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European Sectoral Social Dialogue Review – Joint message from the EU Sectoral Social Dialogue Committees

Brussels, 24 May 2022

Dear Mr. Korte,

With this letter, the undersigned EU sectoral social partners would like to express their concerns with regard to the European Commission's approach to the review of the European sectoral social dialogue. More precisely, we would like to express our concern about the intention of transferring the organisation of EU sectoral social dialogue committee meetings to social partners.

We understand the existing constraints, which were raised by the European Commission during the social partner hearing on 28 April 2022. However, we strongly request the Commission to work closely with EU sectoral social partners on a joint solution that fully respects social partners' autonomy and parity – avoiding a severe devaluation of European sectoral social dialogue.

As raised multiple times on various informal and formal occasions, our concerns are of a very principled nature. Through the proposed financing tool for the organisation of SSDC meetings, we understand that funds will be allocated on the basis of project applications to be submitted by EU sectoral social partners on an annual or multi-annual basis.

This raises several questions and concerns:

- For European sectoral social partners in general, and for small European social partner organisations in particular, the proposed changes imply an enormous administrative burden. Applying for, obtaining, and managing a multi-annual budget represents a heavy burden and a tool which would not be flexible enough to adapt to changing priorities of European sectoral social partners including adapting and responding to the EU Commission's own initiatives in the social area.
- The proposal from the Commission also raises serious questions as to whether the proposed funding tool can respect social partner parity. There is the risk of creating an artificial competition for funding if the money allocated depends on the final decision of the Commission to accept or not the project submissions based on unknown criteria.
- On a more general level, the shift of the organisation of EU sectoral social dialogue meetings questions the independence of social partners if they receive direct financing for their staff for the functioning of the organisation and not for the European sectoral social dialogue only.

- We further understand that the concept of applying for funding leads to the consequence that proposals can also be rejected – which would signify a severe violation of social partners’ autonomy and it would challenge the whole existence of European sectoral social dialogue.
- Moreover, we consider that the argument used by the Commission about “greening” is not relevant as the shift of responsibility in the organisation of sectoral social dialogue committee meetings will not have any impact on climate. The proposed transition to more online meetings already leads to cost reductions and an improved ecological footprint, while the change proposed will only be a simple transfer of tasks.
- The European Commission’s approach is also going against the will to support capacity building and independence of social partners as the outsourcing would weaken the long-term relevance of the EU sectoral social dialogue, sending a negative message to national social partners and potential new, interested sectoral social partners. In practice, we fear that the withdrawal of the European Commission from the organisation of meetings would put the engagement of national social partners at risk, which clearly runs against everybody’s objective to strengthen European social dialogue.

As you will take from the above comments, sectoral social partners strongly believe that any reorganisation of the European sectoral social dialogue would need to ensure that both employers and trade unions, with their different internal organisation realities, that need to be respected, have equal access to funding if the system is maintained (Art. 154 TFEU “The Commission shall have the task of promoting the consultation of management and labour at Union level and shall take any relevant measure to facilitate their dialogue by *ensuring balanced support for the parties.*”).

Finally, the focus of sectoral social dialogue should be on content, on contributing to EU policies and legislative process through social partner consultations and should not be overburdened with administrative or financial tasks. The externalisation would add a major layer of discussion that could hinder dialogue on content and EU policies.

Many of these points have already been raised individually in the various informal consultation meetings and hearings on the review of the European sectoral social dialogue, as well as meetings with your services. As sectoral social partners, we strongly request that these are fully taken into account and invite the European Commission to work with us on a solution that works for all sides.

Yours faithfully,

FOR THE TRADE UNIONS’ ORGANISATIONS

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Secretary General

European Arts & Entertainment Alliance
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