

Social Europe should be at the centre of the Conference on the Future of Europe

Statement Adopted at the Executive Committee Meeting of 2-3 July 2020

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The COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences have put the European project and democracy at risk. **The EU is at a crossroads and must rise to the challenges that it is facing: either it makes a relevant change of direction and commits to its founding principles, or it will face an unprecedented political crisis. In this context, the European Trade Union Confederation welcomes the intention to organise a Conference on the Future of Europe.** The Conference must constitute the occasion for a genuine and forward-looking discussion concerning the future of the EU in order to ensure that the recovery from the Covid-19 crisis paves the way for a fairer society.

The Conference on the Future of Europe must include the discussion on economic and social democracy, particularly workplace democracy, workers' and trade union rights, social dialogue, collective bargaining, workers' participation and the promotion of better working and living conditions.

The Conference should pave the way for a fair recovery from the Covid-19 crisis and for the definition of a fairer and more sustainable European economy and society. In this regard, the focus should be put on the full implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights, on managing a just transition particularly for climate and digitalisation, on the necessary efforts to rebuild and to strengthen public services, on ensuring that all workers enjoy fair working conditions and wages, that collective bargaining is supported and promoted, and that democracy at work is strengthened.

The Covid-19 crisis has shown once more the importance of social dialogue. **The Conference on the Future of Europe needs to ensure the full involvement of social partners, who can bring an essential contribution to the discussion and the decisions of the Conference, but also to the involvement of workers, companies and citizens at all levels.** This is in line with the recognition of the role of European and national social partners by the Treaties and with the commitment by European and national institutions to promote social dialogue and involvement of social partners.

The European Parliament resolution on the Conference included the call for European social partners to be represented in the European plenary of the Conference. This element must be included in the final setup of the Conference.

In addition, any other fora of discussion (including the assemblies at national level) need to include social partners representatives.

Since the so-called Laval-quartet rulings of the Court of Justice of the European Union the European trade union movement has been pushing for a Social Progress Protocol

on the relation between economic freedoms in the EU internal market and fundamental social rights, including trade union rights, in the light of social progress. Such a protocol should guarantee that workers', trade union and social rights take precedence over economic freedoms in the event of a conflict.

Guaranteeing social progress and protecting fundamental workers and trade union rights constitute key elements in strengthening the European Union project and European democracy.

For this reason, it is important that the Conference on the Future of Europe discusses the possibility of Treaty changes and – in this framework – the introduction of a Social Progress Protocol to the EU treaties.

In this context, it is also necessary to open a discussion on much-needed improvements to the decision-making processes in the European Union.

The future of European democracy, economy and social cohesion is at stake. The trade union movement in Europe has always defended the strengthening of the European project by promoting a European Union that protects its citizens and workers. The European Trade Union Confederation, representing workers across all countries and sectors, is united in calling for a fairer Europe, based on the principles of solidarity, equal rights and social and environmental justice.