Press Release

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Social dialogue package: time for action

The EU Commission has yesterday released its long-awaited package on social dialogue, which comprises a Communication on the strengthening of EU social dialogue and a draft Council Recommendation on strengthening social dialogue at national level, including collective bargaining.

EFBWW together with the European Trade Union Federations (ETUFs) have long called for strengthening social dialogue at national, European, and sectoral level. Indeed, a reinforced EU social dialogue goes hand in hand with robust national social dialogue. However, much needs to be done to change the practice on the ground.

While acknowledging the positive contribution of social dialogue in delivering on social fairness, crisis management - especially COVID-19 - and a fair management of change, the EU Commission's analysis recognises that social dialogue is far from being a reality everywhere in Europe.

If social dialogue is to become the normal way in which the EU and the Member States develop policies impacting the world of work, national policy makers must promote an enabling environment for both bipartite and tripartite social dialogue at cross-sector and sector levels. This should include collective bargaining, support for capacity building, the conditions for higher collective bargaining coverage, and active promotion of the added value of social dialogue. In this sense, the ETUFs believe that the draft Council Recommendation is a step in the right direction, providing guidance on how best to strengthen social dialogue and collective bargaining. It now requires unanimous support in the Council to be adopted.

In relation to the EU social dialogue, despite its call on social partners to negotiate more agreements, the EU Commission does not provide the much-needed clarity on how it will deal with

agreements negotiated with a view to becoming legally binding in the sectors concerned across all EU Member States.

The ETUFs expect the EU Commission - in close cooperation with the EU sectoral social partners – to define the criteria on the legislative implementation of agreements and also who can take part in EU sectoral social dialogue committees.

They call on the EU Commission to maintain its logistical and financial support for sectoral social dialogue committees and to enhance its political support. Money and political action should be put where its mouth is!

There will be no meaningful EU social dialogue without the right level of political and financial commitment from the EU Commission and without legal certainty on how social partner agreements will be implemented in an effective and coherent way across the EU.

Finally, EFBWW and the other ETUFs welcome the establishment of a social dialogue coordinator in each Commission service as a key element to strengthen social partners' involvement in EU policy-making. If properly managed, this is will prompt a culture of social dialogue within the EU Commission and ensure that social dialogue is respected.

After repeated efforts to relaunch social dialogue in Europe, it is now time to act. The ETUFs are committed to playing their part to ensure that the social dialogue initiative launched yesterday delivers on its promises.