



## EPSU argues for social dialogue and investment in public administrations with Italian Minister and EU DGs, Rome 2 and 5 December 2014

EPSU-led TUNED met the Italian Minister for administration and simplification, Ms Madia in Rome on 2 December, amid a series of industrial action, students protests and a general strike planned for 12 December in the country.

The objective of the meeting was to convey trade union messages ahead of the informal meeting of EU Public Administration Ministers who had not met for seven years. The TUNED delegation consisted of EPSU and CESI secretariats and EPSU's Italian affiliate CGIL.

TUNED congratulated the Minister's initiative to hold an EU ministerial meeting to discuss drivers of a modern administration and scope for EU cooperation. The last seven years have seen a stronger role of the EU in national administrations in terms of budget, wages, jobs and priorities. These decisions are taken in the framework of the EU semester by Finance and Economy ministers which in many countries are not responsible public administrations; it means that TUNED has no EU interlocutor to air concerns and alternative proposals. TUNED underlined the human cost of EU-coordinated austerity with millions of job and pay cuts including in central government, with long lasting consequences on the morale of public employees. Many countries were becoming seriously under-administered incapable of tackling social, economic and ecological challenges and corporate tax avoidance.

Unlike in the early 90s when the Italian administration put social dialogue centre stage to tackle successfully massive inflation, today's government, as many others, had opted to sideline collective bargaining on pay. TUNED also provided background to the EU sectoral social dialogue committee for central government administration (SDC GA) which, with 16 national employers including Italy, was the most representative body to negotiate long term solutions to improve working conditions in central government and restore the trust of workers and citizens. But there was no EU social dialogue without a national social dialogue and all members of EUPAN, the informal network of public administrations, should become members of EUPAE, the employers' platform in the SDC CGA. The pending review of EUPAN would be a good opportunity to revisit the issue.

Minister Madia strongly supported more EU cooperation in view of the Semester and queried about the reasons why not all the 28 national administrations were in the EU social dialogue committee. She agreed that job freezes would not allow to meet users' needs. Instead of a cost cutting exercise, she saw modernisation as a process to save time and bring services closer to citizens through digitalisation and building of new offices. There was disagreement regarding the comparison with the private sector as the Minister did not think that the situation in the Italian administration was as bad. She recognised the importance of involving all staff in reforms and of a good social dialogue which did not however, imply negotiations. For TUNED there was little point in dividing public and private sector workers and reminded that the EU definition of social dialogue covered negotiations.

Little of the above exchange was reflected in the one-page conclusions adopted on 3 December by the EU Ministers for public administration. They recognised for the first time the influence of the EU Semester on national public administrations and that modernisation of administrations cannot be limited to budgets and is also about improving citizens' trust and decisions must be taken on the basis of evidence. There is a subliminal reference to repeat the holding of Ministerial meetings but no reference to social dialogue although its

importance both at EU and national levels was mentioned by French Minister Lebranchu at the meeting.

Closing the week, a 22-strong TUNED delegation attended the biannual informal meeting of EU public administration Directors General on 5 December (EUPAN).

As per usual, this was an opportunity to report on the activities of the Social Dialogue Committee in central government administrations – SDC CGA. French Deputy Director General Thierry Legoff, on behalf of EUPAE, reported on the ongoing discussion to establish common minimum standards on information and consultation rights. He said that reaching an Agreement would be desirable but the first step was to agree a common text. Britta Lejon, on behalf of TUNED, added that information and consultation rights were essential for a good quality administration. She looked forward to first meeting of the information and consultation drafting group scheduled for 6 February.

Italian researcher Ms Greco-Tonegutti reported on the implementation of the European Agreement for a quality administration adopted by TUNED and EUPAE in 2012 with a focus on administrations dealing with asylum requests, youth unemployment and pensions. The conclusions of her survey of more than 300 employees and managers in a dozen of countries, were that much more needed to be done to improve the quality of the administrations surveyed notably by being more proactive and reaching out to the users especially those in a vulnerable position. The short-term gains of outsourcing often had a negative impact on the quality of the services. The spread of non-permanent employment contracts, the lack of training, low pay levels that did not match competences were underlined as well as the need to better involve users. The lack of a common definition of quality public services and of social dialogue at national level made it difficult to evaluate the situation.

TUNED secretariat concluded the SDC CGA was now working on a set of policy recommendations based on the survey findings. A draft had been sent to the Committee for comments by 20 December. During the discussion, Italian officials including of Aran, the employers' agency, said that social dialogue was a pillar of EU social policy, enriched democracy and was part of a good governance. The social dialogue in central government played a very positive role in stopping the crisis in the country in the 90s and benefited the Italian system and allowed the country to join the Euro. However, the reopening of pay bargaining (stalled for the past 6 years) depended on the right conditions being in place but other issues could be dealt with in the social dialogue. Italian CGIL- FP representative said that the situation had become unsustainable with low pay levels for the majority and that a real social dialogue included negotiations of pay.

The next informal meeting of the DGs and TUNED is scheduled for 12 June in Riga, Latvia.

- The Conclusions of the EU Public Administration Ministers, 3 December can be found @ <http://www.eupan.eu/en/documents/show/&tid=860>
- Resolution of the 63rd meeting of EU directors General for public administration
- @ <http://www.eupan.eu/en/events/show/&tid=133>