Future of the social dialogue at European level

1996/2191(COS) - 29/01/1997 - Economic and Social Committee: opinion, report

The Committee is pleased that the Commission has published such an important and informative communication. The ESC recently expressed its view on this matter when it stated that the representatives of the most important economic and social sectors (among which the ESC certainly includes small and medium-sized firms) should be involved in an adequate framework in one way or another. The interprofessional social dialogue In its opinion on the application of the social protocol the ESC called for adequate back-up for the social dialogue. If the social partners want this they can work towards an independent secretariat. Social dialogue under the protocol on social policy Experiences suggest that the six-week period which the Commission had planned to allow the social partners for replying to its questions is too short. In its opinion referred to earlier the ESC had proposed extending the period to eight weeks. The Committee thinks that the EP and the ESC can be kept informed about the progress of the talks by the social partners. If the social partners come to an agreement and, in accordance with Article 4 of the agreement on social policy, present it to the Commission with a request that a proposal be submitted to the Council, they must state what sort of legal instrument they wish to have. The role of the Council should be to check to what extent the agreement concluded is signed by representative organizations. The Commission can carry out the preparatory work here. After that they can decide whether or not to support the agreement. They would not be allowed to make any substantial changes to it, as this would infringe the autonomy of the social partners. The EP would be free to issue an opinion on the agreement concluded, in which the question of representation might be discussed. The sectoral social dialogue For the further development of the sectoral social dialogue, various aspects must be taken into consideration. Effectiveness is an important aspect, but attention must also be paid to the contribution which can be made towards improving the European system of labour relations. Cost efficiency must also be taken into account, but it should not be the only yardstick. The section therefore feels that the Commission must make sufficient funds available for the sectoral social dialogue. Interprofessional advisory committees The Commission usually only convenes the advisory committees if they have a concrete proposal. The Committee thinks that the advisory committees must be consulted sooner. The Standing Committee on Employment (SCE) Basically the Committee shares the view that the SCE must be given a higher profile. Social consultations and possible participants At present social consultations are open to member organizations from EU countries. As part of the social dialogue, organizations from EEA countries are also invited, in view of the consequences for them. Organizations from southern European countries which have applied to join the EU and from central and eastern European countries with association agreements are not involved in the consultations. In view of the possible accession of these countries to the EU the section thinks they should be invited to the consultations as observers. Impact Knowledge of the social dialogue within organizations can also be increased by making effective use of the European Centre for Labour Relations in Florence. In this centre there are opportunities for involving a broad spectrum of social partners. DG X and its info-points and the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions also play an important role here.