

Consultation of sectoral social partners on the review of EU sectoral social dialogue

Bd A. Reyers Ln 80

1030 Brussels – Belgium

 www.ceemet.org

 [@ceemet](https://twitter.com/ceemet)

EU Transparency Register

61370904700-45

Key messages

I. Added value of MET sector social dialogue

- The overall evaluation of the MET social dialogue by Ceemet members is positive as they value the quality of the outcomes over the years (joint positions, declarations, events etc.)
- The MET social dialogue is based on the mutual understanding on how social dialogue functions in the different Member States, on the exchange of best practices and on lobby activities at both EU and national level
- As a result of social dialogue, the MET social partners also have easier access to EU funds and partnership & networking opportunities

II. Challenges of MET sector social dialogue

- A fit for purpose sector social dialogue deserves more than three meetings per year
- The Commission should strictly apply its 1998 Decision on sector social dialogue in order to avoid the fragmentation of the MET social dialogue

III. Contributions of social partners to EU policy making

- Consultation of EU initiatives in the social affairs and employment area should not be diluted with other types of consultation – i.e. public consultations
- Employer (social partners) contributions to social partner consultations should be better reflected in (EU) social policy making (Commission proposals)
- Informal consultation of social partners should take place in the debates around EU initiatives with a strong social component that are not released by DG Employment

IV. Outcomes of MET sector social dialogue

- The MET social dialogue focuses on topics agreed by the social partners after thorough consultation of members priorities and in line with the work programmes and rules of procedure
- The outcomes that the social partners reach, in their autonomy, are of added value to our members. A quality social dialogue is not linked to the number of outcomes but to the quality of the work achieved
- The Commission should improve its social dialogue webpage to better market and disseminate social partners outcomes. Social media should also be used

V. Support for sector social dialogue

The Commission should:

- Continue to boost support for capacity building of social partners – where necessary – in order to improve their representativeness
- Improve technical support for online meetings and increase financial support for additional social dialogue meetings
- Improve the AGM system

PRELIMINARY REMARKS

Following several years of informal dialogue, Ceemet & industriAll Europe formalised their social dialogue in January 2010. The MET sectoral social dialogue is structured in two working groups on “Competitiveness & Employment” and “Education & Training”. The annual plenary meeting gathers the members of both working groups.

Ceemet welcomes the fact that Andrea Nahles was appointed as Special Advisor on social dialogue to Commissioner Nicolas Schmit. Ceemet met Ms. Nahles at different occasions (Social dialogue working group, bilateral meetings, joint employer/trade union meetings) and already had the opportunity to share its views on how to improve sectoral social dialogue.

Ceemet, nevertheless, welcomes the Commission specific consultation of social partners on how to improve sectoral social dialogue and further expresses its interest to participate in the different seminars that will be organised in this context and that will serve to build the Commission’s future initiative in the area of social dialogue.

Finally, Ceemet would like to refer to the joint statement reached together with industriAll Europe in September 2016 on “*how to promote a fit for purpose European sectoral social dialogue*” [see link](#). In this joint position, the MET sector social partners share their views on how to foster an efficient, added value sectoral social dialogue. The content of this paper remains valid for the present consultation.

I. ADDED VALUE OF MET SOCIAL DIALOGUE

Sectoral social partners are closer to the needs and challenges of workers and employers and thus have the possibility to offer innovative tailor-made solutions to the issues employers and workers representatives encounter. In this vein, Ceemet would like to recall the importance of (MET) sectoral social partners as they are closer to the industry and therefore address more specific topics.

As mentioned above, Ceemet and industriAll Europe hold a formalised sectoral social dialogue since 2010. Our social dialogue is of genuine added value to our members and in general performs well though there is some room for improvement. It is based on the mutual understanding of how social dialogue functions in the different Member States, on the exchange of best practices and information and, very importantly, on joint lobby activities, both at EU and national level.

Further, as a result of sectoral social dialogue, the MET social partners can access networking & partnership opportunities and are informed on the initiatives taken at EU level which impact the employment and social affairs area. Through social dialogue, members have more options to access EU-funded projects that are of interest to them as well as to partner-up with other social partners. Social dialogue also serves members to inform on their own challenges i.e. difficulties in accessing EU funded projects. These messages are then given by the Brussels secretariats to the Commission services (bottom-up approach) which can help improve the Commission’s understanding of national situations.

Over the years, the MET social partners have reached a large number of important and valuable outcomes (such as joint positions), put in place joint lobby activities (for example, in the area of education & training), organized joint events (in the European Parliament, in the Economic and Social Committee etc.), participated jointly in high level events (such as the European Alliance for Apprenticeships, the Industry Days), elaborated joint studies and have even worked together on selected legislative dossiers. A large number of these outcomes are accessible on the website, [see here](#).

Ceemet members evaluate positively the large number of quality outcomes reached as a result of social dialogue. These have served to carry out lobby actions at national level, to understand the functioning of social partnership in other countries, to gather intelligence on how social partners deal with certain topics (i.e. skills) in other Member States, to learn from each other and exchange best practices and experiences etc. Further, members have also had the opportunity to participate in EU funded projects and have acquired in-depth knowledge of Commission initiatives in the area of social affairs and employment.

II. CHALLENGES OF THE MET SOCIAL DIALOGUE

From the organisational point of view, our social dialogue only meets formally three times per year (with interpretation services and support from the Commission). In spite of the fact that secretariats hold informal meetings and discuss different issues on a frequent basis, Ceemet considers that three formalised meetings is not sufficient to hold a fit-for purpose social dialogue, as it is only within these formalised structures that Ceemet and industriAll members meet to have in-depth discussions on the agreed topics.

Furthermore, today the MET social partners are dealing with important issues, such as Artificial Intelligence, which, though not strictly social, has a strong social dimension and are thus heavily impacting the employment context within the MET industries. Given that today the number of topics with “a social dimension” is broader than it used to be, a reduced number of meetings does not allow for a proper debate amongst members on these topics.

Ceemet therefore calls on the Commission to increase their financial support for additional social dialogue meetings (be it physically or online).

Avoiding fragmentation of MET social dialogue

In recent years, Ceemet had experienced a fragmentation of its sectoral social dialogue, as some industry associations were formally engaged in a European sectoral social dialogue supported by the European Commission.

For the future, and in order to ensure a proper MET sectoral social dialogue, Ceemet calls on the Commission to put in place a strict application of the concept of sectoral social partners based on the Commission decision of 1988. It is mandate, representativeness, and capacity that enables EU sector social partners to take the responsibilities for the outcomes reached in social dialogue.

Ceemet would also like to refer to the Eurofound representativeness study of 2018 (for the MET industries) that concludes that Ceemet is the most representative European sectoral organisation for the MET sector and the only European organisation active and involved in the field of social dialogue. We should, therefore, be considered as the only European social partner organisation representative for the entire MET sector.

Ceemet is nevertheless to play a role to keep industry associations informed about the discussions and outcomes of the MET sectoral social dialogue.

III. CONTRIBUTIONS TO EU POLICY MAKING IN THE SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND EMPLOYMENT AREA

Social partner consultations (TFEU)

In its 2016 joint statement on “how to promote a fit for purpose European sectoral social dialogue”, Ceemet already pointed out that social partner consultations on EU initiatives in the area of social affairs and employment had to entail a proper and timely involvement of social partners (procedure wise). Indeed, the TFEU recognises the important role that social partners play in employment and social affairs and the expertise they have in these areas. Therefore,

it is crucial that consultations on EU initiatives in the social area are not diluted with other types of consultations (i.e. public consultations) where other types of organizations (industry associations, civil society organizations etc.) are consulted on initiatives that are the sole remit of social partners. The voice of social partners should thus be given a more important weight on topics which fall under their competences.

Even though the Commission consultation procedures have improved since 2016, there is still some room for improvement. For example, on the initiatives on Individual Learning Accounts (ILAs) and micro-credentials (skills area), the Commission has offered the possibility to reply to inception impact assessments (open to all), organized a targeted consultation of social partners and is in the middle of gathering input on both initiatives through public consultations. For Ceemet, it is confusing that the same initiatives are subject to different types of consultations (public and targeted) as these types of “mixed procedures” do not seem to guarantee solid social partner involvement in employment and social policy initiatives that is indispensable for seizing the full potential of European (sectoral) social dialogue.

Employers’ contributions to social partner consultations and EU policy making

In order to reply to social partners’ targeted consultations, Ceemet puts in place in-depth internal consultation procedures to allow for a proper involvement of members on the different “consultation topics” (minimum wages, platform work etc). Ceemet members are the recognized sectoral social partners at national level and are thus the experts dealing with the different topics within the social affairs & employment departments. Ceemet contributions to social partner consultations are, therefore, developed and constructed on the basis of solid input from their members.

For example, on the Commission proposal on adequate minimum wages, beyond the fact that Ceemet and many other employer organisations challenged the legal basis, we were clear on the fact that wage setting and wage policy is a national competence and in many countries a **core responsibility of mandated social partners** at the appropriate level. Indeed, employers representatives argued that by proposing a Directive, the EU would strongly interfere in national competence and breach social partner autonomy which is a fundamental principle to be respected. However, employers’ views were disregarded and a Directive on this topic was put forward.

Ceemet would, thus, positively value that industry & tech contributions (employer contributions) are better reflected in EU policy making in the social affairs and employment area.

Initiatives from other DGs impacting the social affairs & employment area

As referred to above, the Commission releases numerous initiatives with a strong social dimension which come out from DGs other than DG employment. Due to this situation, these proposals do not fall under the social partners’ consultation procedure foreseen by the TFEU. Therefore, Ceemet proposes that, for these initiatives, the Commission puts in place another type of social partner consultation procedure, more informal ones such as hearings, consultation via e-mail etc. in order for the other DGs to consult and involve social partners on initiatives with a strong social dimension. Better coordination of DGs would indeed be of added value.

The ‘Pact for Skills’ is a joint initiative of DG Employment and DG Grow

A better coordination of both DGs on this specific topic would have allowed a timely consultation and active involvement of social partners when the initiative was launched.

In that sense, Ceemet welcomes the proposal made by Special Adviser Nahles in her final report that each Directorate General should appoint a member of staff responsible for social dialogue and that these coordinators work closely with DG Employment to ensure that social partners are involved and consulted on new initiatives at an early stage.

Improving the involvement of sectoral social partners in the Semester process and in the National Recovery and Resilience Plans (NRRPs)

Since the European Pillar for Social Rights was proclaimed in November 2017, the European Semester process is one of the Commission's tools to shape social policy in the EU. For this reason, Ceemet welcomes the Commission's intention to improve the consultation and participation of social partners in the Semester process as also recommended by Mrs Nahles in her report. In this context, Ceemet calls on the Commission to coordinate with Members States in order to put in place the adequate consultation procedures for sectoral social partners to contribute to the debates around the Semester process.

Finally and similarly, consultation and involvement of social partners in the development and deployment of the National Recovery and Resilience Plans should be fostered.

IV. OUTCOMES OF SECTOR SOCIAL DIALOGUE – RESPECT FOR SOCIAL PARTNER AUTONOMY

Concerning the content and outcomes of sectoral social dialogue, Ceemet would like to emphasize once more the importance of respecting social partners' autonomy. Ceemet-industriAll Europe social dialogue focuses on topics chosen by social partners after thorough consultation of members' priorities and in line with the annual agreed work-programs and rules of procedure.

The MET social partners believe that the tools chosen to reach the objectives are of added value – be it joint positions, exchange of best practices, analytical documents etc. Whatever these tools are, all outcomes are important and valuable. The quality of social dialogue is not linked to the volume of joint positions or declarations but rather to the effects they produce. Similarly, Ceemet does not believe that an effective social dialogue should systematically lead to agreements at EU level. For the tech & industry employers, bargaining and negotiations of agreements is for the national level. Social dialogue at EU level aims at producing joint positions or recommendations as well as to exchange information and best practices.

In this context, Ceemet welcomes Mrs. Nahles' proposal to ***set-up a platform for the exchange of best practices on social dialogue with support from the European Commission***. This is a simple tool for social partners to learn from each other and thus to support and strengthen EU social dialogue. The platform should be an interactive tool (online) where social partners across Europe could easily access information on social dialogue practice in other countries and exchange information.

Dissemination of outcomes

Ceemet would like to suggest to improve the Commission's webpage dedicated to the results of social dialogue. Indeed, in our opinion the website is not user-friendly and social partner activities are not easy to find. A user-friendly website is a very good tool to publish, market and disseminate social partner outcomes.

In this same vein, Ceemet would like to propose to the Commission to use social media (be it LinkedIn or others) to market or disseminate the outcomes of social dialogue. The Commission could also use targeted Weeks (Vocational Skills Week, Industry days, and other fora) to market and promote social dialogue outcomes.

V. SUPPORT FOR SECTORAL SOCIAL DIALOGUE

EU Funds for sectoral social partners:

Ceemet fully agrees with Mrs. Nahles' proposal to boost support for capacity building in order to improve the representativeness of social partners and, thus, calls on the Commission to allocate the adequate funds to reach this objective. A structured exchange of information and best practices in this area will also be of added value. In this regard, Ceemet is fully committed to play its part when it comes to developing employers' organisations in countries where employers' representation is weak. It is indeed key that European social dialogue can rely on strong and representative national organisations.

Moreover, EU funds in the area of social dialogue and industrial relations, in particular targeted to sector social partners should be easily accessible.

Ceemet welcomes the Commission information sessions on funding opportunities. These sessions are an important added value tool for social partners to access information on potential European funded projects.

Organizational aspects of meetings:

Concerning some very practical issues on the organizational support given by the European Commission to sectoral social Committees, Ceemet would like to make the following comments:

- The use of certain online platforms has proven to be inefficient to allow proper dialogue and debate during the meetings. Therefore, Ceemet would like to call on the Commission for the adequate technical support for such online meetings. Platforms such as Interactio should be avoided as they do not allow for proper discussions amongst members.
- As mentioned above, it would also be of great added value if the Commission could increase its financial support for additional social dialogue meetings (be it physically or online). Three Social dialogue meetings is not enough to ensure a well-functioning, efficient, value-adding sectoral social dialogue at EU level. Such a limited number of meetings does not offer the possibility for members to discuss in an in-depth manner the social dossiers which have a large impact on the MET industries.
- Further, it would be important to improve the AGM system as it is cumbersome and confusing. The number of notifications it generates for the participants, for example, is a real source of annoyance.
- For the sake of continuity, it would be of added value, if the Commission could ensure that the contact persons for the MET sectoral social dialogue do not change on a regular basis
- Finally, Ceemet would be grateful if the Commission would propose more options for the dates allocated for Social Dialogue meetings. It is a challenge to gather members from two different organizations from many different countries if the options of dates for meetings are limited. This certainly reduces the possibilities of having a large number of participants attending the social dialogue meetings.
