# Future of the social dialogue at European level

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OBJECTIVE : This purpose of this communication is to stimulate the debate between social partner organizations, Member States and European institutions on the means of developing European social dialogue at all levels (interprofessional and sectoral). It presents all the existing structures which are a feature of such dialogue and proposes, for each level, specific measures for improving methods of consultation and negotiation. Once that debate has been concluded, a second communication will be presented, in 1997, reflecting the views and opinions which have been received. SUBSTANCE: European social dialogue takes a number of very different forms. There are two major types of negotiating fora, namely interprofessional social dialogue and sectoral dialogue. Alongside these, there exist other structures and procedures established in particular in the context of the Social Protocol and which are directly involved in the establishment of European social legislation. At each of these levels, the Commission proposes procedural improvements as regards consultation and participation: - Interprofessional social dialogue: .Val Duchesse: this form of social dialogue, which is informal and voluntary, is particularly well used. It brings together the three big European organizations representing trade unions and employers (UNICE, CES and CEEP), and the initiatives agreed result in 'joint opinions' for submission to the Community institutions. At this level, the Commission intends to continue to support the Val Duchesse model and calls on management and labour to strengthen the dialogue by ensuring that all interested parties concerned are appropriately represented; .Interprofessional advisory committees: these have the task of advising the Commission in the drawing-up of specific policies and assisting it in their implementation. As the functioning and working methods of these committees pose some problems, the Commission wishes to study their structures with a view to adapting them. At the same time, it intends to merge the advisory committee on social security for migrant workers and the advisory committee on freedom of movement for workers. Other forms of committee could also be envisaged and the status of the various social partners could be reviewed. - Sectoral social dialogue: Structures are organized either as joint committees (JCs) appointed by the Commission or as informal working parties (IWPs) organized to respond to specific questions. At this level, the Commission wishes to give more substance to sectoral social dialogue by focusing it on strategic issues and sectors (employment and vocational training). It intends, in particular, to strengthen cooperation and coordination within its services concerning consultation procedures. A study of the representativeness of the social partner organizations in the sectors will be launched so as to obtain a better picture of the membership and role of these organizations. The Commission considers that, in order to ensure efficiency, the number of members of the joint committees should be reduced; in particular the number of meetings must be cut and coordination must be improved. - Standing Committee on Employment (SCE): established in 1970, this committee is a tripartite consultative body bringing together the Council, the Commission and representatives of the social partners. Its tasks, which remain valid, were laid down when it was established. Nevertheless, the Commission wishes to reform the committee and link the reform to the implementation of the decision adopted by the European Council in Madrid on the creation of a stable and permanent structure for employment policy. The SCE should also establish a long-term work programme, and its composition should be modified and rationalized. The Commission proposes to this end that the various social partner organizations should express their views, in the context of the SCE's activities, through a liaison committee. - Social dialogue under the Agreement on Social Policy: on the basis of the consultation and negotiating mechanism put in place by the Protocol on social policy, European agreements between social partners have resulted in: . consultation of the social partners: compulsory consultation each time that new social legislation is to be adopted. The Commission has set out the criteria for such consultation and drawn up the list of large representative organizations to be consulted (cf. COS0127). Nevertheless, since consultation is not always easy, the Commission wishes to review the criteria by which it is governed, on the basis of the criteria proposed by Parliament in this field. It wishes in particular to review the list of European organizations to be consulted at the interprofessional and sectoral levels and to look at ways of involving more closely SMEs, which are still under-represented. Regular meetings will be organized between all interested social

partner organizations for information and an exchange of views. Finally, the deadline for the first phase of consultation should be reviewed (the six-week time-limit currently applied can be reviewed on a case-by-case basis, depending on the complexity of the subjects under negotiation; .Negotiation under the Agreement on Social Policy: The negotiation procedures resulted in the signing on 3 June 1996 of an agreement on parental leave. Problems relating to procedure and the representativeness of the organizations consulted have emerged, however, and the Commission wishes to avoid these in the future (e.g. the rejection of the agreement by the UEAPME, which claimed that consultation had been inadequate, criticism by Parliament of the fact that it had no part in the decision-making process and by the Council, which takes the view that certain matters come under the jurisdiction of the Member States and not solely of the social partners). The Commission is calling for fresh measures to be taken to boost the acceptability of the agreements negotiated by all parties. - Development of social dialogue: In more general terms, the Commission takes the view that it is essential that social dialogue be concerned with issues relating to employment at both the interprofessional and sectoral levels, in order to supplement the Community's actions in this area. At the same time, the Commission believes it to be vital that applicant countries (especially in Eastern Europe) develop social dialogue structures of their own. For that reason, it wishes to assist these countries in developing practical forms of cooperation with European organizations. As regards information and communication, the Commission proposes holding regular meetings for the exchange of information between interprofessional social dialogue and sectoral social dialogue representatives. It also wishes to ensure the dissemination of information about European social dialogue and to encourage European social partner organizations to inform their members about the activities and results of European social dialogue in general. It will also provide information to the EU institutions on developments in social dialogue. Finally, it intends to strengthen and support operational joint initiatives under the social dialogue (in particular financial assistance to support actions undertaken in cooperation with the social partners) and to develop new levels of dialogue, especially in transnational companies and social dialogue at regional level in cross-border regions.