

Economic and Social Council to be reorganised

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In May 2003, Portugal's tripartite Economic and Social Council (CES) has a new president who is in favour of extending the range of interest groups represented on the Council. Meanwhile, parliament is debating draft legislation which will change the composition of one of the CES's constituent bodies, the Standing Committee for Social Dialogue (CPCS), on which the government and social partners are represented. It is proposed that the Portuguese Confederation of Tourism should participate in the CPCS as a social partner and that the number of government representatives should be reduced.

The Economic and Social Council (Conselho Económico e Social, CES) is an important body in Portuguese industrial relations. It is a tripartite forum which is consulted on economic and social policies and participates in drawing up development plans in these areas. The Council is made up of representatives of the government, trade unions and employers' organisations, along with representatives of: local and regional government; groups such as cooperatives, the liberal professions, consumers, family associations and women's organisations; and sectors such as insurance and finance and tourism.

In May 2003, the CES is undergoing a number of important changes, with the inauguration of a new president and discussion in parliament of draft legislation which will alter the composition of one of its constituent bodies, the Standing Committee for Social Dialogue (Comissão Permanente de Concertação Social, CPCS). The role of the CPCS, according to the law which established the CES (law No. 108/91 of 17 August 1991), is to: promote dialogue and understanding between the social partners; and contribute to the definition of policies on pay and prices, and employment and occupational training.

In his inaugural speech, the new president, Professor Alfredo Bruto da Costa, stressed two key points:

- the importance of developing forums such as the CES, where it has proved possible to express and reconcile a growing number of 'social interests' in civil society. However, there are probably interests which are inadequately represented or unrepresented in CES, and the new president is in favour of a wider representation of social interest groups on the Council. Their interests can then be defended by means of opinions or the organisation's own initiatives; and
- the need to implement greater social cohesion in Portugal – a need that should not be interpreted as a vague sentiment but should be translated into commitments and forms of individual and collective responsibility.

Changes to the composition of the CPCS

Parliament is currently debating draft legislation proposed by the government, [draft law No. 41/IX](#), which will change the composition of the CPCS - an issue which has been under consideration for some time.

One of the key issues addressed by the draft law is the representation of tourism sector employers on the CPCS. On the basis of Law 80/98 of 24 November 1998, the tourism industry has already acquired representation on the CES, through the Confederation of Portuguese Tourism (Confederação Portuguesa de Turismo, CTP). Now as part of its programme, the present government has decided that CTP should be represented on the CPCS as the body representing employers' organisations in the tourist industry, with social partner status. The preamble to draft law No. 41/IX states that this decision is based on the importance of tourism to Portugal and is in the interest of strategic action that will ensure sustained development involving employers and workers.

In its opinion on the draft law, the parliamentary Economic and Financial Committee notes that pacts, agreements and social dialogue have become some of the most important aspects of the functioning of democracy. There is a need for the composition of the bodies that make up this social dialogue to evolve and, specifically, tourism - an important sector in Portugal's economic development - should now be represented on the CPCS.

The inclusion of CPT is not the only change to the composition of the CPCS made by draft law 41/IX. It provides that the CPCS will in future be made up as follows:

- four government representatives instead of the current six;
- two representatives of the General Confederation of Portuguese Workers (Confederação Geral de Trabalhadores Portugueses, CGTP) - including the general secretary - instead of the current three;
- two representatives of the General Workers' Union (União Geral de Trabalhadores, UGT) - including the general secretary - instead of the current three; and

- the presidents of the Confederation of Portuguese Agriculture (Confederação da Agricultura Portuguesa, CAP), the Confederation of Portuguese Services and Commerce (Confederação do Comércio e Serviços de Portugal, CCP), the Confederation of Portuguese Industry (Confederação do Comércio e Serviços de Portugal, CIP) and CTP. At present, CAP, CCP and CIP each have two representatives.

CTP is an organisation which has been active in considering and presenting proposals in areas such as: vocational training for workers; the regulation of industrial relations; and planning and the environment and their sustainable development. It has been consulted on draft laws in these areas.

The social partners currently represented on the CPCS have responded to the planned changes in its composition by stating that the balance of representation in the social dialogue needs to be maintained. On the employers' side, CCP clearly supports the admission of CTP, given that tourism is an important sector of the national economy, which has hitherto been represented on the CPCS by CCP. UGT and CGTP have stressed the need to maintain the balance of the trade union side on the CPCS and have called for strategic alterations in the role of the social dialogue in Portugal.

Commentary

By extending the range of interests represented, it appears that the changes being made to the composition of the Standing Committee for Social Dialogue will contribute to strengthening the system for the representation and reconciliation of the various interests in the Portuguese economy and society. (António Casimiro Ferreira and Maria Luisa Cristovam, UAL)