Social partners' involvement in the European semester
The case of Belgium

15 May 2017

Vera dos Santos Costa
Head of the international and European affairs department

Michèle Claus
Federation of Entreprises in Belgium
• Social dialogue between employers and employees at 3 levels

- National level
  - “Interprofessional”
  - Separated blue collars/white collars

- Sector level
  - Formal

- Company level
  - Informal
  - Group of 10
  - National Labour council
The Belgian social dialogue model at national level

• National dialogue
  • Interprofessional Agreement (IPA): general framework for the private sector
    • Informal agreement between employers’ and employees’ organizations about wages and labour conditions
    • 2017-2018: Maximum wage increase; early retirement conditions; new rules on long-term illness (reintegration of sick workers); discussions on ‘strenuous occupation’ and impact on retirement age; Measures for risk-groups, Prosperity-linked mechanism for social allowances; ...
  • Advice committees
    • National Labour Council (NLC): social policy
    • Central Economic Council (CEC): economic policy
    • High Council for Prevention and Protection at Work: occupational health and safety
The Belgian social dialogue model

Group of 10

Marie-Hélène Ska (CSC)

Marc Leemans (ACV)

Rudy De Leeuw (ABVV)

Marc Goblet (FGTB)

Mario Coppens (ACLVB)

Sonja De Becker (Agrofront)

Karel Van Eetvelt (UNIZO)

Pieter Timmermans (VBO-FEB)

Bernard Gilliot (VBO-FEB)

Frédéric Buysse (VBO-FEB)

Marc Leemans (ACV)

Philippe Godfroid (UCM)
Involvement of social partners in the annual coordination cycle

- **November**
  - Opinion on DBP Communication on action taken in EDP

- **Winter Forecast**
  - Winter Forecast

- **Spring Forecast**
  - Spring Forecast

- **15 Oktober**
  - EA MS: Draft Budgetary Plans

- **5 April**
  - AMR

- **15 April**
  - Country Profile

- **Early March**
  - Involvement of social partners in the annual coordination cycle
  - March: contribution of CCE & CNT (inventory of actions taken during 18 months)
  - Presentation of PNR, day before formal adoption

- **End May**
  - Very short & quick consultation procedure on draft recommendations

- **2020 strategy**
  - Macro-economic surveillance
  - Fiscal surveillance

- **Sept**
  - Meeting with strategic cell of Prime Minister on budget.
  - Meeting with EU-desk Belgium on results previous semesters and timeline

- **During whole year**
  - regular contacts with Belgian representatives in EMCO, EPSCO, SPC
COMMON UNDERSTANDING : THE FIRST KEY PRINCIPLES

• **September 2010**: Belgian conference of the CNT-CCE and CESE in the involvement of the social partners in the EU2020 Strategy and in the coming European Semester

• **November 2011**: first National report of the Councils in relation with the Semester

• => Early awareness process on the national challenges of the Semester => social partners agreed on the fact that the Semester was shaping new forms of designing policies that they were supposed to be at the heart of the implementing.
STRONG NATIONAL SOCIAL DIALOGUE INSTITUTIONS: 2ND KEY PRINCIPLE

- strong social dialogue institutions which provide information: immediate link with permanent representatives (EMCO, SPC)

- On a very regular base a lot of consultation (but not influencing the process of the Semester)

- Great implication of the national SP in the Semester: NRP’s jointly commented
EUROPEAN SUPPORT AND IMPLICATION: 3\textsuperscript{RD} KEY PRINCIPLE

- Belgian SP’s involvement in the European social dialogue

- Reshape of the Semester + political context: an opportunity …

- The European support initiatives (capacity building process of the ETUC towards its members, raising awareness in the different social dialogue levels, …) \(\rightarrow\) the Joint declaration: a relaunch of the joint social interest!
Table 7: Social partners’ views on certain aspects of their participation in the European Semester

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social partners …</th>
<th>Coincidence of employer organisations and trade unions</th>
<th>Employer organisations</th>
<th>Trade unions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>are aware of the importance of the European Semester process, it really matters to them</td>
<td>AT, BE, CY*, CZ, DE, EE, ES, FI, FR, HR, HU, LV, MT, PL, PT, SE, SI, SK, UK</td>
<td>BG, DK, IE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>allocate enough time and resources to take advantage of the consultation with regard to the NRP and other opportunities to participate and be heard in the European Semester</td>
<td>AT, BE, CY*, CZ, DE, DK, FI (partially), HR, HU (partially), LV, MT, PT (UGT), SE</td>
<td>BG, ES, SK</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Since the beginning of the involvement of social partners in the European Semester in 2011 …</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>participation has been a learning process and has improved their individual and collective capacity</td>
<td>AT, BE, CY*, FR, HR, LV, PL, PT (CIP, CCP since 2015 + UGT), SE</td>
<td>BG, ES, IE</td>
<td>EE, FI, MT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>specific practices and experiences have been developed to improve the involvement of the social partners in the European Semester and particularly in the elaboration of the NRP</td>
<td>AT, BE, CY*, FR, HR, LU, LV, SE</td>
<td>BG, IE, PT (CCP)</td>
<td>MT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The involvement is …</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>similar and equally intense and efficient as the one existing in the national social dialogue or policymaking</td>
<td>ES, HU</td>
<td>BG, MT</td>
<td>DE, DK, EE, FI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>similar, although the output is less efficient than the existing in the national social dialogue or policymaking</td>
<td>CZ, ES, HR, PL</td>
<td>LV, PT (CCP)</td>
<td>AT, DK, MT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>different and less intense and efficient than the one existing in the national social dialogue or policymaking</td>
<td>AT, CY*, DE, ES, FR, IT, PL, PT (CCP, UGT), RO, SI</td>
<td>BE, FI, IE, UK</td>
<td>LV, MT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>different and more intense and efficient than the one existing in the national social dialogue or policymaking</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>BE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Organisations in some Member States did not answer this question, or did not answer clearly enough. Social partners could choose more than one possibility. * Trade unions DEOK, PASYDY, PEO and SEK
Source: Author’s own elaboration
SP’s view on development of involvement

Table 1: Social partners’ views of developments in their involvement in elaboration of the NRP, 2015–2016

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>National social partners</th>
<th>Considerable improvement</th>
<th>Slight improvement</th>
<th>No change</th>
<th>Deterioration</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Employer organisations</td>
<td>BE (FEB/VBO), CY (OEB), RO</td>
<td>BG (BIA), EE, IE</td>
<td>PT (CIP), UK</td>
<td>PT (CCP), SI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Trade unions</td>
<td></td>
<td>PT, RO</td>
<td></td>
<td>UK</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employer organisations + trade unions</td>
<td>CY (CCCI), HR, LT (2015), PT</td>
<td>BG, CZ, DE, DK, ES, FI, FR, HU, LU, MT, NL, PL, SE</td>
<td>LT (2016), LV</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Suggestions for improving the effectiveness of process

• Better time management
  • earlier consultation on draft documents and having more time to read and respond to the documents

Table 8: Suggestions by social partners addressed at improving the efficiency of their involvement

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social partners suggestions related to:</th>
<th>Employer organisations + trade unions</th>
<th>Employer organisations</th>
<th>Trade unions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Better timing (both an earlier start and more time for consultation)</td>
<td>BE, CY, DE, ES, FR, HR, LT, LV, RO</td>
<td>BE (FEB/VBO), PT (CCP)</td>
<td>AT (AK), LV, PL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Their views added as an annex to the NRP or taken into account</td>
<td>AT, BG, DE, LT, LU</td>
<td>AT (ÖGB), DE, PL (ZRP)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Separate meetings</td>
<td>CY, DK</td>
<td></td>
<td>CY (EAKL)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Broader scope of the consultation</td>
<td>FR</td>
<td>BG (joint position), HU (government to negotiate)</td>
<td>DE, IT, PT (CGTP)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
TODAY: GREAT INVOLVEMENT, NO INFLUENCE

- Belgian good example?
- Government not willing to reinforce the social dialogue
- European Governance: an argument for reforms and policies without proper SP’s consultation, CSR’s are an opportunity to justify other measures, …

- **BUT today**: CSR’s and country reports more realistic
- Relaunching of the European social dialogue ...the only way forward!
Current themes in social dialogue

1. Execution of Interprofessional Agreement 2017-2018
2. Execution of Law "Feasible and Flexible Work“
1. Burn-out and absenteeism
2. Simplification of rules and administrative formalities
3. A forward-looking work organization
4. Digitization and Collaborative Economy
5. Mobility budget
6. Restructuring
7. Promotion of youth employment
8. Promotion of hiring and employment
9. Improving and strengthening social dialogue
10. Impact of harmonized statute white and blue collar workers on CPs and other aspects of social dialogue