

10th anniversary of the EU Social Dialogue Committee for Central Government Administrations (SDC CGA)

Statement adopted online, 3 December 2020

Ten years ago, at the joint request of the social partners, EUPAE for the employers, and EPSU-led TUNED in cooperation with CESI for the trade unions, the European Commission agreed to establish the social dialogue committee for the central government sector administration. In total, the sector, in the 28 EU Member States, employs almost 9 million people¹.

It meant a recognition of central government administrations as a sector in its own right and of the EU sectoral social dialogue as both a tool and objective of good governance, in line with the European treaties and 22-years of sectoral social dialogue Communications.

Following a long-standing demand of the trade unions and thanks to the support of a coalition of governments, the Committee came into being on 17 December 2010. It has since grown with 18 governments on the side of EUPAE², a testimony of the trustworthy and relevant work of the Committee.

The establishment of the Committee took place against a very difficult EU context of austerity measures. For the trade unions, a priority was to press for EU minimum social standards on consultation rights in view of much restructuring and changes taking place with no or little say for the workers and their representatives. For the employers, it was to gain a more coordinated say as employers in EU social policy-making.

This 10th anniversary comes at a moment when Europe is facing its most difficult health, economic and social crisis triggered by the outbreak of Covid-19 pandemic.

At the same time, the crisis has shown the importance of working together, of a well-functioning, reactive, protective and democratic welfare state based on valued civil servants across all grades and of a good organisation between different levels of governments. It has also shown the importance of better enforcing EU principles of democracy including at work and cooperation between member states.

While today's turbulent times do not allow for celebrations, a 10th anniversary is, however, an opportunity to recall achievements and chart a course for the next years.

The objectives of the Committee remain as relevant today as a decade ago: to provide a forum for information, consultation and negotiations with a view to improve both the quality of working conditions and of public administrations. The Committee brings different perspectives, the employers' and the trade unions', but it shares the joint ambition of making the administration more responsive to citizens' needs and as open and transparent and accountable as possible when doing so.

¹ EC representativeness study of social partners in central government administrations, Eurofound, 2017

² These are Austria, Belgium, Czech Rep., Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Greece, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain.

Ensuring sufficiently staffed and resourced public administrations and improving cooperation within and between member states will be critical to the recovery from the pandemic and better preparedness to other sanitary or ecological crisis.

For the past decade, the Committee has used all the instruments available as follows:

- EC funds for social dialogue projects which led to the completion of a comparative research and a guide on psycho-social risks at work and a checklist of dos and don'ts on digitalisation and work-life balance;
- statements on the financial crisis, EC strategy on occupational health and safety, quality public services for people in a vulnerable situation, and on Covid-19 and its aftermath;
- research on measuring and closing the gender pay gap;
- responses to EC consultations, most recently on fair national minimum wages;
- policy guidelines on reinforcement of human resources management;
- signing of the 2010 multisectoral guidelines on preventing and tackling third-party violence and harassment at work;
- two agreements: an autonomous agreement on principles of a good administration and an agreement on workers and their trade unions' rights on information and consultation on restructuring with a view to it becoming legally binding via a directive.

For the next years, the Committee commits to strengthening the implementation at national level and across EC services of the above achievements. Adoption of joint statements or agreements is a start, not the end result. A reflection on how to better disseminate the work of the SDC CGA within EUPAN will be necessary.

Securing a legislative implementation of the 2015 Agreement on information and consultation rights on restructuring remains essential, not least because of a massive development of telework and growing health and safety concerns due to the pandemic. The Committee welcomes the ongoing discussions between the Commission and social partners with a view to clarify the rules on social dialogue and strengthen its impact at national level. A report by Ms Nahles, special advisor to EU Commissioner Schmit, will be available in February 2021 to this effect.

Convinced that shaping EU social minimum standards is part of the responsibility of the EU social partners, the Committee will seek, with the support of the Commission, to reach an agreement on digitalisation to make it a shared positive development for both the quality of working conditions and effective accessibility of public administrations.

The Committee underlines the importance of the principle of autonomy of social partners. It remains committed to strengthening the capacities of national employers and trade union organisations. There is only a well-functioning EU social dialogue in so far as there is an equally well-functioning social dialogue at national and workplace levels.

It is convinced that the diversity of structures and scope of central or federal governments requires EU social minimum standards in line with EU equal treatment principle. It reaffirms its commitment to upholding the European Treaties and Charter of Fundamental Rights including the right to good administration and openness, ensuring that everyone in the EU is treated fairly by the EU and national administrations. It underlines the importance of making public administrations more open and representative of the society it serves.