



EESC: CIVIL AND SOCIAL DIALOGUE IN EU CANDIDATE COUNTRIES

During the last plenary Session of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) before the summer break, a highly interesting and topical Opinion was adopted on the importance of institutionalising civil and social dialogue in the candidate Countries and in the European Union's partner Countries. Civil and social dialogue is a fundamental pillar of the European model of participatory governance, which has contributed significantly in recent decades to the consolidation of democracies in EU Member States, playing a key role in promoting sustainable, equitable and inclusive socio-economic development. The EESC emphasises the clear distinction between the two forms of dialogue, which are complementary but distinct in terms of their objectives, actors and institutional frameworks. Social dialogue involves the social Partners (employers' organisations and trade unions), while civil dialogue involves actors from organised civil society more generally. In many candidate and partner Countries, civil and social dialogue remains fragmented and lacking in institutional regulation, thus affecting their ability to develop coherent

and inclusive public policies. In the absence of clear institutional structures, the involvement of civil society and the social Partners in the decision-making process is limited and uneven, leading to a lack of trust in democratic processes and disengagement on the part of citizens. Structured and institutionalised civil and social dialogue, on the other hand, is essential to ensure stability, economic development and social cohesion in candidate/partner Countries. The institutionalisation of social and civil dialogue can take place in various organisational structures, respecting the specific characteristics of each Country and taking into account the interests and aspirations of civil society organisations and social partners, as well as best practices at European and international level in this area. For Councillor Ulgiati, "it is necessary to promote a genuine and structured tripartite dialogue between governments, trade unions and employers organisations, focusing mainly on the labour market, working conditions and economic policies, all of which will help to speed up the pace of negotiations for the accession of candidate Countries to the European Union".

EU, CONSULTATION ON DIGITAL FAIRNESS

A few days ago, the European Commission launched a 12-week public consultation on the upcoming Digital Fairness Act (DFA), which is expected to be proposed in mid-2026. A robust consumer protection framework is essential to ensure that EU consumers can play an active role in the digital transition. The EU Executive has therefore launched a fitness check to determine whether current EU consumer protection law is adequate to ensure a high level of consumer protection in the digital environment. In her letter of appointment a few months ago to the Commissioner-designate for Democracy, Justice and the Rule of Law, Michael McGrath, President von der Leyen referred to the need to develop "a Digital Fairness Act to combat unethical techniques and commercial practices related to dark patterns, influencer marketing on social media, addictive design of digital products and online profiling, especially when consumer vulnerabilities are exploited for commercial purposes". The Digital Fairness Act will be based on the results of the Digital Fitness Check, published in October 2024, while remaining a separate initiative. These results confirmed the importance of European Union consumer protection laws but also revealed some shortcomings and highlighted that buyers continue to face numerous problems online. The new legislative proposal will therefore be significant in filling the regulatory gaps that have emerged and will benefit both



consumers and businesses, complementing the Digital Services Act and the Digital Markets Act, with a particular focus on the protection of minors online. The new Digital Fairness Act will address manipulative and unethical commercial practices, such as the widespread use of dark patterns (deceptive design techniques used in online interfaces to manipulate users into making decisions that are advantageous to a company, often at the expense of their real intentions or interests), and will examine influencer marketing, addictive designs, personalised pricing based on tracking and profiling, and other challenges for consumers, in the knowledge that greater legal certainty prevents regulatory fragmentation and promotes more equitable growth.