

INDUSTRIALL EUROPE AND CEEMET

JOINT PLATFORM FOR THE EUROPEAN ELECTIONS 2024

Brussels, 15 March 2024

The European MET industries are the backbone of the European economy and are responsible for more than 17 million direct, and 35 million indirect jobs, in the EU. Over the last few years, the MET sectors and its workforce have faced unprecedented waves of crisis ranging from the lasting effects of the pandemic, to supply chain disruptions that exposed our heavy dependence on others, war in Europe and an energy crisis that has crippled households and industries.

This multi-faceted crisis needs holistic responses. Support from the European level is more important than ever for the MET sector and the jobs and for preventing an existential crisis for some industries.

In that context, industriAll Europe and Ceemet have set their priorities for the European MET Sector and in view of the 2024 European Election.

Priorities for the European MET Sector

a. Development of a robust Industrial Strategy for quality industrial jobs in Europe

While the scale of industrial policy elsewhere, in particular in the US and China, has dramatically increased the competitive advantage of those countries, the EU must develop a robust industrial strategy that leads to the creation of quality industrial jobs across Europe.

Indeed, a robust industrial strategy must guarantee a level playing field (outside and within the EU), providing an investment plan for enhancing industrial competitiveness promoting robust value chains, and fostering a stable investment environment for companies, SMEs, to the benefit of both workers and companies.

A predictable and transparent business environment is the foundation for attracting private and public investment, ensuring a consistent flow of resources into the sector. The availability of financial resources is necessary to stimulate industrial investment in innovative green and digital technologies and production methods in Europe with guarantees to ensure the retention and creation of quality jobs, while ensuring a fair share of the wealth created. Policymakers should thus work towards the creation of suitable enabling conditions for attracting investment. Indeed, improving the investment environment is of vital importance to facilitate investment flows to Europe.

An industrial policy must not only be about supporting 'clean tech' investors, but also supporting the transformation of existing industrial assets in the founding industries which are essential parts of the strategic value chains.

Competition policy is one of the most visible symbols of the functioning of the EU. In this way, competition policy should be a driver of an efficient internal market that delivers growth and jobs all over the European Union.

A crucial pillar of a robust industrial strategy will be to secure reliable energy sources at competitive prices, which will reduce the costs for citizens and businesses.

The green and digital transformation has never been more challenging for both companies and workers. It must go hand in hand with a just transition framework which ensures the effective anticipation and management of employment and skills, provides security for companies and employees faced with these industrial transitions, underpinned by strong and stable involvement of social partners including at sector level and quality training. Social conditionalities on access to EU funds should promote a fair transformation of the MET industries focusing on social cohesion, quality employment and promotion of social dialogue.

b. Ensure a stable and coherent regulatory environment for the sector

MET industries and its workforce operate today in a highly complex, competitive, globalised economy and in a world of growing socio-political and economic uncertainties. Along with these challenges, our industries and its workforce are currently facing massive technological changes while trying to deliver on the green and digital transformation.

The current fragmentation of the EU regulatory framework for the sector creates a context of uncertainty that undermines investment and weakens market demand. The EU should reshape and improve the rules of the Single Market including by removing barriers for cross border trade and labor mobility including posting. The Commission should make proposals to streamline and better articulate regulations ensuring that EU law-making delivers for everyone including companies, workers and trade unions. The Commission should also conduct extensive impact assessments and competitiveness checks before proposing new regulations, including closely monitoring investment and innovation capacity.

For us, quality regulation is a long-term investment in the general interest, and a solid basis for a well-functioning internal market.

c. Develop a re-skilling and up-skilling agenda

Re-skilling and up-skilling policies must be put at the core of a renewed European industrial strategy. They are also a pre-condition to successfully deliver on the green and digital transition. The MET social partners continue to persistently advocate for decision-makers throughout Europe to firmly support the re-skilling and up-skilling of the MET industries' workforce in particular in industries which are experiencing significant technological transformations such as automotive, aerospace or shipbuilding.

Urgent steps are needed to enhance workers' skills through labour-market relevant continuous vocational education and training (CVET) throughout their careers.

Social partners at all levels have a critical role to play in anticipating and managing skills' needs and organising up and re-skilling. For example, they are key actors in counselling and guiding employees, especially low skilled, on the importance of undergoing training as well as in furnishing information about the nature of training, tailored to companies' needs and workers' skill sets.

SMEs face specific issues when it comes to putting in place training schemes. Targeted support must be deployed in a simple and user-friendly manner for companies to deploy right skilling schemes adapted to the needs of labour markets.

Many up- and re-skilling schemes have proven to be successful at the national and regional level and have effectively boosted training participation in our industries. EU policymakers should facilitate a structured exchange of best practices and leverage these successful examples.

Responsive VET systems are crucial in addressing the prevalent skills shortages within the MET industries and in boosting our industrial basis. The demand for various types of skilled workers, including mechanics, electric and electronic technicians, boilermakers, welders, electricians, and those with vocational backgrounds, remains pressing within the MET industries. EU Policy makers must ensure that adequate funding is made available and targeted to the right priorities (green, digital and demographic transitions) to support well-functioning Vocational Education and Training systems. Furthermore, it should be possible to ease the rules governing EU funding in the event of a major transformation, in particular for SMEs which do not have other specific resources at their disposal.

The rapid transformation of the MET industries underscores the growing demand for professionals in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics (STEM) and Information and Communication Technology (ICT). Intensifying the investment in STEM related studies and disciplines is a necessity to deliver on the green and digital transformation.

Last but not least, we highlight the need to continue investing in the development of strategies on the anticipation of skills needs in order to design education and training programs that are labour market-driven, but broad enough to provide a basis for further education if needs change.

d. Social Dialogue and social partners' involvement

Social dialogue is a fundamental pillar of the European Social model and is today a crucial component in dealing with the twin transition.

At national level, recognised sectoral social partners play a critical role in shaping the world of work in the frame of collective bargaining. Actually, collective agreements remain an important tool to deal with the rapid transformation that the world of work is undergoing due to multiple structural factors including the twin transition, the shortage of labour and skilled workforce, the ageing of the workforce etc. These agreements provide a framework for addressing labour market challenges and adapting employment conditions to the evolving needs of the world of work.

A robust and effective social dialogue can significantly contribute to industrial competitiveness and the creation of quality jobs. Actually, countries with strong social partners and a higher prevalence of

collective bargaining tend to have more resilient labour markets, characterized by lower numbers of low-paid workers and reduced levels of unemployment.

National and EU policy makers need to defend the key role that social partners play while fully respecting their autonomy. It is essential to leave social partners the necessary room for manoeuvre to find the most suitable and efficient tailor-made solutions that can sort out the growing challenges of the world of work. Sectoral social partners have a better understanding of what is happening on the ground and of the problems faced by their workforce and companies and can thus consider the specificity of their companies and of the workers in a certain sector.

Sectoral social partners play a significant role in shaping working conditions and wage setting in the MET sector through established collective bargaining systems in many Member States. Thus, it is imperative that policymakers at all levels refrain from interfering in collective bargaining systems, whether at the EU or national level. Well-functioning collective bargaining systems are the core of industrial relations and thus of industrial competitiveness and quality employment.

At the EU level, and in view of the privileged role that the TFEU gives the social partners, EU policy makers should consistently ensure that social partners are consulted within the appropriate time frame on all employment-related topics as well as on those initiatives that have an impact on the labour market.

In the transformation underway, all policies and legislative proposals are interconnected. Consequently, “greening policies” and “industrial policies”, for example, exert a substantial impact on labour markets and their principal actors: companies and workers. In light of this, we will continue to advocate for policymakers to consult social partners in the formulation and implementation of such policies. Ensuring the involvement of social partners is essential to comprehensively address the implications of the different policy initiatives in the world of work.

e. Ensuring a level global playing field

Fair trading conditions between the EU and its economic partners must be ensured, including all efforts to ensure a level playing field for decarbonization and partnerships for raw material supply, while respecting the UN Sustainable Development Goals and human rights in third countries.

Europe needs industries: MET industries are essential to develop solutions to meet the many challenges that we are facing with the green and digital transition. Strengthening industries must take place by maintaining and acquiring strong positions in the global value chains, ensuring quality jobs along the chain. Unfair competition can create an uneven playing field for European manufacturers. To safeguard the competitiveness of European manufacturing and workers’ jobs, the EU must proactively address these challenges and work towards fostering a level playing field, ensuring trade partners comply with the existing rules and effective trade defense instruments are in place. Diversification of the supply of raw materials, including the ratification of existing trade agreements and the negotiation of raw material partnerships must be promoted.

The European Union's international trade and investment policies must seek to protect and promote its principles and not undermine them. Trade policy must always be consistent with the goals of promoting inclusive and sustainable economic development, while fostering a competitive industry.
