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TALKING THROUGH THE CRISIS

Social dialogue and industrial relations
trends in selected EU countries

Edited by Igor Guardiancich and Oscar Molina

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Foreword

This volume represents the final output of a project entitled “Post-crisis social dialogue: Good practices in the EU-28”, implemented by the International Labour Office (ILO). The aim of the project is to document and analyze emerging trends and good practices in social dialogue and industrial relations, in the period following the economic and financial crisis in Europe. The project, which benefits from the financial and technical support of the European Commission (EC), focuses specifically on developments since 2013, when countries began to exit the crisis, and examines the role of social dialogue in promoting sustainable policy reforms and job-rich inclusive recovery.

This project is a follow-up to an earlier ILO/EC project, implemented between 2012 and 2014, that analyzed the impact of structural reforms and fiscal consolidation policies on the industrial relations systems of five EU countries that were most hard hit by the 2010 sovereign debt crisis, including those under structural adjustment programmes. The findings of that project were published in 2014.¹

Under the current project, a series of in-depth national studies was carried out by reputed national scholars in a larger sample of eleven EU countries. These countries were selected to give a geographical balance and to ensure representation of the different industrial relations systems prevailing in Europe, including the Nordic, Continental, Mediterranean, Liberal and Eastern European models. The research involved analysis of secondary sources of information as well as interviews with key stakeholders in each country. A comparative analysis was also prepared, capturing the main trends documented in the country studies, as well as in other EU Member States.

A high-level tripartite knowledge-sharing conference, held at the Palais du Luxembourg in Paris on 20 May, 2016, provided the opportunity for the draft study findings to be presented and discussed. On the basis of this discussion, the draft reports were finalized and are brought together in this edited volume.

The volume, in its entirety, provides valuable insights into the many factors that have influenced recent developments in social dialogue in countries of the European Union – including the evolving economic and political context, the effectiveness of national institutions for tripartite and bipartite social dialogue, as well as the processes of the European Semester. The volume sheds light on the heterogeneity of approaches to

¹ Papadakis, P.; Ghellab, Y. 2014. *The governance of policy reforms in southern Europe and Ireland: Social dialogue actors and institutions in times of crisis* (Geneva, ILO).

social dialogue across European countries, clearly demonstrating there is no ‘one size fits all’ prescription for sustaining it through difficult economic times. It further shows how, where tripartite social dialogue was maintained through and after the crisis, it tended to produce positive outcomes in terms of promoting a return to positive economic growth, ensuring social and industrial peace, sustaining competitiveness and employment, and contributing to an increase in productivity and wages.

We take this opportunity to express our sincere appreciation to each of the national researchers who undertook the country studies and, in particular, to the volume’s editors, Oscar Molina and Igor Guardiancich, for so ably overseeing and coordinating the research as well as for drafting the overview chapter; to Christian Welz of Eurofound for his insightful comments and contributions throughout the project; and to Raymond Maes and Tim Van Rie of the Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion of the European Commission, for their invaluable support. We gratefully acknowledge the contributions made by participants in the tripartite conference in Paris, whose insights have helped strengthen the content of this book. They included representatives of the International Organisation of Employers (IOE), the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC) and the European social partners, as well as tripartite delegations from 15 EU Member States and selected non-EU countries.

Our gratitude is extended as well to the ILO project team, in particular Youcef Ghellab, head of the Social Dialogue and Tripartism Unit, who was responsible for project implementation; Caroline O’Reilly, Angelika Muller, Sarah Doyle and Germaine Ndiaye of DIALOGUE Unit; and Daniel Vaughan-Whitehead of Inclusive Labour Markets, Labour Relations and Working Conditions Branch (INWORK), for their various invaluable contributions. Our sincere thanks go also to Sylvain Baffi and Marion Christophe of the International Training Centre of the ILO in Turin (ITC-ILO), for organizing two research seminars in Turin as well as the Paris conference, and to Cyril Cosme, Director of the ILO Office for France, for all his efforts to ensure the success of the Paris event. Finally, special thanks go to the two anonymous peer reviewers for their critical and helpful comments on the draft volume, to Frances Papazafiropoulos for editing the final text, and to Chris Edgar of the ILO Department of Communication and Public Information and José Garcia of the Official Meetings, Documentation and Relations Department for their support in producing this volume.

It should be noted that the responsibility for opinions expressed in this book rests solely with its authors and its publication does not constitute an endorsement by the International Labour Office or the European Commission.

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A message from Deborah Greenfield, ILO Deputy Director-General for Policy

The ILO enjoys a long history of close collaboration with the institutions of the European Union on key employment, labour and social policy issues, dating back to the first agreement signed in 1958. This collaboration ranges from our shared efforts to tackle child labour and other violations of fundamental rights at work in some of the world's poorest countries to devising effective policy responses to economic crisis in some of its richest. Most recently, this collaboration has involved the analysis of emerging trends and good practices in the field of social dialogue and industrial relations across the Member States of the EU, focusing specifically on developments since 2013 as countries started to recover from the worst effects of the economic crisis.

Social dialogue and tripartism lie at the very heart of the ILO's mandate to achieve social justice, yet these are not simply "good practices" in the common sense of the term today. Instead, it must be recalled that the ILO has its genesis in two post-crisis eras – first, at its founding in 1919, as Europe began its recovery from the devastation of the First World War, and then again in 1946, when the ILO became a part of the United Nations, as the world sought to reconstruct following the Second World War.

The origins of social dialogue are enshrined in the Declaration of Philadelphia (1944), which states: "The war against want requires to be carried on with unrelenting vigour within each nation, and by continuous and concerted international effort in which the representatives of workers and employers, enjoying equal status with those of governments, join with them in free discussion and democratic decision with a view to the promotion of the common welfare."

Social dialogue thus represents an active decision taken by the nations of the world as a means to tackle the economic and social challenges which inevitably flow from crisis, in order to ensure lasting peace and sustainable prosperity for all.

The present volume highlights that, after several years of negative growth, many EU countries have started to see modest positive growth. According to the European Commission's economic forecasts, this modest growth has benefited from factors including low oil prices, favourable financing conditions and the exchange rate of the Euro. At the same time, however, significant economic challenges remain. Risks are becoming more pronounced and new challenges are surfacing, such as slower growth in China and other emerging market economies, weak global trade as well as geopolitical uncertainty.

So now is yet another time to rely on the promise of social dialogue to achieve balanced, sustainable and inclusive growth, and in particular, to address the widening inequalities that threaten recent gains made and that jeopardise a still quite fragile economic and social recovery. Indeed, one of the most worrying legacies of the crisis has been a further rise in wage and income inequalities, along with the high structural unemployment that continues to plague the global economy.

At the ILO, social dialogue is a critical component of the Decent Work Agenda. Social dialogue similarly lies at the heart of the European social model, through which states share certain core values, such as a commitment to full employment, social protection for all citizens, social inclusion and democracy. Both the ILO and the EU have seen social dialogue and tripartism endure through past periods of economic difficulty and, time and again, play an important part in devising measures to face the challenges.

Yet the worsening economic climate and the urgency of reforms during the 2008-09 crisis unfortunately led, in many cases, to reduced space for tripartite dialogue. Collective bargaining and industrial relations systems also frequently came under pressure, meaning that workers found it increasingly difficult to engage in meaningful negotiations. Labour market reforms during the crisis period placed additional strain on these systems.

As social dialogue and tripartism decline, the institutions that facilitate them also fray. Governments, representatives of employers and of workers have a joint responsibility to reinvigorate these institutions. Nothing short of serious political commitment and sustained collaborative effort will enable them to rebuild themselves and to find new ways of working in pursuit of shared goals.

Notably, the evidence presented in this volume suggests that those countries in which social dialogue has proven most resilient have also done better in weathering the crisis. Some of the country chapters reveal positive signs of a revitalization of social dialogue. National social dialogue institutions have proven to be key in this respect, not only as forums for discussion but also in helping to devise creative policy proposals for building a sustainable economic and jobs recovery, around which different interest groups can coalesce. The book indicates also the potential of the European Semester as an avenue that crosses national borders.

The aftermath of the crisis has opened up exciting new possibilities for tripartite and bipartite institutions to demonstrate their value in shaping a new social and economic contract. Governments and the social partners in Europe must seize upon this oppor-

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