

Delegation of SUEZ EWC meets Commission's competition officials

A delegation of the EWC visited DG Competition Director-General Lowe, 30 June, Brussels. The delegation representing 128.000 workers in Europe out of 157.000 workers worldwide, discussed the announced merger between Gas de France and Suez and the role of the European Commission.

Issues raised included:

- The weakness of the information and consultation rights in the European Works Council Directive and the need to revise and improve the Directive;
- The importance of the social dimension of the merger and the need to respect the social commitments Suez has engaged in;
- Its opposition to a take-over bid that would result in breaking the company up;
- The demand that the EWC be consulted by the European Commission when considering Commission proposals for disinvestments in case the Commission believes the new merger has a dominant position on certain markets.
- If the merger goes ahead and in the light of the economic situation of the energy companies there is no reason social commitments should not be honoured and improved upon to ensure that a possible merger also brings benefits for the employees. Guarantees for jobs need to be part of the merger;
- The delegation also referred to Europe's failing internal market, lack of a European energy policy and the importance of fair, reasonable and stable energy prices for domestic and industrial users. The public interest is more than a blind application of competition rules.

- If a merger goes ahead it should actually result in more investment in infrastructure and power plants. So far the internal market for electricity and gas has failed to do so. Announcements of the companies that investment will be part of the merger, have to be translated in concrete and guaranteed plans;
- Nuclear safety needs to be secured. This is an absolute condition for the merger as well as for any disinvestments the Commission might propose;

We expect that the European Commission takes account of the impact on the workers of the proposed merger, and of its possible proposals for disinvestments. The viability of the resulting company in the different countries and in the different branches such as water, waste and energy services is to be ensured to prevent the merger results in job losses. The EWC demanded equal treatment of the workers' side with company management, including in discussions on disinvestments.

While the discussion was constructive and the Commission explained the process no commitments were made other than that the Commission would take our concerns into account.

The EWC financial expert accompanied the delegation which included the Secretary of the EWC of Suez, the secretary of the EWC of Tractebel and the Secretary of the Comité de Groupe France. EPSU was represented by the Deputy General Secretary.

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