

President Ursula von der Leyen
European Commission
B- 1049 Brussels

Sent by e-mail

**Joint letter from the European Sectoral Social Dialogue Partners
Review of the rules on the financing of the European Sectoral Social Dialogue Committees**

Brussels, 3rd May 2023

Dear President von der Leyen,

The *Communication on Strengthening social dialogue in the European Union: harnessing its full potential for managing fair transitions* of 25 January 2022, states, amongst others, that the Commission will launch a process to review the organisation of sectoral social dialogue committees, including a possible revision of the 1998 Decision, in close cooperation with social partners.

While we look forward to starting such a review process, we have concerns that it might not match the Communication ambitions to further strengthen EU social dialogue and that it might lead to a weakening of the Commission's support as the reality over the past decade has sadly shown: fewer meetings, lesser political engagement in meetings, unclear consultation processes, cumbersome administrative process towards social partner agreements, to name just a few incremental, unilateral negative changes.

Yet, it is our strong view that the Commission's current institutional and financial role should be enhanced.

The Commission's obligation to support social dialogue as set out in the Treaty is well reflected in the new Communication, which states that "Social dialogue is a cornerstone of the European social model" – "Strong social partners are essential for effective and balanced change management" – "Social partners' involvement improves policy-making and law-making" – "The EU promotes the role of social partners and urges better social dialogue" – "The efforts to address the challenges [of national social dialogue] need to be redoubled at national level to harness all the benefits of social dialogue".

The Commission further states that:

- European sectoral social dialogues cover more than 80% of the EU's workforce. This provides legitimacy and lead to concrete outcomes at national level, We would add that with its 80% coverage, European sectoral social dialogues are essential for building national social partners' capacity and thus for improving the collective bargaining coverage.
- Each year European sectoral social partners adopt between 30 and 50 joint positions on a wide range of topics.
- It looks at an enhanced role of the sectoral social dialogues in EU-policy-making.
- It commits to engage with the social partners in the modernisation of the framework for EU sectoral social dialogue to enhance its relevance and effectiveness.

Indeed, as the Communication recognises that social dialogue is a priority for the EU Commission and stresses its role in shaping and delivering fair green and digital transitions and crisis management, we expect the Commission to maintain both its logistical and financial support for sectoral social dialogue committees and enhance its political support. However, the current proposal presented by the EU Commission will not create the necessary conditions for sustainable social dialogue and therefore threatens the mere existence of some SSDCs. Under these circumstances, we request the Commission to come up with a proposal which maintains its responsibility.

As social partners, it is reminded that we are deemed experts in our respective sectors, and that coupled with our institutional role, we would expect greater support than the one the Commission grants to its numerous expert groups.

Finally, it is worth noting that the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee have both taken up the issue and are urging the Commission to maintain its logistical support for sectoral social dialogue committees and to enhance its financial, legal and political support.

In view of this important review, your strong commitment in favour of an effective social dialogue, and in continuity with the Nahles report to strengthen the social dialogue, we would like to have the opportunity to meet with you to discuss the role of the Commission in supporting the sectoral social dialogue.

Yours sincerely,

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Commissioner Nicolas Schmit
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