



EuroCommerce and Uni-Europa Commerce

Joint Statement on Corporate Social Responsibility

1. EuroCommerce and Uni-Europa Commerce are the European social partners, which represent employers and workers in commerce and distribution. This industry employs more than 22.5 million people in the European Union, in 4.7 million enterprises. The value added of 13 per cent, which commerce and distribution create in the European Union area, contributes to the well being of all European citizens.
2. EuroCommerce and Uni-Europa Commerce are committed to corporate social responsibility (CSR) and welcome the Commission Green Paper on promoting a European framework for Corporate Social Responsibility¹, the Commission Communication concerning Corporate Social Responsibility², as well as the Council resolution of 2-3 December 2002, defining CSR as a “concept whereby companies integrate social and environmental concerns in their business operations and in interaction with their stakeholders on a voluntary basis”.
3. Trade is becoming global and spreads its operations worldwide. Corporate decisions and actions have repercussions on global markets, the environment and mankind. Few industries impact as strongly on the daily lives of all Europeans as commerce. The constant contact with customers has a decisive impact on the success of most enterprises and requires a tight interaction between companies, their employees, business partners in the supply chain and the surrounding society.
4. By their actions the European social partners for commerce endeavour to promote quality services, that are well adapted to consumer needs and expectations and are produced by well-qualified and engaged personnel, working under good employment conditions. In this context CSR has proven repeatedly that it can contribute positively to the competitiveness of enterprises in commerce.
5. While recognising the voluntary nature of CSR, and while promoting a balanced and broad approach to CSR, including economic, social and environmental issues as well as consumer interests, EuroCommerce and Uni-Europa Commerce, in their social dialogue, have committed themselves to contributing to the CSR agenda. In this context they have undertaken many initiatives related to CSR.

Promoting CSR in European commerce

6. In line with their activities in the sectoral social dialogue the social partners for commerce have reached a joint statement on combating violence in commerce (1995), a joint statement on combating child labour (1996), a joint agreement on fundamental rights and principles at work (1999), a joint statement on combating racism and xenophobia (2000), as well as a recent joint agreement on guidelines for age diversity in commerce (2002). They have produced vocational training material to encourage workers and management to use new technologies, thereby promoting life-long learning, and have organised high-level seminars and conferences on CSR.

¹ COM(2001) 366 final.

² COM(2002) 347 final

7. CSR is part of a concerted effort by all those concerned towards meeting shared objectives by entering into dialogue with all stakeholders, including the company's own personnel and their organisations. Therefore CSR does not only relate to external aspects, but also to internal aspects such as health and safety at work and management of human resources. Yet, CSR cannot replace compliance with national and European legislation, international labour norms or collective agreements.
8. EuroCommerce and Uni-Europa Commerce welcome the positive and active approach of many leading European-based international retailers and wholesalers to implement CSR policies, including through strengthening their social dialogue on the different levels of their structures, and through integrating CSR policies into the work of their European works councils. The European social partners invite all commerce companies in Europe, large and small, to share this approach.
9. Responding to the challenge of promoting social corporate behaviour, EuroCommerce and Uni-Europa Commerce, the social partners for commerce will endeavour to:
 - promote corporate social responsibility throughout business activities,
 - raise awareness about corporate social responsibility in European commerce and distribution, among enterprises and their workers, as well as among their own members and affiliates, including through dialogue, exchange of information, best practices and expertise,
 - inform on and further develop the social dialogue between employers and employees at European, national and company levels, on appropriate issues related to corporate social responsibility,
 - familiarise their members, as well as companies and their workers, about existing good practice, with a view to facilitate, if necessary, appropriate solutions for improving employment and working conditions while developing their business activities,
 - continue monitoring previous agreements and statements from their European social dialogue, and follow-up on initiatives which support the positive development of employment and working conditions, taking into account workers' needs for employment security and companies' needs to respond to changing consumer demands in flexible ways, and which increase the quality of services to the consumers.

Monitoring and assessment

To follow-up on this joint statement the European social partners will endeavour:

- to convene roundtable discussions, exploring concrete measures to promote corporate social responsibility,
 - to collect and disseminate good practices,
 - to ensure monitoring of the follow-up of the European social dialogue for commerce related to corporate social responsibility,
 - to monitor and assess on a regular basis the follow-up to this statement.
- 12 EuroCommerce and Uni-Europa Commerce believe that the success of this statement will depend on the commitment of the social partners, who have a particularly important role to play in promoting this statement and its principles.



13 EuroCommerce and Uni-Europa Commerce wish to place emphasis on the importance for companies and employees and their trade unions to monitor developments related to this statement and to follow the spirit of this statement when incorporating CSR policies in their activities. Where they exist, European Works Councils can also play a positive role in this respect.

For EuroCommerce

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Brussels, 5 November 2003

ANNEX:

Overview of related EuroCommerce and Uni-Europa Commerce agreements and initiatives

1. The Joint Statement on Combating Violence in Commerce

The Joint Statement on Combating Violence in Commerce of 1995 addresses a serious issue of concern both for companies and their workers. The statement gives guidelines on measures to avoid incidents of violence, but also for dealing with them when they take place.

Noting that violence and abuse against shop workers is increasing all over Europe, the social partners have recently decided to launch a joint project in 2004, with a view of actively contributing towards ensuring the safety and dignity of the people working in European commerce.

EuroCommerce and Uni-Europa Commerce welcome the recent initiatives of European commerce to address the issue through social dialogue.

2. The Joint Statement on Combating Child Labour

The Joint Statement on Combating Child Labour of 1996 is a strong expression by the European social partners for commerce against the abuse of the human rights of children. It is particularly focused on the obligations of European traders to take all reasonable measures, adapted to their possibilities, to ensure that the products sold are not produced through child labour.

EuroCommerce and Uni-Europa Commerce have followed up on this agreement through their active participation in the global action which lead to a new International Labour Convention, the Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (182/1999) being adopted in 1999. They have also produced a study related to the issue, and decided to keep child labour on the agenda of the European social dialogue for commerce.

3. The Agreement on Fundamental Principles and Rights at Work

This agreement of 1999 demands the full respect in European commerce for the principles of freedom of association and collective bargaining, and prohibits all forms of child labour, of forced labour and of all forms of discrimination.

In this agreement, the European social partners for commerce state that they firmly support the aim of a worldwide improvement of social standards. They also want to lend their support to innovative measures aimed at promoting fundamental rights at work worldwide.

The parties to this agreement acknowledge that while large companies are able to apply more direct measures to avoid dealing with products that are manufactured in violation with core labour standards, than small and medium sized companies, the same general objectives apply to all. They also agree to work towards a European commerce sector that is productive, internationally competitive and based on the respect of both employers and workers, and express their willingness to further promote the respect of the fundamental principles of human rights, notably as embodied in the International Labour Organisation (ILO) Declaration of 18 June 1998 on the fundamental rights and principles at work.

4. The Joint Statement on Combating Racism and Xenophobia

This joint statement of 2000 defines commerce as an industry, which can thrive only in an environment where stability and openness allows all people to go about their daily lives as fully accepted partners in their workplaces, communities and countries. It recognises that the visible role of retail and wholesale trade and the active social dialogue for commerce give the social partners an obligation to address the problems of racism and xenophobia.



Referring to the ILO Declaration on Fundamental Rights and Principles at Work and confirming their own agreement within the European social dialogue, EuroCommerce and Uni-Europa Commerce emphasize that any discrimination on the grounds of race, ethnic or national origin, religion or any other comparable reason is in contravention with the fundamental principles of human rights and as such unacceptable. Commerce enterprises and any persons representing these enterprises must abstain from such discrimination in all their activities and functions, including employment, training, the setting of wages and defining working conditions.

The European social partners in commerce recommend that enterprises and their associations as part of their social dialogue on different levels establish guidelines and codes of conduct, which contribute to combating racism and xenophobia and promoting non-discrimination. They also recommend that the problems of racism and xenophobia be included in all applicable training programmes, to create a broad awareness of the necessity for all commerce employers and employees to consider and address the issue in their daily activities.

5. Agreement on Guidelines Supporting Age Diversity in Commerce

This most recent agreement on age diversity guidelines dates from 26 March 2003. The agreement recognises that the social partners have a special role to play in finding new forms of work and training, to facilitate the continuous integration of ageing workers. Ageing workers shall not be subject to discrimination at the workplace and an age-neutral approach should be adopted as regards employment relations. Recruitment, vocational training and the distribution of positions within the enterprise should depend on skills and abilities, regardless of the age of the person concerned.