressed by the ArbeiterKammer in Austria (who have no role in interest representation at company level), as opposed to the rather narrow approach of the Austrian unions (whose first interest representation lies just there, at shopfloor level).

Collective bargaining on environmental issues

In the main, from the early 90s onward, in most EU Member States trade unions started to negotiate environmental clauses in collective agreements, at branch (i.e. sectoral) and company level (and, in Italy, also at regional level, Lombardy). At sectoral level, the chemical and metal industries (in Belgium, Germany, the Netherlands and Spain, notably) occupied a pioneering role. Company agreements with an environmental component were mainly confined to large companies. Sectoral and company level agreements were on the systematic quality and participative nature of environmental management, extended roles for H&S committees, works councils, safety and trade union representatives, as well as environmental education, training and qualification provisions. Overlooking the kinds of agreements thus made, it appears that the dominance of the chemical sector has resulted in a somewhat limited orientation towards rational management of risks as defined by this sector (leading amongst other things to a focus on standardised management systems and expert information systems). At company level also, agreements on physical aspects of production were made, like the banning or substitution of certain hazardous substances, recycling practices or commuter traffic. Also, more specific organisational measures were agreed upon, like rights to expert advice, setting up working groups on environmental issues, agreements on eco-auditing, et cetera.

⁷ The actual programme of the DGB (dating from 1996) formulates the following, far-reaching objective: *"Unser Ziel ist eine weitgehende Kreislaufwirtschaft und eine Produktgestaltung, die sich auf Dematerialisierung, Langlebigkeit, Erneuerbarkeit und ressourcenschonende Herstellung stützt."* (Our goal is to develop, as far as possible, a closed-loop economy and a product design based on dematerialisation, prolonged lifespan, renewability and reduction of resource-use in production.)

Examples of environmental agreements at national level are few and far between, except for the Netherlands – which proved to be mostly symbolic and condition-creating –, and, in a less specific form, Denmark, Italy and Greece.

Examples are known in which environmental disputes were settled through (sometimes extended) collective bargaining procedures (e.g. Kemisk Vaerk Koge (KVK) in Denmark; Enichem in Italy; ÖMV in Austria)⁸. Analysis shows, however, that such settlements may be unstable (the previously mentioned Danish KVK case) or can be typified as an "economic alliance" of industry and trade unions vis-à-vis environmental demands (as in the Austrian ÖMV case).

Overviews produced in the Netherlands⁹ showed a significant rise in environmental clauses in collective agreements from the early 90s. A German overview¹⁰ revealed the continuous – although somewhat limited – use of this instrument throughout the 90s (mention is made of 5 sectoral and 13 company level agreements), as well as a gradual spread beyond the chemical and metal sectors (amongst other things agriculture, food industries, media sector, construction industries, telecoms). Most agreements are of a formal and somewhat general nature, mostly providing roughly defined ("*sehr vage, unpräzise*") rights.

Initiatives to influence state policies

Next to trade unions' natural counterparts, i.e. the employers' associations, the State has also – and, in the case of the environment, not surprisingly – been an important target of trade union initiatives. Several trade unions have developed – sometimes international – initiatives to promote tax reform (particularly – albeit with mixed feelings – with respect to eco-taxation)¹¹ or state policies on eco-labelling of products or on green jobs. An important example in the latter respect is the German trade unions' initiative to add to the existing social pact "*Bündnis für Arbeit*" a pact called "*Bündnis für Arbeit und Umwelt*",¹² which particularly advocates a combined offensive by state, industry and trade unions towards clean technologies and clean energy in order to create jobs.

An important part of trade union initiatives to influence state policies relates to legislation on quality of work and participation. Consequently, EU legislation on quality of work and workers' participation (the Framework and Seveso Directives) have been broadly interpreted so as to enable workers and their representatives to protect occupational health and environmental issues in a combined fashion. H&S committees are increasingly often referred to as HSE committees (e.g., in the revised Dutch Working Conditions Act). Also, the European Directive on European Works Councils (EWCs) has opened opportunities for environmental consultations within trans-European companies. One example in which such environmental consultations are taking place on a regular basis, is the BASF EWC.

⁸ Compare Le Blanch, Hildebrandt and Pearson (eds.) (1994), *IR & the environment; case studies book*.

⁹ Dienst Collectieve Arbeidsvoorwaarden (1991), *CAO regelingen 1991*; Ministerie SoZaWe (1994), *OR-bevoegdheden in CAO's 1994*.

¹⁰ Leitretter (1999), *Betriebs- und Dienstvereinbarungen betrieblicher Umweltschutz*.

¹¹ For an overview, see ETUC discussion paper *Ecological Tax reform, 1999*.

¹² Based on the DGB position paper *Arbeit und Umwelt* (WSI Mitteilungen 9/1999, p. 651-658).

In some EU Member States, too, trade unions have played important roles in bringing about changes in legislative conditions so as to enlarge workers' rights in environmental issues. Examples are:

- Extensions of (currently) the Dutch and (in future) German Works Councils Acts, creating rights for works councils on environmental information, consultation, initiative and advice.
- The inclusion of a right of works councils to be consulted in Dutch and Danish environmental law.

Participation in social debates

In all countries, trade unions are participating in environment-related debates (often with a European dimension), in which attempts are sometimes made to take the broader ("sustainable") view on the issues at stake. These issues include :

- the production and use of different types of chemicals : pesticides, (repro) toxics, chlorines (for instance in Austria, Spain and Sweden) ;
- structures and methods of agricultural production (e.g., in Spain, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom) ;
- infrastructure and systems for transport and traffic regulation (Austria, Belgium, Spain and the United Kingdom) ;
- the climate change debate, energy saving and use of renewable sources (for instance Germany and Spain) ;
- waste management, water management.

Sometimes innovative attempts are made to develop new approaches, like the "energy poverty" approach of Unison in the UK, or the way the Dutch FNV (industrial trade union, presently "bondgenoten") has taken exploratory action in regard to the industrial, social and technological effects of the packaging agreement in and around the paper industries (including transport, agriculture, food, et cetera), or in the debate with industry and environmental organisations on the future of chlorine production.

In other instances, however, trade union interventions articulate different types of interests. In the case of energy or transport policies the union input often comes as a reaction to liberalisation and privatisation drives in government policies, to socio-economic effects of eco-taxes, or to efficiency losses and lost working time as consequences of infrastructure deficiencies. In the case of the agricultural and food production crisis in the EU, some unions particularly stress the social problems of farmers (i.e. home and family workers) versus unreliable EC and state policies and consumer hysteria.

Trade unions throughout Europe have been mostly concerned to keep their own positions distinct from the environmental positions of NGOs in general and of environmental groups in particular. In some countries, trade unions regularly consult with environmental NGOs, and/or co-operate on individual projects. An example of the latter is the common initiative in Germany of IG BAU and Greenpeace in the project "*Das Plus für Arbeit und Umwelt*", aimed to introduce energy conservation measures in existing buildings, and to create jobs through that. Another example is the common initiative of the Danish General workers' Union and the Environmental Bureau, together with several national trade union and other organisations (Unison in Britain, among others), for a study on "green job creation" (supported by EC Environment Directorate-General).

But unions and environmental lobbies often take explicit common lines on particular issues for political purposes (e.g., the German initiative for the *"Bündnis für Arbeit und Umwelt"* was launched at a congress by the DGB, the Hans Böckler and Friedrich Ebert Foundations and the Deutscher Naturschutzring; also: the IG BAU started a project on "sustainable development and workers' interests, together with "Naturfreunde", Germany's biggest nature conservation organisation). In Italy local co-operation between trade unions and environmental groups exists, as part of the "diffuse partnerships" that came into being following the administrative decentralisation (governed by the Bassanini Act).

European initiatives

At a European level, the trade unions have repeatedly called on employers and the Commission to join in common initiatives for combined environmental/socio-economic action. This has led to several unilateral and multilateral activities, focused amongst other things on green jobs, eco-taxation and worker participation in EMAS. On the EMAS issue in particular, both the ETUC and many national trade unions have joined in lobbying for workers and trade unions to have a right of say in implementing it¹³ – with limited success.

Also, unions have co-operated in promoting dialogue on sustainable development through the Commission's agencies – especially the Dublin Foundation¹⁴.

International initiatives

Internationally, trade unions have contributed to sustainability debates through the ICFTU and other international trade union organisations (such as on food and agriculture, and on climate change and jobs), and in forums like the OECD (see, for instance, the common declaration on climate change) and the CSD¹⁵. These inputs have often been of a programmatic nature and have found their ways into common approaches and protocols.

¹³ See for instance the publication of the Kooperationsstelle Berlin and the B&SU (2000): *Die Beschäftigten, Stiefkinder beim Öko-Audit – Trendwende bei EMAS II?*

¹⁴ Next to the studies and publications on industrial relations and the environment cited earlier, this dialogue was also promoted through a variety of studies and debates on sustainable development, amongst other things on the role of the social partners, design, environmental management, networks, the role of SMEs, economic instruments, eco-products, new materials and training.

¹⁵ See: ICFTU/trade union statement to the Kyoto conference, *"Climate change and jobs; towards a strategy for sustainable employment"* (1997); Outcome of the CSD Special dialogue session with Workers and Trade Unions in the Agriculture and Food System, *"Plough to plate approaches to food and agriculture"* (2000); COP6 ICFTU/TUAC statement *"Social & employment transition for climate change"* (2000).

Sustainable Development

Putting environmental policy at the heart of European employment policy

Resolution adopted by the ETUC Executive Committee, 13-14 June 2001

1. The European Trade Union Confederation welcomes the fact that on the occasion of the Göteborg Summit, a proposal for a medium-term European strategy on sustainable development will be examined. This strategy is intended to integrate an environmental dimension into the economic and social strategies adopted at the European Councils of Lisbon, Nice and Stockholm. The ETUC supports such a process of which an essential element must be the setting up of an approach to Sustainable development which integrates working life. Keeping this in mind, the ETUC believes that the conclusions of the Stockholm Summit concerning “Better quality of work” could be the starting point of such a process. In fact, for the ETUC a full employment policy must not only focus itself on the growing number of jobs but equally on the quality of these jobs. The ETUC has been working for several years in order to establish a European employment pact based on a policy of growth, structural reforms and a more efficient labour market.

2. Accordingly, the ETUC wishes to emphasise that this integration process must fall in line with the co-ordination of different policies. The ETUC insists on the need for the different processes to be consistent and closely co-ordinated in order to ensure a single European strategy in favour of full employment and the modernisation and improvement of the European social system. Accordingly, it calls for social consultation at European level to be reinforced in the framework of the defence and promotion of the European social model.

3. The ETUC considers that there is a crucial and urgent need to integrate an environmental dimension for three fundamental reasons.

- Firstly, there is a positive relation between environmental protection policies and the creation of jobs.
- Secondly, European and international data converge to confirm the need to control the use of natural resources and reduce environmental pressures.
- And finally for the improvement of living conditions for the weaker populations in Europe both present and future and especially those in Southern Europe. The ETUC insists on the need for Europe to be driving force at international level. In this context, the conclusions of Göteborg must represent the European Union's contribution internationally in preparation for RIO + 10.

4. These two elements have been highlighted on several occasions by the ETUC, in particular in a joint EEB/ETUC declaration in June 98, on the occasion of the Cardiff Summit.

5. The joint declaration emphasises the potentially important impact of this process in reducing the pressures on the use of natural resources and consequently on the environment. This need has been emphasised in the reports on the environmental situation in Europe and at world level in particular: for example climatic changes, the reduction of the ozone layer, the increase in waste, the reduction of biodiversity, the degradation of soil and the quality of the air. The ETUC has expressed

on several occasions its concern about the gap between political declarations and the reality of the situation. European laws are ineffective, badly transposed and inadequately implemented. ETUC demand the reinforcement of the capacity of control of the public authorities. And the role of the social partners in the implementation of environmental policies must be emphasised.

6. To that end, the ETUC calls on the Göteborg Summit to lead the way in refocusing medium and long-term economic, environmental and social choices with a view to co-ordinating the transition, on the basis of clearly established priorities, to an economy which guarantees the well-being of future generations, social cohesion and the protection of the environment. The ETUC believes that, in order to achieve such objectives and put an end to the unrestrained use of natural and environmental resources and the persistent underemployment of human resources, structural changes are necessary. 14 million unemployed people in the European Union and the Commission estimates that there are 65 million poor people in the Union. In this perspective the ETUC Congress in Helsinki 1999 underlined just how much “Fiscal systems must become fairer on the social scale and more in favour of jobs and in particular in favour of the employment of women. The ETUC renews its support for a coordinated fiscal policy which replaces the fiscal charges which affect labour to capital, savings, environmental and energy taxes and adapting VAT to take account of social needs and promote jobs.” Moreover, the ETUC supports the importance of the reorientation of certain Community policies, for example: The Common Agricultural Policy towards quality objectives and to guarantee a high level of Food Safety and in this perspective, transport policies must be redefined in depth. The ETUC awaits the construction of the orientation of a future research programme (6th framework programme) in function of these objectives.

7. Moreover, the ETUC considers that this situation results, on the one hand, from the pressures of the financial markets and companies which are too focused on short-term results and, on the other hand, from a lack of innovation to meet the environmental and social challenges. This situation is also the result of the failure of governments to recognise the role of the public sector in society, which has led them to reduce the labour intensive social services which are essential for ensuring access to fundamental services in the framework of sustainable development: education, health and resources such as energy, water and food.

8. The ETUC insists on the need for any environmental transition process to integrate such a policy reorientation. To that end, the ETUC welcomes the Commission's guidelines issued in September 2000 in a Communication for the integration of environmental questions in economic policy and its recognition of the need for structural measures to help the sectors for which this transition process may cause problems.

9. The European trade union movement wishes to emphasise the fact that such a policy reorientation cannot succeed without recognition of the essential contribution of workers and the social partners. At the current time, Community environmental policies continue to ignore the role of workers, especially in companies, whereas their experience, motivation, skills and actions are essential in order to implement environmental policies. Likewise, Community programmes in the field of the environment fail to recognise the role of workers as essential actors in this reorientation of policy.

10. Such a reorientation of sustainable development policy must focus on achieving a more cost-effective management of resources, a health policy based on prevention and greater social justice. Common policies are needed to achieve such objectives.

11. Certain fundamental principles must be followed by the European public authorities within the framework of an environmental transition process:

- **The recognition, promotion and respect of fundamental social rights, in particular the individual and collective rights of workers. The ETUC calls for the rights concerning the information and consultation of workers to be enlarged to include the environmental aspects. Certain countries extended the scope of these rights when transposing the Framework Directive 89/391 on measures to improve the health and safety of workers. These rights must be extended to all Member States and the rights of information and consultation, including the aspects relating to the environment, must be applied in all companies.**

The recent revision of the EMAS regulation is a step in the right direction. It recognises the role of workers and their representatives as actors in the management of the environment. The ETUC considers that the European social partners must play an active role in promoting and supporting the development of such eco-management systems, in particular through the promotion of policies for training workers:

- The recognition of the role of the social dialogue and, in particular, identifying in the framework of the different sectoral policies, alternative ways of promoting employment: “green jobs”, defining joint objectives for the improvement of the working environment, the promotion of clean technologies.
- The adoption of economic and fiscal policies which stimulate the private and public investment that are indispensable to the development and use of cleaner and more cost-effective technologies as well as the reduction of the difference between market costs and labour costs. Clean technologies and products which respect the environment must be promoted and supported in public procurement policies. In this context, the proposals to reduce the subsidies that exist in different sectors (for example, energy, transport, agriculture, etc.) must be examined in the light of their impact on employment, as well as the alternative solutions.
- The involvement of Non-Governmental Organisations at Community level.
- The establishment of common legal principles which translate into concrete terms the principle of polluters/payers, in particular in terms of environmental responsibilities and the implementation of the principle of prevention.
- The recognition of the principle of the hierarchy of standards and the key role of the public authorities and the management of voluntary actions.

12. In its preparatory document, the Commission has identified a series of priority themes which require action in the framework of a European strategy of sustainable development. The ETUC can contribute, based on the above-mentioned principles, its support for these choices while not losing sight of the fact that the integration process must not undermine the existing co-ordination process. The ETUC, as an organisation representing not only workers but also FERPA (European Federation of Retired and Elderly Persons), is active, both at European level and nationally, in areas such as combating poverty and social exclusion and on questions concerning the ageing population.

13. In the framework of this consultation, the ETUC has emphasised its views on two themes in particular: the issues of health and climatic changes.

14. Health is a key issue for the European trade union movement, which has stressed the importance of common policies throughout the European integration process. The trade union

movement has implemented actions at all stages of industrial development to encourage the public authorities and employers to assume their responsibilities in preventing accidents at work and ensuring compensation for victims. The European trade union movement has been an important actor, both nationally and at European level, in the adoption of laws on protection of workers and in setting up social protection systems. Today, the concerns of consumers on food safety, as well as national reports and those of the WHO-Europe on the growing inequalities in terms of life expectancy in Europe between the different socio-professional groups, and also the reports of the European Foundation of Dublin on working conditions, confirm that the traditional risks still exist and that the changes in the organisation of work and the job insecurity in work relations are at the origin of new health problems for workers: stress, MSD, repetitive work, moral harassment.

15. The European trade union movement considers that a European health policy should be based on a European activity co-ordinated on health factors as well as on the supply of health services. The actions of the public authorities must in principle be guided by the principles of prevention. Most of the risks to which workers and the populations are exposed are known, as are the means to reduce the inequalities between professional categories, regions and the different social groups. This requires vigorous actions in all areas affecting health (the quality of the environment, living conditions, housing etc.) and with regard to the collective aspects of working conditions. Today, chemical products and substances are, by their properties, their number, their use and absence of data, important risks for both workers and populations as a whole. The European Commission has just adopted a new strategy for chemical products. The ETUC considers that such a strategy must focus on reducing the risks to which workers are exposed by applying the principles of prevention and, therefore, of substitutes for cancer-producing substances. This comes directly under the burden of the manufacturer. The ETUC calls for the strategy to take into consideration explicitly the questions and needs of the protection of workers.

16. The issue of climatic changes and new sources of energy is of major interest to the ETUC. In fact, the different projects carried out by the ETUC over many years show that the policies to reduce CO₂ emissions and develop renewable sources of energy can have positive effects for employment and also on the competitiveness of companies and economic development. Accordingly, the ETUC calls on the Heads of State and Government to ensure that the Kyoto protocol is ratified quickly without diluting its objectives and to define a European strategy for its implementation. A European strategy must fix targets for reductions in the gases covered by the protocol and for the use of renewable energies, as well as establishing a fiscal strategy to encourage energy savings.

17. With regard to the instruments for the implementation of such a strategy, the ETUC wishes to emphasise the key role of directives and the importance of defining quantified objectives, both in the framework of the 6th environmental programme and as part of an open co-ordination procedure. Moreover, the ETUC considers that the voluntary systems set up by Community regulations can be useful tools for the implementation, at company level, of innovative strategies, practices and systems for the cost-efficient management of resources. Moreover, companies have set up their own systems of environmental and/or social self-declarations which can also possibly involve sub-contractors in countries either from within or outside the European Union. In certain cases, these declarations are made without any third party control, while in other cases the controls are carried out by a private body under a contractual relationship. It is also important to point out that non-governmental development organisations have set up self-declaration compliance systems

concerning business relations with producers. Some of these systems have been introduced in cooperation with trade union organisations, for example in the management of forests (the Global Forestry Programme of the International Federation of Building and Woodworkers). A Swedish trade union organisation issues quality control labels to manufacturers on the basis of a system of references that it has drawn up (TCO on monitors, software, etc.).

18. The ETUC considers that in the framework of a European strategy, the public authorities must widen the framework for voluntary initiatives by sectors issuing declarations intended for consumers or public or private buyers. Such declarations must involve trade unions in the elaboration and implementation of policies during the control phases. Systems cannot be used simply to rubber-stamp self-declaration practices. In any event these systems of voluntary declarations cannot be used to replace the supervisory role of the public authorities. The environmental objectives must be defined by the public authorities.

19. In conclusion, in the framework of the evaluation and revision of the "Guidelines for employment", the ETUC calls for the fact that experience shows that environmental activities generate new jobs to be taken into account. In this connection, and in order to satisfy these needs, appropriate education, training and qualification policies must be developed:

- creation of new training programmes specifically adapted to environmental jobs,
- recognition of new professional diplomas and qualifications,
- setting up environmental-related training programmes.

20. The ETUC insists on the need for Europe to be driving force at international level. In this context, the conclusions of Göteborg must represent the European Union's contribution internationally, not only at the Rio+10 conference but also within the WTO. It is increasingly apparent that the different international instruments in the field of environmental protection, whether in the field of climatic changes or biodiversity, the relevant national implementation measures, as well as national decisions for the protection of the environment, can be referred to the WTO under the procedure for resolving differences. Several complaints have thus been filed: the complaint of Canada against France with regard to the ban on asbestos is a recent example. The panel's decision is not reassuring as to the possibility of subsequent actions by the WTO to limit preventive measures taken by authorities on the basis of the principle of precaution. The decision of the appeals body confirms this concern. In addition, conflicts of competence between different international instruments could arise, for example the Kyoto protocol which contains trade policy provisions. The European Union must act in order to clarify the relations between the instruments concerning the environment and trade. The aim of this action must be to obtain WTO recognition of the international social and environmental agreements which are essential to sustainable development.