
EU Commission: an initiative on social dialogue. “Union membership and collective bargaining are steeply declining”

“An initiative to further strengthen and promote social dialogue with concrete actions at national and EU level” is the one that has been proposed earlier today by the European Commission, which insists on its “strong commitment to social dialogue as a cornerstone of the EU social market economy and its competitiveness. The initiative empowers social dialogue to adapt to the changing world of work and new trends on the labour market, against the backdrop of the transitions to a digital and climate neutral economy and the emergence of new forms of employment”. Through social dialogue and collective bargaining, negotiations between employers’ and employees’ organisations (trade unions) will help improve – according to the EU Commission’s initiative – living and working conditions, such as pay, hours of work, annual leave, parental leave, training, and health and safety measures”. The trade unions “also play a crucial role in times of crisis or change. For instance, during the COVID-19 pandemic, they quickly helped to organise health and safety measures at work, and short time work schemes”. However, the EU Commission admits, “the degree and quality of the involvement of social partners varies considerably among countries. At the same time, union membership and the share of workers covered by collective agreements at national level is declining (from an EU average of about 66% in 2000 to about 56% in 2019). Newer forms of employment such as platform work and certain groups such as young people are also less likely to be represented, with some sectors like care seeing a near-total absence of collective bargaining”.

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