

Meeting of the Social Dialogue Committee

5 February 2020

DRAFT Minutes

The meeting of the Social Dialogue Committee (SDC) was chaired by *Barbara Kauffmann*, Director for Employment and Social Governance of DG EMPL.

1. / 2. Adoption of the agenda and approval of minutes

The agenda of the present meeting and the minutes of the last meeting of the Social Dialogue Committee on 25 September 2019 were both approved.

3. Information by the Commission

3.1 Update on recent developments in employment and social policies

Joost Korte (Director-General of DG EMPL) presented an update of the recent developments in employment and social policies, outlining the recent and planned initiatives of the new Commission, stressing the link between the transition to the sustainable and digitised economy and the social dimension.

On the **Action Plan to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights** announced for 2021, *J. Korte* invited social partners to actively participate in the consultation process and contribute to the preparations scheduled this year. He recalled the dedicated hearing with social partners planned on 8 June 2020. In this context, all social partners stressed the important role of national social partners. Recalling the consultation on the European Pillar of Social Rights, *ETUC* asked the Commission to foresee in all national events a dedicated session for social partners where they could also discuss joint activities. *BusinessEurope* suggested national social partners to be involved in the choice of relevant topics to be discussed in particular Member States. The Commission reacted by assuring social partners to do what it can to ensure the involvement of national social partners in this process.

On the initiative on **minimum wage**, *ETUC* informed about its letter from 4 February asking the Commission to postpone by one month the start of the second phase social partner consultation. The request was supported by the employers' side. *BusinessEurope* reiterated its opposition to a legislative initiative pointing to the need to apply a country-specific approach and to respect well-functioning collective bargaining systems. For *CEEP* social dialogue and collective bargaining should constitute the pillar of the initiative. *SMEUnited* asked for more clarity on the EC intentions and insisted on the central role of social partners for wage setting mechanisms. The Commission

showed, in principle, openness for the request to delay the start of the second stage consultation, whilst stating the extension was not needed by the Commission.

Regarding the **update of the skills agenda**, *J. Korte*, referring to the social partner hearing held on 17 January, stressed the importance of the buy-in of social partners. *ETUC* called for a framework for up- and reskilling and asked how this would be linked to initiatives, such as platform work and the Green Deal. *ETUC* also supported the idea of individual learning accounts (provided there is a close link with the labour market) and called for a right to training. *BusinessEurope* pointed to the link with the industrial policy strategy and referred to the positive experience of sectoral employers with the blueprints. There was a need to work with employers given their role in training; it was important to also train those that are not in the labour market, while noting that there is no single approach that could be implemented. How training is provided to employees will necessarily be different to how it is provided to the unemployed. In this regard, the role of social partners will also be different. *SMEunited*, whilst not supporting an individual right to training at EU level, highlighted the importance of addressing skills and labour shortages and called for more support for SMEs in this context.

On **Platform work**, *J. Korte* announced a dedicated summit conference on 22 September to consult stakeholders on the need and ways for improving the labour conditions of platform workers. In this context, he stressed the importance of the autonomous social partner agreement on digitalisation. *BusinessEurope* asked the Commission to focus its efforts on the implementation of the recent initiatives (Transparent and predictable working conditions Directive and Access to Social Protection Recommendation). *SMEunited* highlighted the need for fair competition.

With a view to the **reinforcing of the Youth Guarantee** *J. Korte* referred to the objective of enhancing the employability of young people. *ETUC* welcomed the dedicated social partner hearing on 20 February and asked for a stronger rights based approach linking with the Pillar. The Commission announced that the **Gender Equality Strategy** would be presented in March, to be followed by a legislative proposal on pay transparency in the fourth quarter. A dedicated social partner hearing was announced for June. *BusinessEurope* saw the gender employment gap as the starting point and highlighted the key role of childcare. *SMEunited* asked to avoid putting bureaucratic burden on small and micro-enterprises regarding pay transparency measures (problem of confidentiality in the case of a limited number of employees).

In general terms, for *BusinessEurope* a competitive economy represents the basis for achieving successful transitions. *SMEunited* called also for fairness with regards to a competitive economy. *ETUC* emphasized to integrate the aspect of just transition.

BusinessEurope recalled the quadripartite commitment to social dialogue from 2016 following the launch of the “New Start for social dialogue” and stated the employers’ commitment to play their role.


3.2 The European Green Deal

Antoine Colombani, Member of the Cabinet of Executive Vice-President Timmermans, explained the context and broad approach of the European Green Deal and presented next steps following the communication in December. He emphasized that this initiative had been presented as the EU's new growth strategy. *A. Colombani* recalled the necessity, in order to reach the Paris agreement objective, to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and to reduce significantly the Greenhouse gas emissions by 2030. Designing a set of transformative policies, leaving no one behind (just transition), financing the transition and mainstreaming sustainability in other policies constitute key pillars of the Green Deal.

BusinessEurope stressed the need to work globally and reiterated the need to ensure the focus on a competitive economy also when implementing the Green Deal. The sectoral focus would be important also in that regard. *CEEP* asked the Commission to continue regarding the Green Deal the practice of bi-annual high level meetings between relevant Vice-Presidents of the European Commission and leaders of social partners which was introduced under the previous Commission. *SMEUnited*, welcoming the Green Deal, called for better support for SMEs, in particular with regard to circular economy and for access of SMEs to the Just Transition Fund given the key role of social partners at local and regional level.

While *ETUC* praised the global approach of the Green Deal, it recalled the need to ensure just and inclusive transition. In this context, social partners should be involved at all levels including the governance of the Green Deal. *ETUC* asked the Commission to go beyond Just Transition Mechanism by creating a solidarity mechanism to support the most vulnerable sectors (e.g. adequate social protection and training). In its reply, the Commission highlighted its openness to involve social partners and pointed to the consultation on the climate pact. Regarding the integration of the sustainable development goals in the Semester, *B. Kauffmann* informed about the current consultation of Member States on draft country reports, ahead of their publication end February.

3.3 Update on the implementation of the directive on transparent and predictable working conditions

 presented the state of play regarding the expert group for the implementation of the Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions Directive. Social partners would be invited as observers to the second meeting planned for beginning of April 2020¹ and to some future meetings where topics relevant to them are for discussion (8 seats for each side). *ETUC* requested that social partners should

¹ Given the current development regarding the outbreak of Covid-19 the meeting was postponed by the time of drafting. A new date will be communicated.

be invited to all future meetings. [REDACTED] also stressed the need to strike a balance between enabling discussions between Member States as the addressees of the Directive, and having discussions involving the social partners given their important role in implementing many of its provisions. The Commission would take care to ensure a transparent process which would give the social partners the opportunity to input on the entire Directive. The Commission would publish a report of the work of the group once it has finished.

4. Information by the social partners

Social Partners informed about their negotiations of an autonomous agreement on digitalisation. Negotiations should normally be concluded in March. However, *BusinessEurope* felt that an extension could be needed. Both sides expressed their confidence that a deal could be concluded. For ETUC, the right to disconnect is a key element of the discussions. Regarding the sub-group on capacity building, social partners informed about a meeting on the day before. They informed that two experts would soon conduct country visits to nine Member States having the highest needs. While the report would only be presented before the summer, social partners promised to share in the coming weeks some first results with the Commission. Social partners reiterated their request to the Commission for political support to ensure that the relevant national governments make capacity-building a priority in their future European Social Fund operational programmes (OPs). The Commission took note and reminded social partners that they are invited to provide information on the concrete needs at national level. *BusinessEurope* suggested capacity building as focus for the next ESDE.

5. AOB: EU framework for national Roma integration strategies and its follow-up

[REDACTED] presented current plans regarding a follow-up to the EU Framework for national Roma integration strategies. In its 2020 Work Programme, the Commission announced a new initiative on Roma equality and inclusion for the fourth quarter of 2020. He invited the social partners to become part of the on-going consultations for the preparations of the initiative. Many issues, such as improving educational attainment and skills, increasing labour market participation and promoting inclusive labour markets closely relate to social partners. [REDACTED] suggested to the social partners to participate in a short survey on their views and experiences with Roma equality and inclusion. All sides reacted positively and confirmed their commitment. The Commission announced to get back to social partners with the survey at a later stage.