Social dialogue at European level

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OBJECTIVE: to propose a new European social dialogue in order to increase its adaptability and link the work of the social partners more closely to the development and implementation of EU policies.
SUBSTANCE: Following the consultation document of 1996, which was intended to gather as wide a range of views as possible from the parties concerned on the means to be employed to promote and develop the European social dialogue (COS0468 - COM(98) 259), the Commission gave some thought to the future of the European social dialogue. Drawing conclusions from the consultation exercise and from recent developments in this field, it now introduces new actions and initiatives to be carried out to adapt and promote the social dialogue. To this end, the Commission has adopted three main objectives: - a more open social dialogue; - more effective dialogue between the European institutions and social partners; - the development of real collective bargaining at European level. In order to attain the objectives, the Commission proposes to act in four main directions: 1) information: the Commission will set in place more efficient channels for the exchange of information with all the social partners, and it will encourage the European social partners to follow up the outcome of the European social dialogue; 2) consultation: the Commission will replace the existing structures at sectoral level by new more flexible social dialogue bodies. At cross-industry level, the advisory committees will be rationalised and the Commission will ensure that all social partners are effectively consulted on on-going policy developments; 3) employment partnership: the Commission will propose to reform the Standing Committee on Employment in order to strengthen the exchange between the Commission, the Council and the social partners, on the basis of the Council Resolution on the 1998 Employment Guidelines; 4) negotiation: the Commission will continue to encourage the further development of contractual relations both at cross-industry and sectoral levels. On the latter point, the Commission adds that after the entry into force of the Amsterdam Treaty legislative proposals on social policy will be addressed to all Member States and will undergo the two-stage consultation procedure provided for by the Treaty. The Commission may suspend the legislative procedure if the social partners indicate that they wish to enter into negotiations on the subject concerned. This means that the social partners will have greater opportunities - and responsibilities - to participate in the development of European social policy. The Commission also states that with the new employment strategy the social partners have a leading role to play in the necessary modernisation of the labour market. Initiatives will therefore be called for to enhance cross-industry dialogue (particularly with SMEs) and sectoral dialogue.