

**SOCIAL DIALOGUE AND EMPLOYMENT**  
**IN THE EUROPEAN UNION**

*An introductory guide*

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## Introduction

What is presented here is a simple guide to the understanding of the role played by *social dialogue* in Europe with regard to the matter of employment, both within European Union (EU) institutions and in the more consolidated experiences of single European countries. The specific aim of the guide is to give to readers from the ten new EU members (especially trainers working for social partners' organisations) a rigorous, albeit synthetic introduction to one of the most important features of the so-called *European social model*.

This “model” – essentially based on a relatively high degree of workers' protection and on an extensive and radicated welfare system – is articulated in a web of laws and regulations also present at European level. Despite, sometimes, a different perception, the *acquis communautaire* in matters of employment and welfare is vast, complex, and growing year after year. New EU members and their firms – regardless of the size – are already facing the problem of implementing domestically a set of rules which in many cases are bound to change substantially the overall system of employment, industrial relations and welfare. As we will see, social dialogue and concertation are becoming more and more an integral part of the EU decision making and – on the very matters of social and employment policy – the effect of social partners' action can be relevant in shaping the design of new European rules.

In a nutshell, one can define *social dialogue* as a “process of continuous interaction between the social partners with the aim of reaching agreements on the control of certain economic and social variables, at both macro and micro levels” (Economic Commission, 2000, p. 8). Very often, the definition of social dialogue is also used with reference to the relationships and the co-operation between social

partners' and the government. We prefer, however, to distinguish whenever possible between social dialogue between social partners and *social concertation*, i.e. a “method of managing labour, social and economic issues by means of consultation and concertation between the public authorities and bodies representing employees and employers” (Economic Commission, 2000, p. 8). As we will see, quite often the existence of common opinions among social partners is a sort of pre-requisite for social concertation to be effective and fruitful in terms of policy results.

These are useful definitions helping to understand the type and quality of industrial relations prevailing in Europe and in the EU. However, one must be soon aware of the existence of many different facets of social dialogue and concertation.

Bipartite social dialogue, in particular, can be performed at sectoral, cross-sectoral (or cross-industry) and inter-professional levels, the latter being especially important at European level where the issue of diverging *national* positions (even within the same association) cannot be ruled out. These three levels have relatively different procedures and produce quite diverse outcomes.

A sectoral agreement is almost always, in national experiences, a contractual agreement defining sectoral wage dynamics, working time, working conditions, other details compatible – as the rest of the agreement – with national laws. At European level there are still few cases of sectoral agreements that can be considered close to the model of contractual national ones; there is no doubt that a European contractual area will gradually take shape but bipartite social dialogue since its beginnings has usually taken the form of joint opinions, declarations, recommendations and the like, all instruments which do not carry with them contractual obligations.

A bipartite cross-sectoral agreement of a contractual nature exists in some European countries though it should be stressed again that the basic contractual

instrument is within Europe the *sectoral* agreement between management and labour. At EU level bipartite cross-industry agreements have been often signed, with concrete fallouts in a few relevant cases on EU normative frameworks and, by consequence, on single Member States legislation.

Inter- (or cross-) professional dialogue is regularly performed at national level. Less obvious is the fact that discussion and agreements within management or labour are also happening at European level, thus helping to forge common and probably clearer positions of entrepreneurial or workers' associations.

*Social concertation* is also articulated in different ways. At national level – not necessarily, as we will see, in all European countries – concertation has taken the shape of “social pacts” on employment or on competitiveness. From an initial period of a main focus on inflation reduction, these “pacts” have essentially become wide-ranging agreements between social partners and the government on practically every relevant aspect of public policy-making. At EU level the idea of large pacts has not been practised up to now (probably because real economic policy powers, especially on the fiscal side are still not firmly in the hands of EU authorities), while policy concertation has regarded the implementation – mainly through Council Directives – of cross-sectoral agreements signed by social partners.

Indeed, despite the differences today existing in the single European countries, social dialogue is more and more rooted in the EU decision-making process; new members, in their participation to the EC system, will thus have to adjust and to gradually converge to a set of rules and procedures governing industrial relations which constitutes another piece of the much wider *acquis communautaire*.

The relevance of social dialogue in today's EU is strengthened by the growing role played by social partners in the building-up of new EU decisions but it is also

magnified by the EU's increased powers and competences. The circulation in twelve EU members of a single currency is maybe the best example and the symbol of a deep and probably irreversible process of integration. And the – hopefully imminent – agreement on the text of the European Constitution gives the idea of how far institution building has gone, especially in recent times.

The scope and “intensity” of EU competences has grown year after year together with the widening of EU borders. Five significant enlargements of the Union have already been realized in the past. The result is that decisions taken in Brussels, Frankfurt and Strasbourg affect the life of hundred of millions of European citizens in a growing number of areas.

Within this context it is easy to understand why social dialogue at the European level is important.

First, social partners – which feel that the European level is the right one in facing the challenges of globalization and modernization - participate and can significantly affect – especially on matters of employment and social policy - the quality of decisions which are bound to thoroughly influence and change working conditions and daily life of citizens living in 25 different countries.

Second, bipartite social dialogue and in particular and the reaching of agreements at European level is instrumental to the process of European integration itself. A European contractual area is probably in the future horizon of EU, thus creating a better environment for the take off a EU-based economic policy.

Third, regular discussions among the organizations involved pave the way for the smoothing out of cultural differences among different countries.

With this background in mind, this guide is organized as follows.

In part 1, the legal basis of European social dialogue is briefly reconstructed. The analysis is mainly based on the articles of the Treaty establishing the European Community (the “Treaty” in the following pages). Attention is also devoted to what is provided on the matter of social dialogue by the final Draft of the new European Constitution.

In part 2, the principal definitions of social dialogue and concertation are recalled and discussed; this part sees also these main definitions in the changing meanings they have acquired with time passing by.

Part 3 briefly presents the main criteria for representativeness at European level, while part 4 is devoted to the exposition and analysis of some concrete examples of social dialogue “in action”.

The reasons justifying a structure of industrial relations based also on the principle of social partnership are presented in part 5. Even in this part a careful distinction between social dialogue on the one hand and social concertation on the other are made.

Part 6 presents the “state of the art” of social dialogue in the single European Member states. Particular emphasis goes to the instrument of “social pacts” widely adopted in most EU members in recent decades.

In part 7 the main elements of EU employment *acquis* are spelled out, with the giving a first look to a complex and growing labour legislation. New Member States firms are soon realizing the scope and magnitude of EU normative intervention in this field.

An annex contains a glossary of the main expressions used throughout this guide and in the official EU documentation, a short, essential bibliography, and a number of useful internet links which could be useful if more details are needed.

## **1. Normative foundations of European social dialogue**

The role assigned to social partners and to social dialogue in the EU venture is spelled out in several articles of the Maastricht Treaty, as amended by the Treaties of Amsterdam (1997) and Nice (2000).

The recognition of the relevance of social partners and social dialogue is clearly specified on article 138 (1): “The Commission shall have the task of promoting the consultation of management and labour at Community level and shall take any relevant measure to facilitate their dialogue by ensuring balanced support for the parties”. The type of “dialogue” among social partners the Treaty is referring to is characterized by a high degree of autonomy. In particular, article 139 (1), covering both sectoral and cross-industry relationships provides that “should management and labour so desire, the dialogue between them at Community level may lead to contractual relations, including agreements”. This is of the utmost importance since social partners are explicitly entitled – if they wish - to build a European bargaining area. Thus, the Treaty introduces a potential, strong element (feature) of supranationality – as long as social partners autonomously decide to move in that direction – in an area where the EU has traditionally respected the “diverse forms of national practices, in particular in the field of contractual relations” (article 136 (1)). In this specific case, therefore, the process of integration of the Union is essentially in the hands of European social partners and civil society and does not stem from top-down EU decisions.

The Treaty, however, makes also a strong link between the willingness of social partners at Community level to negotiate agreements on a European scale and the EU decision-making process. As a matter of fact, article 139 (2) provides that “agreements concluded at Community level shall be implemented either in accordance with the procedures and practices specific to management and labour and

the Member States or, in matters covered by Article 137, at the joint request of the signatory parties, by a Council decision on a proposal from the Commission". Thus, an agreement reached by social partners – according to the specific rules stated in article 139 (2) – can become a more binding Union decision.

MATTERS COVERED BY ARTICLE 137 OF THE TREATY
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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>a) Improvement in particular of the working environment to protect workers' health and safety;</li><li>b) Working conditions;</li><li>c) social security and social protection of workers;</li><li>d) protection of workers where their employment contract is terminated;</li><li>e) Information and consultation of workers;</li><li>f) representation and collective defence of the interests of workers and employers, including co-determination (this provision does not apply to pay, the right of association, the right to strike or the right to impose lockouts);</li><li>g) conditions of employment for third-country nationals legally residing in Community territory;</li><li>h) Integration of persons excluded from the labour market;</li><li>i) Equality between men and women with regard to labour market opportunities and treatment of work;</li><li>j) Fight against social exclusion;</li><li>k) Modernization of social security regimes.</li></ul> |
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Areas c), d), f), g) require a Council decision based on unanimity.

This is a first way through which the role of social partners is magnified, taking also into account the fact that Council decisions have to be made after consultation with the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC, see below).

It is quite evident that that the matters here listed essentially concern labour market regulation and social policy.

But there is also a second way thanks to which social partners can strongly affect the content and the quality of EU decisions especially in the areas of employment and social policy: the consultation process of social partners by the Commission and the Council made compulsory on a vast array of matters. The EESC plays here a central role, being elected as the institution of reference for the consultation procedures.<sup>1</sup> The areas interested by compulsory consultations, previous to any Council decision are several:

- a) Employment guidelines defined by the Council (article 128 (2));
- b) Incentives to cooperation between Member States and support to their efforts in matters of employment (article 129);
- c) All the labour market and social policy areas listed in article 137, also according to what stated by article 138 (2): “before submitting proposals in the social policy field, the Commission shall consult management and labour on the possible direction of Community action”.

In the end, the normative coverage to social dialogue, in its widest sense, given by the Treaty is quite large. Both sectoral and cross-industry dialogue among social partners and, at the same time, concertation are clearly defined in the Treaty, giving social partners a far from formal possibility of building a supranational area of collective negotiation and of intervening in the detailed content of EU decisions.

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<sup>1</sup> It must be here added that consultation by the Commission or the Council involves in an equal manner the Committee of Regions.

## SOCIAL DIALOGUE IN THE DRAFT TREATY ESTABLISHING A CONSTITUTION FOR EUROPE

The Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe - as submitted by the European Convention to the European Council meeting of Thessaloniki on 20 June 2003 and, in the final text of the Draft, to the Rome Council of 18 July 2003 – deals extensively with social partners and social dialogue. In Part III of the Draft Treaty (“The policies and functioning of the Union”), both on matters of employment and social policy, the text of the previous Treaty on European Union is substantially confirmed, as it can be seen from articles III-97 to III-115.

More importantly, however, the Draft Treaty, Part I, Title VI: The democratic life of the Union, article 46, “The principle of participatory democracy”, provides:

- a) at point 1 that “The Union institutions shall, by appropriate means, give citizens and representative associations the opportunity to make publicly known and publicly exchange their views in all areas of Union action”;
- b) at point 2 that “The Union institutions shall maintain an open, transparent and regular dialogue with representative associations and civil society”;
- c) at point 3 that “The Commission shall carry out broad consultation with parties concerned in order to ensure that the Union’s actions are coherent and transparent”.

Even clearer and more specific is article 47, “The social partners and autonomous social dialogue”: “The European Union recognises and promotes the role of social partners at Union level, taking into account the diversity of national systems; it shall facilitate dialogue between the social partners, respecting their autonomy”.

Thus, the Draft Treaty spells out even more explicitly than the existing treaties the role of social partners and social dialogue. The introduction in the Part I of the

Draft (which can be considered – if finally approved and ratified by Member States - the future Constitutional Charter of Europe) of a an unequivocal reference to social dialogue seems to further reinforce the mission social partners will have to pursue at European level. In this way, the new European Constitution gives also a clear framework to new EU members and their social organizations.

## **2. Main definitions and evolution of social dialogue and concertation**

Social partners have rapidly understood the importance of European policy-making and the possibility of enhancing new forms of cooperation among trade unions and employers' organizations at European level. It is worth here recalling that some of the most important cross-industry organisations at supranational level were born in the wake of the launching of the European Community. It is the case of the Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe (UNICE), born in 1958, of the European Centre of Enterprises with Public Participation (CEEP), active from 1961, of the European trade union secretariat (SSE), also born in 1958. Other important associations were born in 1969, such as the European confederation of free trade unions (CESL), in 1973 and the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). Finally, the birth of the European association of craft, small and medium-sized enterprises (UEAPME) in 1979 and of the European confederation of Executives and Managerial staff (CEC) in 1989 has to be mentioned.

These organisations have been certainly ready to operate when social dialogue, consultation and concertation started to be an active part of the European venture and of the EU decision process. However, they have also to be considered responsible for the decision taken by European authorities, in different moments of last decades, to move into the direction of a closer association of social partners to the process of cooperation and integration.

The place of social dialogue at European level, it was mentioned in the introduction, comes into two main ways: bipartite dialogue and concertation. As we have already stressed in the previous part, bipartite dialogue can also be the first step (thanks to the definition of a common, joint position by social partners

on a specific matter) towards a more direct and fruitful involvement of European social organizations in the EU decision process. The two main “channels” of social cooperation are therefore strongly linked and it is today difficult, if not impossible, to imagine a social dialogue without a fallout on EU labour and employment policies or the latter without a previous, thorough discussion among social partners.

### *2.1 Bipartite social dialogue*

Giving it a closer look, bipartite social dialogue is articulated in three different forms:

- a) cross-industry (o cross-sectoral) dialogue;
- b) sectoral dialogue;
- c) inter-professional dialogue.

a) *Cross-industry social dialogue* was the first to be launched at the end of January 1985 at the Val Duchesse Summit, with the active participation of UNICE, CEEP and ETUC and the support of Jacques Delors, at the time President of the European Commission. From then on, social partners were able to produce a number of “joint opinions” in cross-sectoral fields like training, motivation, informing and consultation of workers, employment strategies, basic education, initial training and vocational training for adults, transition from school to adult and working life, new technologies and work organisation, equal opportunities, health, safety, freedom of movement, social dialogue itself. More importantly, dialogue among social partners was responsible for the inclusion in the Maastricht Treaty of articles 138 and 139 which – as we have seen in Part 1 – lay the ground for the official recognition of social dialogue and social concertation on a European scale.

Cross-industry social dialogue has strengthened after the entry into force of the Maastricht Treaty and, a few years later, of the Amsterdam Treaty. Important results have been produced in addition to a number of new “joint opinions”: in particular, the so-called “framework agreements” on parental leave (1995), on part-time work (1997), on fixed-duration employment contracts (1999) which have subsequently become formal Council decisions and thus are today part of EU legislation (see part 7 for more details).

In retrospect, two positive evaluations can be made on the Val Duchesse social dialogue. In the first place, that new kind of dialogue has provided for the first time “a springboard for engaging in dialogue, leading to agreement-based outcomes” (European Commission, 2000, p. 5). Secondly, the joint initiatives deriving from the first Val Duchesse meeting and from the many social dialogue summits held afterwards “have helped forge a European culture of industrial relations, and have enabled the social partners to test at European level their capacity to negotiate on economic cooperation strategy, vocational training, racism, labour market adaptability, the European employment strategy, and the integration of disabled people in the world of work” (European Commission, 2000, p. 20).

However, notwithstanding the importance of common cross-sectoral positions on important matters such as the general strategy against unemployment, the development of a European contractual area has inevitably needed a stronger involvement of social partners on a more sectoral level. After all “it is at sectoral level that the real economic and social issues manifest themselves, whether they be industrial restructuring, the introduction of new technologies, changing occupational profiles, changing Community policies or liberalisation and freer competition” (European Commission, 2000, p. 19).

b) These are the main reasons why *sectoral social dialogue* has recently become more and more diffused at European level. The number of sectors interested by dialogue between social partners is increasing and it is now close to thirty. A significant number of joint opinions, resolutions, declarations, proposals, recommendations (more than 150) especially on fields such as telecommunications, agriculture, aviation, fishing has been produced. All this is the outcome of the working of specific social dialogue sectoral committees whose mission was reinforced thanks to the suggestions contained in the European Commission communication of May 1998 (“Adapting and promoting the social dialogue”) specifically devoted to the reform of social dialogue.

However, concrete results, i.e. bipartite agreements, have been reached only on a few cases such as the reduction of working time in agriculture (1997), the organisation of working time in the maritime transport and railways sector (both in 1998), teleworking in the commerce and telecommunications sectors (both in 2001).

What seems here to be relevant – if a closer integration of the European labour market is considered an objective – is that social partners are becoming more and more “aware that Europe is the most suitable arena for dealing with the changes and for taking the necessary action” (European Commission, 2000, p. 5). This means that, as in many other aspects of European life, rules and suggestions coming from the EU are bound to form a framework legislation which Member States (and national social partners as well) will have to respect.

c) An often-overlooked category of social dialogue is the so-called *inter-professional dialogue*. As maintained by Allan Larsson, former Director General of the DG Employment and Social Affairs of the European Commission, “social dialogue is not just a matter for action between the two sides of the workplace

equation. It is also a matter for social partner representatives of the same side, in various sectors” (Larsson, 1999, p. 8). Several co-operation agreements have been reached among employers’ organizations or employees’ associations. In the former case, one has to mention the agreement reached between UNICE and UEAPME while in the latter the agreement signed in the management and clerical staff sector between ETUC and the Confédération européenne des cadres.

Needless to say, even cross-professional dialogue at European level is an another important manner through which industrial relations can be moved from the simple national level to the supranational one.

In synthesis, bipartite social dialogue has become – especially in recent years – a relevant feature of the overall process of European integration. Social partners are now able to regularly make explicit their opinions on the most important employment and social issues on the EU agenda and, at the same time - pushed by globalization and the very strengthening of the Union - to put on a European scale problems of working conditions or equality which until recently were considered only of national scope. This trend is only going to gain more and more momentum. New members – both institutions and entrepreneurs – should be well aware of this circumstance.

## *2.2 Social concertation*

*Tripartite social dialogue* (i.e. dialogue between social partners, Commission and Council) is part of the wider *social concertation* and it has been so since the early Seventies of last century. It can also be considered the first kind of social dialogue introduced in Community life. Indeed, since 1970 the newly-created Standing Committee on Employment (SCE) regularly met representatives of the Council and the Commission on matters of industry and employment. More

recently, these procedures have been reinforced and in conjunction with European Council meetings social partners meet the *troika* of Heads of State and Government and other European institutions. The so-called “Macroeconomic dialogue” had been also created as a result of the 1999 Cologne summit and thus social partners can make their voice heard on questions of general economic policy.

The other main part of social concertation has already been mentioned before. It deals with the consultation process of social partners, through the European Economic and Social Committee, made compulsory by the Maastricht Treaty (articles 138 and 139) and on the implementation of a clear link between joint undertakings of social partners and EU formal decisions. While we suggest to turn to Part 1 in order to gather more precise informations on the consultation procedure, it is worth here to give a closer look to the concertation mechanisms leading to a Council decision.

### *2.3 Social partners consultation and Council decisions*

In Part I it was exposed in detail how deep it is the involvement of social partners in the compulsory consultation procedures strengthened by the Treaties of Maastricht, Amsterdam and Nice, especially on the basis of what provided by article 137. These procedures allow social partners to express their common opinion – through the EESC – to the Commission and the Council on a vast number of topics concerning labour employment.

However, as already stressed, social partners have other strong instruments for affecting EU decisions. These instruments and their procedures are outlined in articles 138 and 139 of the Treaty. More in detail, article 138 provides for a two-stage consultation of social partners by the Commission. In the first stage, art 138 (2), “before submitting proposals in the social policy field, the Commission shall

consult management and labour on the possible direction of Community action”. In the second stage, art 138 (3), “if [...] the Commission considers Community action advisable, it shall consult management and labour on the content of the envisaged proposal.” In this way, the standing of social partners on social matters is made evident both on the general terms of Community initiative and on the more specific details of the proposal. At this point – this can be considered the third stage of the concertation procedure – article 138 (3), “management and labour shall forward to the Commission an opinion or, where appropriate, a recommendation”, leaving to the Commission the possibility of undertaking appropriate actions.

However, social partners – this the potential fourth stage – have now the alternative option, article 138 (4), to “inform the Commission of their wish to initiate the process provided for in Article 139”. What is provided for by the latter is the possibility for management and labour to establish contractual relations, including agreements (this phase of procedure has to last a maximum of nine months) and to ask for their implementation at Community level. Article 139 (2) gives now two different possibilities of implementation of the social partners’ agreements; the first one must be “in accordance with the procedures and practices specific to management and labour and the Member States” while the second one – more in the spirit of concertation – provides for an implementation “in matters covered by Article 137, at the joint request of signatory parties, by a Council decision on a proposal from the Commission”. In short, the Commission (which still has the option of rejecting the proposal) receives the request from the social partners, it assesses the compliance of the agreement with Community law and with all the provisions regarding small and medium-sized enterprises, it transmits the agreement itself to the attention of the Council. The latter, at this point, could adopt a directive, a regulation, a decision or it could send back the proposal to

social partners (who will still retain the possibility of implementing their agreement in accordance with the first option outlined above).

It might be useful to recall that the article 139 (2) procedure has been successfully used – i.e. with implementation by Community legislation – on the matters of parental leave, part-time work, working time in sea transport, fixed-term contracts. These decisions – which are an important of today's *acquis* in matters of labour – will be seen in more detail in part 4 and 7 of this guide.

### **3. Criteria for representativeness**

Given the importance assumed by social dialogue at Community level, it becomes essential that the degree of representativeness of organizations involved in the dialogue is rigourously certifiable. In order to be able to be consulted and to take part to the procedures designed by articles 137-139 of the Treaty, the European-scale social organizations have to meet the following requirements set by the European Commission:

“be multisectoral, or relate to specific sectors or categories and be organised at European level;

consist of organizations which are themselves recognised as part of Member States’ social partner structures and have the capacity to negotiate agreements and, in so far as possible, be representative of all Member States;

have adequate structures to ensure their effective participation in the consultation process” (Economic Commission, 2002, p. 3).

In consideration of the strengthening of social dialogue and, at the same time, of the increasing number of sectors interested by the emphasis on the European level, the number of organizations involved by European social dialogue is bound to rise. At the moment, around thirty associations fulfil the criteria set by the Commission.

#### **4. Some concrete cases**

In this part two significant examples of social dialogue at European level are presented. The first one refers to bipartite sectoral social dialogue while the second – cross-sectoral in kind - falls in the category of social concertation.

##### *4.1 Bipartite sectoral social dialogue: the case of agriculture*

Within the lines traced by Council Directive of November 1993 on the general organisations of working time in the Community and, in this context, the specific features of the agricultural sector, social partners reached an agreement in July 1997 targeted to the improvement of paid employment in agriculture.<sup>2</sup> The two European-level sectoral social partners were the Employers' Group of the Committee of Agricultural Organizations in Europe (GEOPA/COPA) and the European Federation of Agricultural Workers' Trade Unions of the European Trade Union Confederation (EFA/ETUC). It was the first sectoral “recommendation framework agreement” between social partners at European level. Leaving aside the contents of the agreement – less important in the context of this guide – the recommendation was to be implemented in a voluntary way and incorporated within national collective agreements concerning the agricultural sector, that is, on the whole, a world of around 2.5 million paid employees and 8 million farms.

What is important here is that, on the basis of article 139 of the Treaty, social partners signed an agreement capable of subsequently binding national legislation without any constraint on the part of the Commission or the Council (if not for the existing directives on the specific matter). The autonomy granted to management

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<sup>2</sup> For more details, see EIRO, 1997, in [www.eiro.eurofound.ie](http://www.eiro.eurofound.ie).

and labour – in this as in other cases – was complete, giving a concrete example of how a European contractual area can successfully be built.

#### *4.2 Cross-sectoral social dialogue and concertation: the case of parental leave*

The question of parental leave is of clear cross-sectoral nature. It regards working parents, whatever the type of paid employment they are engaged in, with the aim of improving child care and the upbringing and education of children. Social partners did sign in 1996 an agreement on that issue, actually it was “the first European-level collective agreement to be concluded under the procedures set out in the agreement on social policy [later incorporated in the Maastricht Treaty]” (European Commission, 2000, p. 22). It is highly significant that the agreement reached by social partner dealt with a very serious and difficult problem, deeply felt everywhere in the Union by millions of people.

Considering the complexity of the issue, it is therefore even more significant that the cross-sectoral agreement laid the ground for the legislative procedure described in Part 2. According to the procedure specified in article 139 (2), the Commission sent a proposal to the Council which, a few months later, adopted a specific Directive on the framework agreement on parental leave. The Directive constitutes also the first agreement to be implemented thanks to European legislation.

Member States were called to “import” and implement the Directive by June 1998 though some flexibility in this deadline was allowed in case of national peculiarities. It is important to stress that in consideration of the national character still typical of competences in the social field, the agreement between social partners and the following Directive did not set strict rules to be respected by Member States. What was foreseen by the Directive was simply the provision of minimum standards

on parental leave, leaving, moreover to States total discretion on related questions such as payment during parental leave or notice periods.

## **5. The reasons behind social dialogue and concertation**

The reasons why social dialogue and concertation are considered of great relevance at national level, though well-known, are worth recalling.

As far as bipartite dialogue is concerned, the widespread diffusion in almost all Member States of the Union of national collective bargaining, especially on a sectoral level, is based on the principle that the autonomy left to social partners in discussing matters of pay and of work organisation can bring about more equality in the labour market, more cohesion to society as a whole, more economic integration within each country.

In the long tradition of the European Social model, these considerations are considered more relevant than other observations of a different nature which, however, would be a mistake to ignore. We refer, in particular, to the need of taking more into account - even within the framework of bipartite social dialogue – of regional and territorial differences (especially with reference to the pay system), something which would probably help to increase the flexibility of European labour markets.

More articulated are the reasons behind the emphasis put by most European countries on social concertation.

First, regular consultation procedures and the choice of governing through co-operation and consensus allow for a better management of the processes of change and innovation. The latter are very often linked to the possibility of conflict, social tensions, economic dislocation. A constant dialogue with entrepreneurs, artisans, workers, farmers, etc., gives the possibility of overcoming the hurdles of new challenges without undue and unwelcome economic and social conflicts.

Second, social concertation is by itself a democratisation of the decision-making process. Our institutional systems – based on the sovereignty of Parliaments and elected Governments - are already a guarantee of full democracy. However, a closer consideration of what social partners believe and advocate vis-à-vis the development of a country brings governmental decisions more in line with the hopes of citizens and the opinions of management and labour.

Third, a stronger relationships between government and social partners betters the quality of economic policy. The views of entrepreneurial and workers' associations are indeed fundamental – even on a mere technical basis - in making decisions fully informed since social partners are certainly well aware of the specific problems of their sector. Useful suggestions and improvements of legislation can come very often from the ideas and the observations of social partners.

Fourth, even the phase of decision implementation seems to be easier and more efficient if the involvement of national and local social partners is ensured.

Fifth, procedures of open consultation of management and labour (and consumers' associations as well) makes the overall decision process more transparent and reduces the relevance and, sometimes, the blurred action of lobbies and interest groups.

All these motivations can be summed up, as many official Economic Commission documents do, by saying that social dialogue is a “key to a better governance”, notwithstanding the vagueness that sometimes the word “governance” carries with it.

The reasons justifying social dialogue and concertation at national level are able to explain why the role of social partners is essential also at European level.

More specifically, the motivations regarding the democratisation of the decision-making process and the betterment of economic policy because of the value added inherent in regular consultation procedures seem to be especially well-founded when referred to a European scale.

Social dialogue and concertation are by themselves an important indication of the intensity of European integration. After all, with the growing powers managed by EU institutions and with the single market becoming day after day a reality, even industrial relations are inevitably bound to acquire a strong European dimension. At the same time, social partnership and cooperation are also an incentive to better integration among Member States, because of the gradual building up of a European contractual area.

One last observation: to give the idea of how far and deep is going the process of European social concertation, one has to realize that the link between social partners and concrete legislative actions is nowhere stronger than at European level. As a matter of fact, the possibility of transforming an agreement between management and labour into a law (with the obvious exception of labour contracts) is present at the moment only in the procedures provided by articles 138 and 139 of the Treaty and not, at least to this degree, in national legislation.

## **6. Social dialogue and concertation in the Member States of the European Union**

Social dialogue and concertation at European level are founded on a long experience of relationships between social partners (and between social partners and the government) in the single Member States of the Union. With the recent decades exception of the United Kingdom and, for some aspects, of France, EU Member States share a model of industrial relations based on a strong autonomy of social partners in defining contractual rules – albeit within the framework of EU and national laws – regarding working time, working conditions, pay. This model is still prevailing in most countries though a higher degree of flexibility is spreading up in collective negotiation with a more evident role played by decentralized company-level bargaining.

Moreover, in most European countries, social concertation on a wider scale, involving management, labour and the government, has been expressed through the use of “social pacts”, i.e., of wide-ranging tripartite agreements including, in particular, the basic macroeconomic framework, the fiscal policy stance, support both to research and innovation and to education and training, territorial incentives.

The preminence of social dialogue and concertation in industrial relations, needs, *ça va sans dire*, a widespread and recognized presence of social partners’ organizations, trade unions in particular. In this respect, it is interesting to see that “trade union density” or “unionisation rate” (i.e. the percentage of trade union members on total paid employment) is still very high, despite an evident reduction of overall union membership in the last decades. And, incidentally, EU density is significantly higher than the one at present registered in the ten new EU members.

The data on union density give us many relevant indications on how articulated and differentiated is the European “model” of industrial relations. EU-northern countries (Denmark, Finland, Sweden) show unionisation rates close to 80% or even more while countries like Spain and France lie at the bottom of the ladder with rates, respectively, of around 15% and less than 10%. Between these two extremes, Belgium has also a high union density (close to 70%) whereas Greece and Italy show percentages between 30% and 40%.

Normally, high union density can also mean high levels of direct collective bargaining coverage, i.e., the quota of workers on total paid employment covered by a contractual agreement signed by social partners. This is true for EU Scandinavian countries and for Belgium while quite high bargaining coverage rates are also registered by countries with lower union density such as Italy and Spain or even France. In line with its low union density is the UK quota (between 35% and 40%). Thus, a significant degree of centralization in the determination of working rules and pay is compatible with an apparently low percentage of unionisation. Even in the discussion of collective bargaining coverage it is interesting to realize that new EU Members – with the exception of Slovenia – show extremely limited rates (for example, between 10% and 15% for Lithuania, under 20% for Latvia, moderately higher percentages for Estonia and the Czech Republic).

Bargaining levels, especially wage bargaining levels, can also help to better define the model of industrial relations. Centralized, i.e. intersectoral or sectoral, wage bargaining as opposed to decentralized and more fragmented company-level wage negotiation, are the expression of strong nationwide social partners. Therefore, it is not by coincidence that countries with both union density and bargaining coverage at high rates are in general associated to more centralized

wage bargaining levels. This also means that if dialogue between social partners is considered, for the reasons outlined above, a priority, unionisation rates must be significantly high and the same applies to bargaining coverage rates.

Another feature of the European model of industrial relations as expressed in the national experiences is concerned with a close relationship between policy making and social partners. We have seen in the previous part how strong and structured in its procedures is social concertation becoming at European level.

Most EU Member States have a long tradition of dialogue between government and trade unions and employers' associations. This has been true especially for Germany, the Netherlands, Italy. More recently "these concertations have been put in the form of Pacts for employment and competitiveness (PECs). While in the seventies, social pacts were demand-side oriented, i.e. trying to use incomes policies to keep inflation low, nowadays these pacts are supply-side oriented and are meant to maintain and increase employment." (Economic Commission, 2003, p. 18). Albeit in different forms, social pacts have been signed in at least 11 EU Member States, not surprisingly with the notable exceptions of the UK and France.

Typically, these pacts are the result of long and complex negotiations and take the form an agreement in which each of the three parts involved engages itself to realize reciprocally agreed specified objectives. As an example, trade unions can pursue wage moderation, entrepreneurial associations may take engagements on the growth of private investment, the State may pledge itself to increase public infrastructure, to reduce taxes on low-income families or on profits, to channel more financing to disadvantaged areas. The basic, simple idea though quite difficult to realize is that social consensus coupled with fiscal discipline will create a stable macroeconomic framework, i.e. low inflation and budget

adjustment with resulting low interest rates and less volatile currency rates. Within this background of stability and of low macroeconomic uncertainty, supply-oriented policies should support the growth of income and employment. Domestic and external competitiveness of a country are also expected to improve. Being so wide in scope and ambition and, quite often, being also very detailed social pacts at national level are very close to the implementation of a government program. Or, better, they can be defined as government programs implemented with parliamentary *and* social approval.

Social pacts experiences have had different degrees of efficacy even within the same country. As a significant example one can look at the nineties Italian experience. In July 1993 an agreement between the government and social partners was signed; its main aim was to create institutional and concertation mechanisms that would help Italy reduce its inflation rate, significantly higher than what registered in the other EU countries, thus paving the way to moderate wage dynamics, lower inflation rates, and currency stabilization. Trade unions, in particular, agreed on the need of setting in advance a “programmed (or anticipated) inflation rate” with the aim of gradually diminishing inflationary expectations, the advantage of unions being that in a less inflationary context the real purchasing power of wages and salaries would be better preserved. Specific consultation procedures were set up with social partners gaining substantial ground even in the preliminary discussion of governments’ main policy measures.

The Italian “July 1993” agreement experience was extremely successful and certainly the main motivation behind the clear improvement of the macroeconomic condition of the economy in the last decade. Less successful, however, have been the 1996 and 1998 cases when social pacts of the **wider** kind sketched above were adopted. Practically, the entire spectrum of public policies entered into the discussion between social partners’ and the government. A

framework agreement – such as in its essence the 1993 pact – was substituted by a long list of engagements – almost exclusively on the part of the government – on practically every single detailed aspect of policy-making. Almost by its nature, this type of agreement becomes of difficult and incomplete implementation with the risk of jeopardizing the quality of relationships between the government and social partners. The 1996 and 1998 Italian agreements were certainly able to prolongue the phase of wage moderation and of social consensus to fiscal restructuring; the judgement is more articulated and severe as far as growth and innovation policies are concerned.

Considering the drive to tripartite agreements and institutions spread up in the ten new EU members, a careful, detailed analysis of the main social pacts signed in EU members in the last decades could be very useful.

## 7. European rules on employment: a complex *acquis*

Bipartite social dialogue and social concertation are instrumental to the achievement of new rules governing the welfare system, the labour market and employment.

As mentioned throughout this guide, welfare and employment policies still find their privileged area of intervention at national level. It is one of those sectors where the so-called “heterogeneity of preferences” among Member States seems stronger than the presence of externalities which would justify the management of a specific sector at supranational level.

Nonetheless, the complex universe of EU undertakings (directives, recommendations, regulations, communications,...) has touched in many, substantial ways the fields of welfare and employment. Moreover, the role of EU decisions has been growing over time and today it would be very difficult if not outright impossible to say that welfare systems and labour markets are fields entirely and unambiguously in the hands of national authorities. The situation is much more complicated and the resulting normative framework is a highly peculiar combination of supranational norms dominating specific parts of the field and national laws dealing almost exclusively with others. According to part of the literature, EU labour legislation is also “interstitial” (Treu, 2001, p.77) in the sense that it finds its room wherever some space between different areas of the legislation does exist, without any apparent coherence or any clear path.

The perspective of next years, however, is one of an increasing central role of EU intervention and, consequently, of an *acquis* larger and larger on matters of welfare, employment and labour market regulation. This is the reason why social partners – deeply involved by European rules in EU consultation procedures and

policy-making – will have to pay special attention to what are the main items in the European agenda and, to a certain extent, to what are the best ways to influence the composition of that same agenda.

All these considerations are especially true for firms and enterprises (particularly of small size) of new EU Member States which not only have to deal with all the complex problems of compliance with the *acquis communautaire*, but they have to deal with it all at once, in a relatively short period of time.

Turning now to the concrete reality of the *acquis*, what are the main novelties in terms of labour market legislation that firms from new Member States will have to adapt to? In the following pages, though inevitably in a synthetic way, the essential elements of EU labour legislation – both deriving from EU autonomous decisions and from social dialogue and concertation - will be exposed.

First of all, it is important to recall that the reference to employment matters is scattered in several parts of the Treaty. On the whole, it is a set of very general and somewhat vague indications which, however, have carried the growing burden of EU decisions more and more capable of affecting the making of national legislations.

The EU labour and welfare “mission”, made explicit in often-overlooked article 2 of the Treaty, is one of promoting a high level of employment and social protection. Like in other matters of EU interest, “promoting” is a word which allows an ample variety of interventions with different intensity, as it has actually happened in recent years. Other important, general indications on the role of the Union can be found in article 3 of the Treaty where reference is made to the adoption of measures relative to the free circulation of workers, to the promotion of the coordination between Member States policies in matters of employment, to a policy in the social sphere.

The Treaty deals even more extensively with labour market regulations and social policies. Specific articles (39-42) are dedicated to free circulation of workers while articles 43-48 are devoted to the principle of free establishment of firms in all EU countries. Other parts of the Treaty regard the possibility of the free provision of services (49 and 50). And if this were not be enough, the Treaty dedicates special attention to the issue of convergence of national labour legislations (article 94) and, in particular, on the whole issue of employment (articles 125-130) and welfare (articles 136-145) policies.

The background of principles on employment and welfare legislation given by the Treaty is thus quite wide and it constitutes a basis for many EU decisions. The following are the most relevant and they make an *acquis* of norms which new Member States and their firms in particular will have to respect.

The first regards the *free circulation of workers* within the EU. Several Council directives and regulations put into practice the right of any European worker of finding a job in every EU Member State at the same conditions foreseen for all citizens of the same States. The use of Council directives – as in many other cases we will see below - means that EU intervention affects to a high degree the content of national laws. Thus, in principle, a worker from Poland or Estonia will have the possibility to work in Austria or Italy enjoying the same rights of an Austrian or Italian worker.

The second decision concerns the *free establishment of firms* in any EU country. Any European citizen or firm is entitled to exercise its activity in any nation of the Union. It is also free the possibility for an entrepreneur of establishing its activity in more than one State at the same time.

The third EU intervention is referred to the *free provision of services* in any EU Member State. In practice, this means that the exercise of activities of commercial, industrial, artisan-like, professional character can be carried out by any European citizen exactly at the same conditions of a self-employed worker whose activity is located in that same country. A few caveats, however, apply in this case. In particular, “foreign” entrepreneurs – if their will is to exercise their profession in a specific Member State - have to respect the rules governing a specific profession in that State, albeit different from their State of origin. It is an example of the so-called principle of “mutual recognition”: each State (and therefore each EU citizen) accepts the particular laws prevailing in all other States; the differences in the national normative frameworks remain, but the principle of free circulation and establishment of entrepreneurs is safe.

An important exception regarding the three freedoms here just mentioned concerns the limitations that every State can put to the possibility of free circulation and establishment for reasons of public order, health and security.

A fourth, extremely relevant area where EU intervention in the labour market and the welfare system has been especially strong concerns the matters of *sanitary regulations and security at work*. Article 137 of the Treaty lays the general normative basis and a great number of directives specify in more detail the EU legislator prescriptions. The spirit of this intervention is to “harmonize” a set of minimum requirements to adopt in the working place with the basic aim of preventing work accidents and of improving the health of workers and it should be here added that social partners (through the EESC) can make their voices heard on these matters thanks to the consultation procedures specified in the Treaty. However, EU decisions have gone farther than the simple design of general rules (which, by the way, are exposed in great detail in the legislation). Many directives have been approved with reference to sectors where workers are exposed to particular dangers (mining and

building industries in particular) or with regard to pregnant mothers and young people at work.

A fifth set of EU decisions – which can heavily affect the regular operation of small firms – regards the *organization of working time*. With the attempt of creating a common legal basis, through the adoption of different directives (the most important one issued in 2000), the EU has taken a position on the issue of daily and weekly rest, on the maximum length of weekly working time, on the number of days of paid annual holidays, on night work. The EU standards leave some autonomy of decision to national authorities and contractual agreements between social partners, though the aim is nonetheless one of progressive convergence of rules within the European area. This is an important part of the *labour acquis* which legislation in new Member States will have to deal with; firms will thus be inevitably affected by the domestic implementation of EU directives. Just to give an example of a wide and articulated matter, EU directives provides for at least four weeks of paid annual holidays.

Two other areas where the EU intervention has been particularly strong and constant over time regard *equal treatment and equal opportunity between working men and women*. To give the idea of how sensitive has always been this issue at European level, one must only recall that article 3 (2) of the Treaty mentions explicitly the principles of equal treatment and equal opportunity on matters of employment. It must also be stressed that the EU wide and complex set of decisions in this field (directives, but also Council recommendations and resolutions) also refer to self-employed activities. The scope of Community legislation extends to matters such as access to work, training, professional promotion, working conditions.

The seventh field of EU decision which is worth recalling here regards the delicate matter of *parental leave and absence from work*, which can be considered a sub-set of the equal opportunities area. Community legislation – a social partners-

inspired directive issued in 1996 – aims to create a normative environment where the “natural” needs of a household (such as the birth of a child) are made more compatible with the obligations deriving to fathers and mothers alike from their working life. The 1996 directive sets minimum standards (e.g., in case of childbirths, leaves of absence cannot be less than three months) leaving to national authorities and national social partners the autonomy of spelling out the details of legislation.

Another field of interest recently covered in more detail by the Union is the *prohibition of work discriminations* based on race, ethnic origins, religion, personal opinions, handicaps, age, sexual tendencies. It is a matter on which the Treaty of Amsterdam has intervened (see its article 13) and on which two specific directives have been subsequently issued in 2000. These two directives are part of the *acquis* since they both have to be domestically implemented by the end of 2003.

A general area (the ninth we are seeing) the EU has long decided to deal with regards the *progressive convergence of national legislations on matters of industrial relations*, labour contracts in particular. Being the object a field typically in the hands of national social partners, the EU intervention is of a very delicate nature. Nonetheless, not only the Treaty, on articles 94, 95 and 136 stresses the need of the normative convergence, but the EU has issued a number of important directives on matters such as layoffs, information to workers on their contracts, part-time work, fixed-duration work. Within the scope of this guide, the EU decisions concerning layoffs are less important since they are devoted to firms with at least twenty paid workers. Much more important is the EU standing on part-time and fixed-duration work with directives issued, respectively in 1997 and 1999. Both these directives – it must be here recalled again - are the result of two framework agreements reached by social partners (UNICE, CEEP, CIS). The spirit of the two directives is to find an equilibrium between the flexibility inherent in part-time and fixed-duration contracts

with a certain degree of protection of the workers. Autonomy is left to national authorities in the implementation of the EU decisions.

In conclusion, even on matters apparently and firmly in the hands of national authorities such as employment and welfare, the EU has already covered large and relevant areas of the field. This trend is only going to get stronger in the future and this is why social dialogue and concertation at European level is so important: it is the most direct and probably best way for firms – especially small ones – for getting their interests supported in a policy-making process whose result will affect firms themselves anyway.

## GLOSSARY

**(Texts are mostly taken from Glossaries in Economic Commission, 2000 and 2002 and in European industrial relations observatory on-line of the European foundation for the improvement of living and working conditions)**

**COLLECTIVE AGREEMENT** - An agreement reached through collective bargaining between an employer and one or more trade unions, or between employers' associations and trade union confederations. The agreement regulates the relationships between the parties and the treatment of individual workers, and covers the wages and conditions of the workers affected.

**COLLECTIVE BARGAINING** - The process of negotiation between unions and employers in respect of the terms and conditions of employment of employees, and about the rights and responsibilities of trade unions. The term is usually seen as necessarily containing an element of negotiation and hence as distinct from processes of consultation, from which negotiation is absent, and where outcomes are determined unilaterally by the employer.

**COMPANY AGREEMENT** – A collective agreement at company corporate or divisional level, between a single employer and one or more trade unions.

**COMPANY BARGAINING** – Collective bargaining between a single employer and one or more trade unions in respect of all workers or groups of workers in that company. In single-plant companies plant bargaining and company bargaining are synonymous; in multi-plant companies the term applies when it covers bargaining that applies at least to certain grades of workers in all or several of its plants.

**CONSULTATION** - A process of discussion and debate between unions and employers, or between employers and employees, usually distinguished from collective bargaining and negotiation in that it does not imply a process of bargaining, compromise and joint agreement.

**CORPORATISM** - Systems of government and economic regulation involving active state intervention in the economy through joint decision-making machinery involving the state and employer and employee representatives. Used to contrast with systems of economic liberalism based on clear separation of the state from the economy and from the economic interest groups.

**CROSS-SECTORAL (or CROSS-INDUSTRY) SOCIAL DIALOGUE** - A bipartite cross-sectoral (or cross-industrial) system of consultation and negotiation. Agreement of a contractual nature can be also reached both within Member States and at EU level.

**DECENTRALIZATION** - In the industrial relations literature, the term usually refers to the marked tendency from the 1970s onwards for collective bargaining to shift from the multi-employer, industry-wide level to the single-employer level.

**EMPLOYERS' ASSOCIATIONS** - Organisations of employers, almost always within industrial sectors, formed usually for the purposes of negotiations with trade unions or to provide affiliated employers with industrial relations advice and assistance. In some industries employers' associations negotiate industry-wide, multi-employer collective agreements with trade unions. But with the decline in importance of such agreements employers' associations are becoming increasingly valued for the other services they provide to their members. These include advice on the implications of industrial relations legislation, recruitment, education and training, work study and bonus schemes, job evaluation and local pay levels.

**FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT** – Regulatory text adopted by the social partners. It is implemented through transposal at national level or through adoption of a European legal instrument.

**INCOMES POLICY** - Governmental policies designed to restrict the rate of growth of pay in an effort to reduce the level of inflation.

**JOINT OPINION** – Text adopted jointly by the social partners in which they express an opinion or intention on a Commission initiative or, more generally, on a Community policy.

**LOCAL AGREEMENT** – A collective agreement reached in a particular locality or set of localities. The term could be used to describe an agreement covering a particular group of workers in one factory, a single factory, or a sub-set of factories within a

particular company. More generally it could be taken to cover any agreement below the national or industry-wide level. It is a very broad and imprecise term.

**MACROECONOMIC DIALOGUE** – Dialogue set up by the Cologne European Council in 1999. It involves the social partners in the coordination of economic policy and improves interaction between development in wages and monetary and budget fiscal policies.

**NEGOTIATION** - A process of bargaining between management and trade unions, the outcome of which is an agreed compromise, acceptable to both sides, although not necessarily what either would have wanted. As a component of management/union relations it is to be distinguished from consultation, in which management retains the right to unilateral action after listening to union comments.

**PARENTAL LEAVE** - A period of leave to be taken by either parent to look after a child usually after maternity leave but also for urgent family reasons.

**PLANT BARGAINING:** Bargaining that occurs within an individual an individual plant or factory.

**SECTORAL SOCIAL DIALOGUE** – Dialogue involving the social partners of a given sector of economic activity.

**SOCIAL CONCERTATION** – Method of managing labour, social and economic issues by means of consultation between the public authorities and bodies representing employees and employers.

**SOCIAL DIALOGUE** - Process of continuous interaction between the social partners with the aim of reaching agreements on the control of certain economic and social variables, both at macro and at micro level.

**SOCIAL PARTNERS** - The main protagonists participating in collective bargaining and the processes of industrial relations/labour relations. At macro level they can be identified as: government, employers' associations and trade unions. At micro level (the enterprise) the latter two play the primary role. Other, less important social actors may, however, intervene at both levels (for example, other private associations or local bodies and local government).

**TELEWORK** - Work done in the home at a physical distance from the employer using information-based electronic equipment for some parts of the job. The most common categories of job teleworker are those of data-processing professionals, word-processing, data input sales representatives and insurance agents. Some teleworkers will be employees, others work on a sub-contracted self-employed basis.

**TRADE UNION DENSITY** - The proportion of potential union members who are actually in a trade union. Or, the proportion of union members on total paid employment.

**TRIPARTISM** - A system of co-operation in economic and industrial policy making between government and the peak organisations representing both sides of industry.

**UNIONISATION RATE** – See Trade union density.

**“VAL DUCHESSE” SOCIAL DIALOGUE** – Cross-industry social dialogue launched in 1985 at the Val Duchesse social dialogue summit. Through this forum for dialogue the social partners are informed about Community initiatives and discuss the independent measures they intend to take.

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## **Internet links**

The main source of information is the website of the European Union (<http://europa.eu.int>). In particular, details on social dialogue and concertation can be found at:

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment\\_social/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/index_en.htm) which is the link to the home page of Directorate General, Employment and Social Affairs of the Commission;

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment\\_social/soc-dial/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/employment_social/soc-dial/index_en.htm) with relevant information on European industrial relations and change;

[http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/employment\\_social/pub/index\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/dgs/employment_social/pub/index_en.htm) with details on recent publications by DG Employment and Social Affairs.

See also the website of the European Economic and Social Committee: <http://www.esc.eu.int>.

Moreover, an extremely useful link on industrial relations and social dialogue (also on the new EU Member situation) is the site of the European foundation for the improvement of living and working conditions, in particular the European industrial relations observatory on-line: <http://www.eiro.eurofound.ie>.

Also very useful are the links of social partners' organizations: UEAPME (<http://www.ueapme.com>), UNICE (<http://www.unice.org>), CEEP (<http://www.ceep.org>), ETUC (<http://www.etuc.org>).