Final Conference of the CEMR-EPSU joint project "Localising the European Semester"

The CEMR-EPSU joint project "Localising the European Semester" looked at new ways to establish or reinforce existing channels that allow the involvement of social partners in the yearly mechanism of the European Semester. This project received the financial support of the European Commission.

The overall goal of this project was to strengthen the role of European and national social partners of local and regional governments in the decision-making process of the European Semester. Also, it increased their involvement in the discussion concerning different outcomes of the Semester: Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy, Country Reports, National Reform Programmes, and Country Specific Recommendations.

This joint project started in March 2018 with an opening seminar in Namur. In 2018 and 2019, CEMR and EPSU organised three "national workshops" in Copenhagen,

Madrid, and Vilnius. In each of these workshops the national members' organisations of CEMR and EPSU, coming from a cluster of Member States and grouped by geographic proximity, chair and led the meetings – i.e. Denmark, Sweden and Finland in Copenhagen; Spain, Italy and France in Madrid; Latvia, Lithuania and Estonia in Vilnius.

Each event had been structured as a peer-to-peer workshop where the group of members' representatives chairing the meeting exchange on good practices as well as on policy recommendations both with CEMR and EPSU members from other countries, but also with national governments representatives and European Commission officials in charge of the European Semester.

At the final conference that took place in Venice in January 2020, CEMR and EPSU representatives signed a final joint declaration:

Over the recent years, slight progresses have been made in several Member States in the involvement of social partners organisations in the European Semester process. However, this still remain insufficient in order to make the Semester a fully democratic exercise taking into due consideration the point of view of all concerned institutional actors, of employers' and workers' organisations.

The growing social dimension of the European Semester cannot be overlooked anymore: while in the past the Semester had mainly served as an instrument of economic coordination, it has now become an all-round policy making process that encompasses a variety of issues, from social legislation to EU funds priorities, principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, and Sustainable Development Goals. Therefore, we believe that the Semester need to become more inclusive and reinforce its democratic legitimacy.

Furthermore, around 80% of the Country Specific Recommendations issued every year have a territorial dimension, meaning that it is either directly or indirectly involving local and regional governments (LRG) or, if not involving LRGs, still having a territorial impact. Local and regional governments play an overall role as socio-economic actors by fostering growth, competitiveness and high-quality employment at macro-economic and local scales.

In that respect, the European Semester process requires improving its transparency and an upstream consultation of sectorial social partners, as well as strengthening the involvement of local and regional governments.

The project “Localising the European Semester” has indeed demonstrated that it exists a growing interest and attention by social partners organisations of local and regional governments about their involvement in the European Semester annual cycle.

Thus, the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and the European Public Service Union (EPSU) jointly call on the European Commission to:

- Ensure that the views of sectoral social partners of local and regional governments are duly taken into account;
- Set quality standards for an inclusive approach by individual national governments and for an appropriate level of involvement of national social partners organisations of LRGs;
- Guarantee a stronger involvement of the sectoral social partners in the Semester process through a better and more transparent planning of the annual detailed calendars allowing for sufficient meetings, discussions and inputs;
- Promote visibility of the Semester processes through information sessions and training events to members of sectoral social partner organisations at European and national level;
- Support the effort of sectoral social partners to ensure an adequate information and consultation of their national affiliates in the Semester process by creating an ad-hoc grant managed by DG Employment, Social Affairs, and Inclusion;
- Provide social partners of the local and regional government sector with specific fora for discussion and involvement, given the exceptional role of LRGs in the implementation of Country Specific Recommendations;
- Make sure that the Semester become an effective and inclusive framework for working towards attaining SDGs.

CEMR and EPSU also jointly call on national governments of EU Members States to:

- Collaborate with the European Commission in making the process of the Semester as transparent and predictable as possible, in order to facilitate the

involvement of national social partners;

- Create occasions of effective consultation of sectoral social partners as well as of local and regional governments: evidences show that often these consultations have remained too formal and therefore ineffective;
- Ensure that the views of sectoral social partner organisations of LRGs are properly taken into account, due to the strategic role of local and regional governments in the implementation of national reform programmes.

- Handbook for Social Partners (EN, DA, DE, ES, ET, FI, FR, IT, LT , LV, SV)

- Joint Final Declaration (EN, BG, CZ, DA, DE, EL, ES, ET, FI, FR, HR, HU, IR, IT, LT, LV, MT, NL, PL, RO, SK, SL, SV)

- Final Report (EN, DA, DE, ES, ET, FI, FR, IT, LT, LV, SV)

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