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Strengthening social dialogue in public services is essential across Europe

In reaction to the recently published Industrial Relations and Social Dialogue in Europe 2012 report and the related European Commission (EC) conference in Budapest, CEEP welcomed the extensive focus put on industrial relations in the public sector. **“We are very pleased that the EC’s analysis puts such a strong emphasis on some public services. This signifies a real recognition of the importance of ensuring effective social dialogue in these areas for the resilience of the economy and social cohesion as a whole”**, declared Valeria Ronzitti, General Secretary of CEEP.

“Nevertheless, we regret that once again it is not exactly clear what we are talking about” continued Valeria Ronzitti, highlighting the mixed use in the text between the terms public sector and public services. The term ‘public services’ is far more appropriate, encapsulating all services of general interest such as transport and water services as well as all types of providers. **The narrow approach of the report referring only to public administration, health and education does not capture the real extent of public services.** “Recent texts published by the EC have embraced the functional definition of public services as established by CEEP in its 2010 ‘Mapping of Public Services’ project: why not use it also in the analysis of Industrial Relations and thereby reflect the reality on the ground?” questioned Ms Ronzitti, calling for coherence within the EC services.

Going from terminology to analysis, CEEP agrees with the report that social dialogue in public services is under increasing strain. The impact of the crisis has been significant, as fiscal consolidation measures in some countries have excluded recourse to social dialogue in the restructuring and modernisation processes. **“This is of great concern as the unwillingness of some governments to support collectively agreed solutions damages not only the quality of service provision but also trust in the democratic process and the attractiveness of public services as a future employer of choice”**, stated Ms Ronzitti.

Finally, Ms Ronzitti echoed the reference made at the conference by Sophie Thörne, Chair of CEEP Social Affairs Board, to the three vital prerequisites for social dialogue: **A suitable legal framework, a genuine capacity of social partners to organise their common activities and negotiations, and mutual trust and respect.** **“Strengthening these three fundamentals at all levels is an essential element of the recovery from the crisis and preserving the European social model.”**

For further information, please contact:
Priya Klinkenberg- tel. +32 (0) 2 219 27 98

CEEP gathers enterprises and organisations from across Europe, both public and private, at national, regional and local level, which are public employers or providers of services of general interest. CEEP members employ a quarter of the EU workforce: CEEP is one of the three European Social Partners.