



*European Economic and Social Committee*  
*Directorate B*  
*Unit for External Relations*

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**Subject: Study on social dialogue in the Eastern Partnership countries - Concept note**

**1. Background and context of the study**

The EU's Eastern Neighbours have been working for many years towards achieving more democratic systems and functioning market economies based on good governance, but still a lot has to be done. There is a need to involve both authorities and societies as a whole in these processes. In this context, it is very important that also employers' and workers' organisations are actively involved in policy-making process, as they do not only represent real economy but they build it and make it grow. Furthermore, an involvement of a broad spectrum of civil society and non-state actors is needed to back up the necessary changes and reforms.

Social dialogue and labour issues should be treated as integral and closely connected elements of economic life of a country. Social dialogue is a key tool for promoting better living and working conditions and greater social justice. It is relevant to any effort aiming to achieve both more productive and effective enterprises and sectors and a fairer and more efficient economy, and a more stable and more equitable society. Social dialogue should therefore become one of the priorities to work on and it should be adequately introduced in EaP countries as a mean to support the necessary economic reforms and transition to market economies leading to the improvement of the general development of the societies and their living standards.

An important factor in this process is also a growing role and dynamism of other non-state actors. The social partners themselves are more and more interested in entering into dialogue with wider civil society and want to cooperate with those non-state actors who share similar objectives and aspirations. This collaboration proves to be particularly meaningful in fields such as child labour, labour migration, employment promotion, and social security.

**2. Social dialogue – definition**

For the purpose of the suggested study, social dialogue could be defined, in broad terms, as an interaction between social partners and cooperation with state institutions and local governments aiming at balancing the interests of different segments of society in social and economic issues, and at ensuring internal social stability. Social dialogue includes the sharing of all relevant information,

consultation and negotiation between, or among, representatives of governments, employers and workers on issues of common interest relating to economic and social policies. Social dialogue should take place at all appropriate stages of the decision-making process. This definition is in compliance with the International Labour Organization (ILO) concept and also includes assessment of social interactions at the company level.

### **3. Need for the study**

The Eastern Partnership (EaP) initiative was officially launched in 2009 as a cooperation framework to encourage democratic changes and economic reforms as well as approximation and alignment of Eastern partner countries with European values and standards.

Since the creation of the EaP Civil Society Forum (CSF), the need for enhancing social dialogue in the EaP countries has been highlighted by Forum's participants, especially those from the Working Group 2 on Economic convergence with EU policies. They called for exchanging views and experience on conducting social dialogue between the EU and EaP countries and they emphasised that regular consultations with the civil society organisations would benefit the formulation and negotiations on Association Agreements and deep and comprehensive free trade areas (DCFTA).

In 2010 the Eurasia Partnership Foundation took the initiative to conduct a study on social dialogue in six EaP countries and presented a short outline for the study but it was finally never carried out. This concept note is a follow up of this initial proposal and takes on board some of its elements.

Social dialogue being a cross cutting tool was discussed in general terms under EaP multilateral platforms on Good Governance, Democracy and Human Rights and Economic Integration and Convergence with EU policies. In 2011, the CSF took the decision to establish an additional Working Group with a special focus on social dialogue which became operational during the CSF general assembly held in Stockholm in November 2012.

The main objective of this newly established WG is the promotion of social dialogue in the six partner countries but it will also address the full range of issues related to social and labour policies, respect for social and trade unions rights, gender equality etc.

The study on social dialogue will therefore serve as a benchmark for assessing progress in harmonising with EU social policies and building civil societies in the EaP countries as well as facilitating integration of their economies.

### **4. Objectives and scope of the study**

The overall objective of the study is to assess the current situation regarding social dialogue and its enabling conditions in each of the EaP countries, and to provide comparative analysis across the six EaP states.

More specifically the study should:

- analyse the legal and administrative frameworks in each EaP country for developing social dialogue at national and company level;
- mapping social partners organisations and define the capacity building needs of the respective social partners in each EaP country (assess the capacity and available expertise among social partners to be efficiently involved in legislative or decision making processes, asses their actual impact on the national legislative process);
- evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of social dialogue in each EaP country (identify the main problems encountered in the area of freedom of association, the right to collective bargaining, labour law, social protection, working conditions, gender issues etc);
- identify other initiatives for the promotion of social dialogue and civil society networks both at national and regional level, especially on issues related to labour, social and environmental issues;
- mapping sources of available funding for social partners in EaP countries which could help them to increase their capacity and expertise to perform their statutory tasks, including those related to social dialogue;
- determine the potential of using the EU's Member States' experience of social dialogue and best practice exchange to promote policies that improve social and labour standards in the region and facilitate the economic development and European approximation in the countries concerned;
- identify needs for further research to assess the impact of social dialogue on the overall economic development of the country and the region.

After conducting the above mentioned analysis the study should also:

- propose country-specific road maps for improving conditions enabling social dialogue and identify possible future actions in this area that could be developed under the framework of the Eastern Partnership while building on existing expertise and resources;
- propose measures for more effective involvement of social partners and other non-state actors in actions aiming at promoting civil and social dialogue in the partner countries;
- assess the added value of National Platforms and the EaP CSF as a platform for dissemination of information and raising awareness about reforms and good practices regarding social dialogue and propose actions aiming at further development of common initiatives focused on sharing expertise and experience between the EU and the EaP countries;

- propose a monitoring mechanism allowing the assessment of progress.

## **5. Methodology**

Methodology to conduct the study shall be proposed by the contractor. One of the suggestions on how to obtain the required information is to explore and combine the following options:

- performing analysis of the existing and proposed legislative, policy and administrative frameworks for promoting and conducting social dialogue as well as ensuring freedom of association and trade unions rights;
- collect information on the organizational, financial, and human capacities of social partners in EaP countries for conducting social dialogue at sectoral and company level via specifically designed questionnaires;
- conduct individual interviews with key persons representing employers and trade union organizations, companies, and experts in social-labour relations to assess the situation with regard to collective bargaining practices and capacities to conduct social dialogue at sectoral and company levels – qualitative assessment.

Close cooperation with the ILO field offices established in EaP partner countries should also be envisaged as they have gathered lots of knowledge and experience when working with employers' and workers' organisations and labour administrations in countries in question.

## **6. An added value of the study**

The results and findings of the study can be useful for public authorities and policy makers for law and policy planning and development as well as for social partners for their own assessment of capacity building needs. It may also be helpful for researchers in social and labour policies field to better design the scope of their research projects.

The comparison and analysis of social dialogue in the six EaP countries will identify activities that could be then included in projects to promote experience sharing and best practice exchange among partner countries. The findings of the study will be potentially useful also for National Platforms in partner countries as well as intergovernmental platforms within the EaP on good governance and economic integration as well as for substantiating the positions by the EaP CSF participants.

Last but not least, the social partners themselves would have a better understanding and vision for drafting their own development plans and work programmes. Outcomes of the study could also contribute to the improvement of regional cooperation among the Eastern partners on labour standards and social policies and offer possibilities for creating social partner coalitions and networks at regional level.