

CEPLIS Position on Strengthening Social Dialogue in the EU

The recent health crisis made the important role of the Representative Bodies of Liberal Professions as Social Partners more visible. Once more, the Representative Bodies of the Healthcare Professions were in the front row of organizing and supporting the national and regional medical support systems as a direct partner of their governments. Similar support came from Representative Bodies of other Professions regarding the upkeep of infrastructure, the definition and distribution of support measures, the information processes for public and economy etc.

A strong European Social Dialogue depends on effective national social partners. During the Covid-19 crisis, a well-functioning social dialogue demonstrated to be a solid source for handling crises, conserving jobs and sustaining enterprises. Social partners are the best positioned to deal with topics related to the changing requirements of the labour market. The European Social Dialogue is, here and now, undertaking a deep revision in collaboration between the European Commission and the European social partners.

Strengthening social dialogue as a tool for stability and decreasing social and economic inequalities. Social dialogue provides to reaching the aims of full employment, social improvement and the fight against social exclusion laid down in Art. 9 TFEU. Real social dialogue at all stages is also a device to re-build trust in the European mission at large, to counter populism, and to impact to economic growth.

Strengthening the role of Liberal Professional Representative Bodies as important Social Partners that can contribute to societal needs and therefore involving them in all democratic processes of consultation prior to any new legislation will be an important measure proving that we have learned something from the crisis. In fact, in some EU Member States, as in France, this is already the case regarding national inter-professional representations. This should be proposed as “European Best Practice.” We need a more structured and more representative social dialogue. All professions in all countries must be able to enter in direct dialogue with public authorities in a sustained and coordinated manner. Perhaps the European Commission itself could make recommendations to countries in this regard. Likewise, at Community level, a structured dialogue between CEPLIS and the institutions could be particularly fruitful.

A European sectoral social dialogue is the real turning point for a structural reform of the social dialogue. With their specific knowledge of each area, sectoral social partners are those that have the competence to negotiate according to national law and practice. This peculiarity allows the social partners to lead policymakers in passing legislation that truthfully replicates the requirements of each sector. The sectoral social partners are in a better rank to give up a tangible portrait of each sector and can provide detailed information that can be used in the design of policy proposals. This particularity also enables the social partners to vigorously start a legislative procedure when the requirements are met.

Sectoral social partners should be involved in the EU’s policymaking process, especially through their social dialogue committees by mutual agreement. They can in particular contribute to sector-specific initiatives by adding their social partner knowledge. Liberal professions’ social partners could encourage the European Institutions to consult the relevant European social partners from the initial phase possible before the drafting of a policy proposal begins. Exchange among sectoral social

partners at European level, starting from the national realities, on this and the implementation of focused projects aimed to raise awareness on European social dialogue could be mutually beneficial.

European Social Dialogue relies on a strong national involvement. Liberal professions' social partners are ready to engage in capacity building activities to develop, promote and strengthen sectoral social dialogue taking into due consideration the diversity of industrial relation systems and the specific features and needs of each sector.

It has often been said, but it is necessary to repeat it, that a new start for an efficient Social Dialogue is needed. One of the hallmarks of the lack of preparedness for the current health crisis was the lack of regular consultation with the liberal professions. A better recognition of our sector and of our role within the European societies is a key component of a larger, more representative and more effective social dialogue mechanism. Social dialogue has been the cornerstone of the social dimension of the single market and this should not be forgotten (art. 154 TFUE).

This is why we call for the formal recognition of bodies such as CEPLIS as a Social Partners representing the liberal professions' family so that our voice can be taken into account in the construction of solutions to the crisis but also for the development of a stronger and ever-closer Union. A fair transition can only be achieved if liberal professionals have a seat at the table. Transition planning cannot be done in isolation. The European Commission has all the necessary instruments to improve this situation and to make Just Transition a reality.

In general, we call upon the EU institutions to understand and take into account the specificities of our professions and not to apply upon our enterprises a strict market logic and criteria that do not respond to the essence of our exercise, which is not exclusively oriented towards gain. We strongly believe that in order for all the above issues and for several others, concerning specific professions, a structured and sustainable dialogue must be established between our socio-economic category and the Union's institutions.