

**CONFERENCE ON THE SOCIAL DIALOGUE**  
**IN THE CANDIDATE COUNTRIES**

**ETUC/CEEP/UNICE-UEAPME**

**Bratislava, 16-17 March 2001**

**Press Statement**

The Social Partners<sup>i</sup> Conference on the social dialogue in the candidate countries held in Bratislava on 16 and 17 March 2001 has highlighted the major role that the social partners can play in managing social and economic change and in contributing to the European enlargement process.

The Conference was a joint initiative undertaken with the support of the European Commission. It showed the need to support and strengthen the various forms of social dialogue in the candidate countries.

Working papers on tripartite consultation and bilateral social dialogue between employers' organisations and trade unions served as a basis for discussion.

The role of trade unions and employers' organisations in managing change in a way that is socially just and economically efficient was emphasised.

The Conference identified four factors that influence the way in which social partners can play their role. These factors, which are valid both for candidate countries and EU member states even if they interact differently in each national context, are the following:

- The willingness of employers and workers to join and mandate organisations to represent their interests, which is a precondition for building representative structures;
- The ability to fulfil this mandate by developing an institutional and material capacity to act effectively;
- The proper articulation and distribution of responsibilities between the different levels for action (national, sectoral, territorial or company)
- The development of autonomy of the social partners and a space where they can fully exercise their responsibilities

By way of conclusion the social partners propose to:

1. deepen exchanges on specific themes of relevance to the social partners such as:
  - managing industrial and technological change
  - analysing different collective bargaining systems (using the support of EIRO)
  - looking at the respective roles of chambers of commerce and employers' organisations

- integrating the specific issues related to SMEs in social partner activities
  - distinguishing between the role of State as Government and its role as stakeholder in public company
  - promoting the role of social partners in developing quality services of general interest which are essential for social cohesion.
2. Widen such exchanges to include comparisons between candidate countries and EU member states.
  3. Organise enlarged Social Dialogue Committee meetings to include representatives from the candidate countries.

UNICE/UEAPME, CEEP and ETUC also stressed the importance of underpinning and strengthening the role of the social partners in the integration process.

The European Commission also has a role to play in monitoring the development of the social dialogue as a part of the *acquis communautaire*.

Some two hundred participants took part in the Conference from all of the thirteen candidate countries and from all the European Union organisations.

A full report of the Conference will be available later.

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1) The interprofessional European Social Partners are ETUC (European Trade Union Confederation) representing also the Liaison Committee of Eurocadres/CEC, UNICE-UEAPME (Union of Industrial and Employers' Confederations of Europe with the Union of European Craft and Small and Medium Size Enterprises) and CEEP (European Center of Enterprises with Public Participation and of Enterprises of General Economic Interest).