Social dialogue is a crucial element of the European social model. Unfortunately, the percentage of workers covered by collective agreements has declined over the past 30 years, with the EU average estimated to be around 66% in 2000 and dropping to approximately 56% in 2018.

In line with Articles 152-155 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU), the EU shall promote social dialogue, while fully respecting the autonomy of the social partners and the diversity of national industrial relations systems.

In 2017, the EU Institutions proclaimed the European Pillar for Social Rights. The principle 8 states that social partners shall be consulted on the design and implementation of economic, employment and social policies. In the related 2021 action plan, the European Commission announced that it will consult social partners in 2021 and present an initiative to support social dialogue at EU and national level in 2022, which also reflected in its 2022 work programme.

Following two consultation of social partners (on 5 and 31 May 2022), the Commission put forward a proposal for a Council recommendation which sets out how EU countries can further strengthen social dialogue and collective bargaining at national level, as well as a communication on reinforcing and promoting social dialogue at EU level (see a separate carriage).

The European Parliament has systematically promoted a stronger social dialogue and workers’ representation in the recent legislative and non-legislative initiatives concerning, for instance, the adequate minimum wages, improving working conditions of platform workers and the European works councils.

On 26 April 2023, the European Parliament Committee on Employment and Social Affairs committee (EMPL) adopted 2 questions for Oral answers to Council and Commission on this topic.

Furthermore, on 8 May 2023, EMPL members voted on a motion for resolution on Strengthening social dialogue. The resolution calls on the Member States to review and repeal any national legislation that prevents collective bargaining. It urges the Commission to make sure that the social clause in the existing EU Public Procurement Directive is correctly applied by Member States so that undertakings that have been sentenced for illegal activities related to workers’ and union rights infringements (as well as infringement of environmental legislation) get excluded from tenders. It also calls on the
Commission and Member States to consult the social partners on ecological matters and on the just transition as standard practice throughout the policymaking cycle.

The debate in the EP plenary took place on 31 May 2023. A motion for a resolution was adopted on 1 June by 483 votes for, 38 against and 100 abstentions.

In Council, the text was examined by the Social Questions Working Party at four meetings and has been revised during the examination. The presidency compromise text was adopted in Coreper on 31 May 2023 and submitted to the Council (EPSCO), that adopted it on 12 June 2023.

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European Commission, Commission sets out concrete actions for greater involvement of social partners at national and EU level, press release, 25/01/2023


European Commission, Funding for social dialogue, webpage

European Parliament, Strengthening social dialogue, procedure file, 2023/2536(RSP)

European Parliament, Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, Motion for a resolution on strengthening social dialogue

European Parliament, Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, Vote on Strengthening social dialogue, press release, 9 May 2023

Council, Proposal for a COUNCIL RECOMMENDATION on strengthening social dialogue in the European Union

As of 20 June 2023.