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« **Social dialogue against individualism** »

Strong industrial relations, including collective bargaining, are part of democracy and are necessary instruments for fair and efficient regulation of the economy and of the labour market. Tripartite dialogue, European Works Councils, European and international framework agreements and Inter-Regional Trade Union Councils (IRTUCs) all play an important role in the development of social dialogue.

European social dialogue at all levels is part and parcel of the European social model. It is enshrined in the TFEU and forms part of the European *acquis communautaire*¹. It is widely acknowledged – including by employers – that countries with the most developed social partnerships and effective social systems are among the most successful and competitive in the world, even in times of crisis. Sound industrial relations have an added economic value.

The crisis that struck Europe in 2008 has had a negative impact on social dialogue and collective bargaining at all levels. Bi- and sometimes tripartite social dialogue has, in several countries, been decentralised, dismantled or undermined, directly or indirectly, as a result of European and national policies.

In addition, the effects of unregulated globalisation, economic crisis and austerity; the changes in the economy and labour market due to climate change, digitalisation and automation; the attacks on workers' and trade union rights and on the European social model; the growth of inequalities; the issue of migration and mobility flows, often leading to discrimination and exploitation; and, as a consequence, the rise of far-right, nationalist, neo-fascist and xenophobic forces threatening human and social rights and putting the democratic values of the European Union at risk – all these raise major concerns for the future of Europe and of European working people.

In this context, the trade union movement and social partners have a responsibility to defend democracy and the European social model, the most important achievement of the last century, based on peace, human, workers', social and environmental rights, on fair and equal living and working conditions including quality public services and education systems.

To achieve this, the ETUC and its affiliates have designed sound policies for the future of the European economy, society and labour market and are putting in place strong and efficient tools and actions to reinforce the role of trade unions in delivering concrete and positive results for workers, particularly focusing on: a progressive and sustainable economic policy; pay rises and upward wage convergence between countries and sectors; employment in quality jobs; defence and extension of workers' rights, social protection and public services; relaunching social dialogue, strengthening collective bargaining, extending its coverage and promoting workers' participation; just transition,

¹ *The acquis communautaire is the accumulated legislation, legal acts and court decisions which constitute the body of European Union law*

sustainable globalisation and progressive trade; fair mobility and a common migration and asylum policy, based on respect for rights and equal treatment.

Relaunching social dialogue should not be limited just to a discussion platform or facade. It must be able to generate changes and agreements, and ensure agreements are implemented. It must not be confused with civil dialogue. Employers and trade unions are not merely representatives of public opinion. They are structured organisations – foundations of democracy.

Strengthening European social dialogue is the best way to improve people's working and living conditions and to shape the future of the world of work. Social partners are the best placed actors to manage the relevant changes in our economies, labour market and societies through win-win dialogue and negotiations.

We are facing a radical transformation of the labour market. Our entire economy has to adapt to the hard-to-predict consequences of global warming, digitalisation and automation, globalisation and trade wars. We need to make such transitions sustainable and ensure that no one is left behind, and on the contrary can enjoy better opportunities for the future.

This is what we mean by renewing the Social Contract and the principle of the social market economy that is enshrined in the EU Treaties: shaping a better future for all, based on shared prosperity, quality of work, rights and protection.

Social dialogue is a real asset for meeting these challenges. A major effort to boost investment in negotiation at all levels and in all sectors is necessary to anticipate these radical transformations as well as possible, and efforts are still needed to achieve this. It is crucial not to go backwards in the digital economy and the climate transition; and to anticipate social damage, before it is too late.

For the ETUC, building social partners' power to bargain collectively is a priority. Collective bargaining gives workers and businesses the capacity to develop and improve jobs and competitiveness at the same time, and fight for fairness at work and in the economy.

The stakes are high, wages are underperforming throughout the EU. Growth in real wages is crucial to reduce inequalities and ensure decent and improving living standards for workers across Europe, but also to set a level playing field in terms of competition and boost sustainable growth through aggregate demand. In order to achieve this objective, it's essential to improve the wage share in the economy and promote upward wage convergence between countries and between sectors, through capacity building and frameworks supporting the establishment and enforcement of national and sectoral collective bargaining systems.

These goals should apply also to non-standard workers, also by removing legal obstacles like competition law, which prevents them from organising in a trade union and having access to collective bargaining and social protection. Ways should be found to strengthen and extend the scope and inclusiveness of collective bargaining in order to enhance its equity effects in all countries and strengthen coordination and integration between sectoral and company-level bargaining.

Finally, building on the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), EU policy must change direction towards full respect and protection for the role and autonomy of social partners in delivering sound social dialogue and industrial relations. This means also that social partners should work to increase their influence on institutional decision-making, including through their active participation in the European Semester and legislative processes at all levels.