The footwear sector represents a very important activity for the European Union's economy.

In 1993 it involved nearly half a million workers (approximately 300,000 directly and 150,000 indirectly).

In addition, the European Union is one of the largest footwear manufacturers: 1.1 billion pairs were produced in 1993.

This sector calls for qualified labour whose productive, traditional, but also creative and innovative qualifications find no alternative within the European Union.

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The European Confederation of the Footwear Industry (CEC) and the European Trade Union Committee of Textiles, Clothing and Leather (ETUC:TCL), convened within the social sectoral dialogue, tackled the issue of child labour in the sector, among other things.

Whereas:

- Convention n°138 of the International Labour Organization (ILO) regarding "the minimum age for employment";

- The European Council directive regarding "The Protection of Young Workers" (Com 94/33 dated June 22, 1994);
- The latest report drafted by the ILO on "Child labour" which clearly shows there is an upsurge in child labour not only in third countries but also in western countries;

- The recent Copenhagen Summit and its Programme for Action, which emphasizes (art. 54d) "the need to strive to eradicate all forms of child labour that are contrary to internationally accepted standards, to ensure full implementation of existing legislations on this issue, and wherever necessary, to encourage the endorsement of legislations with a view to implementing the Convention on Child Rights and ILO Conventions that ensure the protection of working children, through educational and health-oriented social services; the need to promote employment policies which aim at eradicating poverty in families";

- The ILO draft resolution dated November 1, 1996 (TMFTCL/1996/8) approved by the "Tripartite Meeting on the Globalisation of footwear, textiles and garment" and pertaining to child labour in the footwear, textiles and garment industries;

And further considering that:

- Child labour is undoubtedly an intolerable violation of human rights, and that some of the answers to this issue are within the social partners' reach;

- Child labour is a problem present in several industrial sectors, including the footwear sector in a number of countries throughout the world;

- Through its trade policy, and particularly the new Generalized System of Preferences (GSP) which includes provisions for (total or partial) temporary withdrawal of GSP benefits in case of coerced labour or slavery practices, and as of January 1, 1998 will include an incentive clause granting additional benefits to those countries that comply with Conventions n°87, 98, and 138, the European Union can also contribute to improving the state of this issue;

the European social partners:

1. Work towards a profitable, internationally competitive, European leather and footwear industry based on the respect of interests of both employers and workers;

2. Called on employers and trade union members of signatory organizations to comply with important legislations to ensure smooth company management;

ask governments of all Member States:

1. to ratify and fully enforce the United Nations Convention on child rights as well as ILO Convention nº138;

2. together with social partners, to take measures and perfect legislations likely to gradually eradicate the use of child labour;
3. to foster and guarantee access to education, to see that compulsory schooling is observed (with a view to increasing the percentage of children in full-time education at the various educational levels), to cut down the number of drop-outs through such methods as the strengthening of social action in schools, and to implement transitory systems allowing children or teenagers who dropped out of school before the age of completion of compulsory schooling to be reinstated and to continue their personal development;

decide to:

1. subscribe to the present Charter and commit to continue contributing to the implementation of actions aimed at eradicating all forms of child labour exploitation, and to promote the rights of these children throughout the world;

2. bring positive support to measures and programmes that make it possible to completely eliminate the use of child labour in the direct or indirect production and trade of footwear;

and confirm their commitment to see that affiliated companies:

1. Continue to not employ - either directly or indirectly - children under 15 or below the age of completion of compulsory schooling;

2. Support the development of training and apprenticeship programs within the company to provide for the personal development of young workers;

3. Support ILO Convention 138 concerning "the minimum age of admission to employment";

Social partners will further see that the present charter be implemented separately as well as jointly through a social sectoral dialogue at all levels.

The CEC, the ETUC:TCL and their respective national affiliated federations shall circulate this Charter in all relevant languages, particularly in companies represented by the above organisations, further recommending that these companies include this Charter in the terms of purchase with their subcontractors and suppliers.

The interpretation of the provisions of this Charter, and the problems that may arise following the failure to comply with it, shall be resolved within a joint CEC-ETUC:TCL committee.

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The CEC and the ETUC:TCL agree to carry out an assessment of the Charter’s implementation as part of the social dialogue at European level, at the latest one year following the signing of this agreement. They hereby ask the Commission and Member States to supply the necessary technical assistance in order to carry out this evaluation adequately.


For the CEC
Roeland SMETS
Managing Director

For the ETUC:TCL
Patrick ITSCHERT
General Secretary

Mandated by:
Febic, DKSF, FNICF, HDS, ELSEVIE, IRLSF, ANCI, FNS, APICCAPS, FICE, BFA, Kenkäteollisuuden Työnantajaliitto, Swedish Federation of the Footwear, Wirtschaftskammer

Mandated by:
La Centrale Générale, DBTF, FO, CFDT, CFTC, CGC, Gewerkschaft Leder, OEKIDE, Filta-CISL, Filtea-CGIL, Uilta-UIL, FNV, CNV, Sindetex, Fesete, FIA-UGT, Fiteqa-CC.OO, KFAT, Kemian Liitto, Industrifacket, Gewerkschaft Textil-Bekleidung-Leder