

COMMUNIQUÉ



EUROPEAN FOUNDATION

for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions

New director

Raymond-Pierre Bodin has been appointed the new director of the Foundation by the European Commission for a five-year term and will take up his post at the beginning of May next. Mr Bodin, a French national, was, in his last job, vice president of human resources in a big multinational company where he had responsibility for industrial relations and training/employment at French, European and worldwide levels. He was also the chairperson of the Agence Nationale pour L'Emploi in France to which he was appointed by the French Council of Ministers in 1996.

The Foundation celebrates 25 years

The Foundation hosted a celebratory concert and reception at the National Concert Hall in Dublin to mark the 25th anniversary of its establishment. The concert was attended by the Administrative Board of the Foundation, representing the social partners and governments in each Member State, representatives of the European Commission, MEPs, members of the diplomatic corps and Foundation staff. Jan Willem van den Braak, as chairperson of the Administrative Board, welcomed the guests on behalf of the Foundation. He said that the celebration marked the end of an era of development and expansion of the Foundation from small beginnings in 1976 it had established itself as a centre of expertise at European level in the field of working and living conditions. These concerns remained central to European policy makers and the Foundation would continue to contribute to the fullest extent in its research and advisory capacity to the search for solutions, he said.



Eric Verborgh, acting director, with Jan Willem van den Braak, chairperson of the Board, at the 25th anniversary celebration.

He spoke of the new era in which economics and labour relations will be re-shaped. He said the Foundation had an important contribution to make to that "shaping of the future". He said this year's special meetings of the Board which were part of the celebration events could be seen as starting points of this new period.

On 22 March, the Administrative Board held its plenary session at which the Annual Report for 1999 was approved and draft estimates of revenue and expenditure for 2001 were adopted. The main work of the Board was an in-depth discussion on the new four-year programme of work (2001-2004) which is currently being prepared. 🌟

Mr Bodin is familiar with the work of the Foundation. As Professor of Social Psychology of Labour for Pierre Mendes-France University until 1989, he created and managed a research team which carried out research for the Foundation and other European bodies. He is the author of numerous publications on working time, labour organisation, working conditions and industrial relations.

Mr Bodin replaces Mr Clive Purkiss who retired as director in June 1999. Eric Verborgh who has held the position of acting director since the retirement of Clive Purkiss will resume his post of deputy director to which he has been appointed for a further term. 🌟

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Working conditions workshop

Pascal Paoli and Mia Latta, research managers at the Foundation, addressed a Green/EFA workshop on working conditions organised by the members of the political group of the European Parliament on 10 February in Brussels. Hélène Flautre, MEP, opened and chaired the workshop. A further discussion group, chaired by Pierre Jonckheer, MEP, discussed the Portuguese Presidency proposals, "Employment, economic reforms and social cohesion – towards a Europe based on innovation and knowledge". The Foundation presentation was based on research findings including results from the Second European Survey on Working Conditions and the Employment Options of the Future survey. Pascal Paoli gave an overview of working conditions in Europe covering the current position and the emerging trends.

Warning against complacency

Pascal Paoli warned the participants that policy makers could not afford to be complacent about working conditions. They should not presume that they are automatically improving. He said that working conditions are not an issue of the past but of the present and the future. Three specific areas of concern were highlighted by Pascal Paoli: intensification of work; the consequences of temporary work and its links with the deterioration of working conditions, and the ongoing exposure of workers to physical hazards like noise, repetitive work and chemicals.

Labour market participation

Mia Latta presented the findings of the Employment Options of the Future survey, focusing on labour market participation and looking at the realities and preferences expressed in the survey. She looked at the links between precarious employment and working conditions. She demonstrated how two variables, age and gender, are key determinates as to who is employed and how and who is not.

The survey findings deal in depth with preferences expressed by the workforce in relation to working hours. She stressed that working hours are a complex issue that cannot be reduced to a full-time/part-time debate. Part-time work must be viewed in a holistic light, looking at the whole employment relationship. This includes such elements as: voluntary/involuntary part-time; substantial/marginal part time; and quality of work such as work intensification; and access to training. As such, it is a different concept from full-time employment, said Mia Latta.

Questions, discussion and debate with participants, MEPs, members of the European Trades Union Congress (ETUC), researchers, experts and representatives of NGOs, followed the presentation. The MEPs suggested that the Foundation's findings had an important role to play. The view was expressed that too little attention has been paid to working conditions issues and that the workshop was a way for this group to re-allocate working conditions as an item on the political agenda. 🌐

Health and safety

The 4th International Occupational Safety, Health and Environment Information Conference – e-OSHE World: seeing the future – will be held at the Foundation in Dublin on 22–23 June 2000. The conference is organised by Sheila Pantry Associates Ltd and the Irish Health and Safety Authority. The main theme is the impact of recent electronic developments on the dissemination of occupational safety, health and environment information. It is aimed at occupational safety, health and environment information officers, information centres' staff, website managers, publishers and trainers. Contact: dimitrios.politis@eurofound.ie or consult <http://panizzi.shef.ac.uk/EOSHE/>

Eco-efficiency

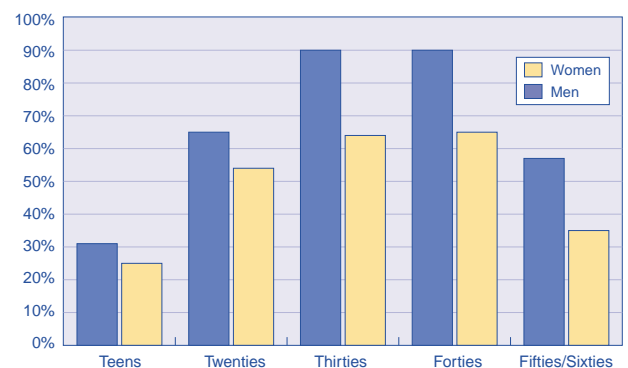
The Foundation was the main exhibitor at a recent conference (March 1–3) staged by the Portuguese presidency in association with the Portuguese national institute of industrial engineering and technology (INETI). *Business, Eco-Efficiency and Sustainable Development* attracted over 200 participants.

The main focus of the three days of presentations and debate was the present and future deployment by industry of various environmental management tools promoted by the EU. The effectiveness of environmental management schemes such as EMAS, eco-labelling of environmentally friendly products, as well as environmental accounting/reporting all came under scrutiny. [A short report on the conference will be prepared]. 🌐 Contact john.hurley@eurofound.ie.

research in figures

Who are those currently in paid employment?
Participation in paid work by age and gender

Source: Employment Options of the Future survey



The early years

Eberhard Köhler, head of operations, has been at the Foundation since its inception 25 years ago, initially as a research manager. Looking back, he describes how the Foundation has evolved as a centre of expertise within the European context.

Starting out

"Effectively, we started from scratch; we had the basic document setting out the mission of the Foundation – the Council regulation – but nothing in terms of an actual programme. That was our first task in 1976: putting together a framework programme which identified and covered areas of urgent concern, within the very broad framework of working and living conditions. The four-year framework programme was then translated into annual research programmes on which we could base research projects.

"Our strengths were that we had a distinct audience to service: the European Community institutions (as they were then) with the express inclusion of the social partners and national governments as decision-making partners on the Administrative Board. This helped us greatly in finding our place in the mosaic of institutions within Europe. It has continued to be a leading strength of the Foundation and ensures the relevance of its programme to the main actors in Europe."

Technological changes

"At that time, technological change was a very significant development in terms of both living and working conditions. Technology in itself is neither good nor bad: it is how you apply technology to the workplace and to private life that determines if it is beneficial or not. We started from the premise that technological development should not determine how people work; it should be people who decide how new technologies work for them. We wanted to find ways of introducing new technology into the work place and show examples of how this can be done for the benefit of those working and living with that technology."

Research in this area covered many sectors. One important focus was on the introduction of technology in offices. Early research showed that new technology has to be

associated with changes in work organisation and working conditions. The Foundation carried out considerable work in this area and work organisation continues to be a central area of concern of the Foundation's programme of work. Eberhard Köhler illustrates, with an early example, how work organisation can offer efficient solutions to technological problems. A company, which used card punching for data inputting, introduced computer terminals. These were less noisy and created less dust yet suddenly and inexplicably the staff complained about the levels of dust and also had skin complaints. The reason was that the computer screens were creating heat which was causing the dust to rise and



Eberhard Köhler, head of operations

move and so become an irritant. Rather than seeking a technological solution, the company was able to introduce organisational change by decentralizing the computer department; one computer decentralized to each department did not cause these adverse conditions.

"Our basic principle was that the introduction of new technology should be accompanied by an appropriate system of work organisation. Our work has tried to identify what are the optimal ways of organising work in order to maximize the benefits of new technology."

Working and living

"While there was considerable development in the area of working conditions in the early years of the Foundation, the area of living

conditions was underdeveloped. The European Parliament brought this to the board's attention and gave the Foundation a special mandate to pay more institutionalised interest in this area. The Foundation's approach is to look at these areas as being mutually dependent. We try to find an integrated or joint approach to living and working conditions in all appropriate projects."

Some of the areas in which the Foundation pioneered work became so important that the political decision makers decided to set up specialised agencies for these areas: for example, the Health and Safety at Work Agency in Bilbao and also the Environment Agency in Copenhagen.

"While we have grown from reasonably small beginnings in 1976, our approach to problem solving is the same. We are not a day to day political advisory body, we look to the medium and long term in order to anticipate change and developments. We seek to underpin the political decision-making process with scientifically based, unbiased research results. It is our function to lay out the different options and associated consequences of policy initiatives, giving the policy makers an informed choice on how to move forward," says Eberhard Köhler. 🌐



3 – 6 May

Conference: Transitions towards a Sustainable Europe, Vienna

5 – 6 May

Portuguese Presidency conference: Europe, Globalisation and the Future of Social Policy, Lisbon

11 – 12 May

Portuguese Presidency conference: Sustainable and Competitive Growth, Lisbon

11 – 13 May

Portuguese Presidency seminar: New Challenges of Social Protection: the Dependency Phenomenon



Publications mentioned

Second European Survey on Working Conditions (1996)

Available on disk

(Full text in EN with summaries in all 11 languages)

SX-05-97-414-EN

€20

Working Conditions in the European Union: Summary

Available online in ES DA DE GR EN FR IT

NL PT FI SV

www.eurofound.ie

European Works Council Agreements Online

www.eurofound.ie/ewc/

Negotiating European Works Councils: An Analysis of Agreements under Article 13

Available in DE FR EN

SX-16-98-320-*-C

€20

Practical Examples of SMEs: Design for Sustainable Development

SX-18-98-906-EN-C

€18

Sustainable Development Online

<http://susdev.eurofound.ie/>

New publications

Economic Instruments for Sustainable Development: Improving the External and Working Environment Part 2

SX-18-98-736-EN-C

€18

EIRObserver 2/00

Available online on the EIRO website

www.eiro.eurofound.ie

Times in the City and Quality of Life Summary leaflet

Available in DE, EN (to be published in all languages)


www.eurofound.ie

• Free publications can be downloaded directly from the website and priced publications can be ordered online (www.eurofound.ie). They can also be ordered from your usual bookshop or from one of the sales agents of the Office for Official Publications of the European Communities. (Addresses available at www.eur-op.eu.int)

Supporting SMEs

Initiatives to support SMEs in the move towards sustainable development are the subject of the latest Foundation report in its series on *Design for Sustainable Development*. The report provides an inventory of SME support initiatives (projects, programmes and networks) relating to more sustainable industrial and commercial activity; it highlights innovative case studies and give a concise comparative overview of the current situation of support systems in the EU and the USA.

The report complements the Foundation online database of initiatives: the SME Support network (available at <http://susdev.eurofound.ie>) which is one of five regularly updated online directories making up SD Online.

The Foundation has had a particular focus on SMEs throughout its sustainable development programme 1997-2000. To conclude the research programme, a European conference on sustainable development – SMEs and New Enterprises – will be held at the Foundation on 12-13 October next which will examine practical examples of sustainable product design, support systems and training for SMEs and an evaluation of the Foundation's research. 


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Social Public Services

Foundation's research work is examining the impacts of changes and reforms in social public services (health, education, social services, housing, employment, social security) on both users and providers of services. It is examining how more tailored services have developed to meet the needs of three particular client groups specifically through promoting improved user involvement and service integration. The client groups are: older people living alone;

adults with mental illness or mental handicap; and unemployed young people. Ten Member States are participating in the research and have completed their national studies. In addition, supplementary research was undertaken in the five remaining Member States.

The European synthesis report pays particular attention to the mix of service providers and the building of partnerships between State, community, voluntary and private market provision. It looks at the effects of reform on working conditions and quality of service, and at the contribution of quality improvement initiatives.

Key material is drawn from examples of good practice and from detailed case studies. The roles and responsibilities of the different parties involved – government at local, regional and national level, NGOs, other service providers in the private or social economy sectors, trade unions, consumer or user organizations – is examined. The European synthesis report will be published in the autumn. 

EWCs

Practical experience of 25 European Works Councils (EWCs) were analysed and discussed by Hubert Krieger, research manager, at two international seminars of IG Metall in Berlin (30.1.- 1.2.2000) and in Sprockhoevel (7.3.2000). Both seminars were attended by more than 70 employee representatives of large European multinational companies like Eriksson, Ford, Danfoss, Mercedes, Electrolux-Zanussi, BMW-Rover, ARBED and Kvaerner. The need for more systematic support of the work of EWCs by increasing the awareness of the existence of the relevant Foundation databases (EIRO, glossaries, EWC agreements) on the Internet, and of comparative empirical research on working time, restructuring and pacts for employment and competitiveness, equal opportunities and work organisation was expressed at both seminars. 

communiqué

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