

ANNEX

To The Call for tenders for subcontracting expertise – ETUC project on ETUC SEMESTER 2.0 - Enabling a trade union influential presence in the EU semester

THE EUROPEAN SEMESTER

The European Semester is a process through which the EU Member States' governments coordinate their economic policies. Moreover, the European Semester is only one of the processes related to the economic governance of the monetary union, even though it is the only one which takes place on a regular and foreseeable basis. In fact, it deals with the Countries' stability or convergence with respect to the macroeconomic constraints of the euro. Other procedures are related to temporary and corrective measures which are not recurrent even though they require a standardized but not cyclical approach.

The European Semester is indeed cyclical, as clearly shown by the organizational approach adopted by the European Commission that is responsible for the correct implementation of the cycle. This process is standardized and is characterized by regular and foreseeable phases. It is possible to find this standardized approach in terms of:

- Timing. The European Commission's sites feature the scheduled phases and the timing of both outcomes and outputs. These foreseeable phases are undoubtedly designed also to improve the consultation of all the parties involved.
- Output structure. By outputs, it is meant the documents produced during the different phases of the cycle. Stakeholders are informed about these documents and expect to receive them in their immediately recognizable structure and form. They are drafted according to unknown methodologies (which belong to the European bureaucracy) which become intelligible when reading these outputs.
- Language. The Commission tends to act and speak with its own language which is by now consistently utilized and full of new words or new connotations in order to convey well identified concepts. For example, the terms AGS, Country Report, CSR, NRP are not only titles given to documents, but they feature specific contents and concepts. Concepts like stability, convergence, violation and excessive imbalance have new but well-defined connotations.
- Actors involved. The European Commission tends to have stable exchanges with the subjects involved, identifying venues, locations and timetables. However, this process is not fully structured yet when it speaks to the European or national trade union organizations.

This process is designed to take decisions in terms of mutual supervision and consistency of the EU economic and monetary policy. This means that the Semester, in its current form, has reached its maximum extension in time. It obliges those who are willing to participate in it to adjust to the above-mentioned standards. The system is extremely complex. It requires significant human and financial resources to produce the necessary outputs within the timing and modality framework of the Semester so as to allow the Council to play an informed, prompt and transparent decision-

making role. However, not all the actors who wish to influence this process have access to the same resources.

ETUC'S REQUESTS

ETUC's request refers to the optimization of its human and economic resources in order to have constructive exchanges with the European Commission during each phase of the Semester. The ETUC has defined its priority actions in the following phases:

- Developing Broad Economic Guide Lines
- Drafting Country Reports
- Monitoring the role of the social partners in defining national reform plans
- Amending CSRs.

To this end, it has developed its own methodology referred to as ETUC SEMESTER 2.0.

Its action is aimed at strengthening the following aspects:

- Participation: number of member organizations actively involved in the methodology and in the exchanges from and to Bruxelles.
- Ownership: awareness of the methodology and its implications
- Efficacy: ability to collect and process the information on the basis of the resources likely to be available
- Transparency: access to processed and reported information within the methodology framework
- Accountability: evaluation of the compliance of all the information provided and of the actions undertaken with respect to the mandate received and with the positions expressed on the basis of the data collected.

The ETUC wishes to enhance its strategic approach to the provision of information to the European Commission at all levels and to the drafting of documents so as to play an instrumental role in the European institutions and consistently monitor its members during the phases at the national level.

The ETUC needs a technical contribution designed to identify the technical instruments deemed to be necessary to reach its objective in the following phases:

- Definition of the Broad Economic Guide Lines and in particular of the AGS and its attached documents published every year in November
- Definition of the Country Specific Recommendations, including the drafting of the Country Reports and of the Country Specific Recommendations.

Instead, it decided to:

- Exclude the budgetary surveillance cycle from its methodology
- Restrict the intervention during the definition of the national reform and stability/convergence plans to the monitoring of social partners' involvement.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATIONS

With this call the ETUC wants to identify a partner(s) to develop information and communication technologies to reach its objectives

1. Strengthening the communication on the www.etuc.org website by optimizing web design functions
- 2a. Optimizing the text format information collection process and the automatic reporting function without re-processing source texts.
- 2b. Organizing the collection of information on observable events in the form of data to be further processed so as to obtain their quantitative description.

The ETUC wants to reap benefit of the cyclical and standardized process. For an organization such as ETUC, the clearly scheduled and timely data collection and processing effort should involve the highest number of its members. Technology can eliminate the participation/efficiency trade-off (for example, the higher the number of participants, the more likely it is for this actor not be able to timely process all the information).

1. COMMUNICATION AND DISSEMINATION OF OUTPUTS

The beneficiaries of this communication effort are ETUC's member organizations. In particular, the traits of these targets suggest that they are familiar with its communication instruments and that they have a propensity to learn the technical jargon related to the economic governance on the single currency. There is still a significant language barrier among users. The exclusive use of the English-language is not in line with ETUC's participation and ownership objectives. Moreover, it is necessary to promote the access to the Semester documents, which is not always easy to obtain even from the websites managed by the European Commission. In addition, communication is strategic for adopting a common language so as to rationalize and enhance exchanges, reducing at the same time the amount of information to be provided.

Therefore, the ETUC would like to implement the following tools:

- A. Developing a dictionary of the terms/concepts of the European Semester to be connected through hypertext links to the terms used in ETUC's publications on economic governance. In a transnational context, it is better not to adopt a multilingual communication approach because it is very expensive. On the one hand, translation tools can reduce the amount of time and resources needed for this job, but they are too costly with respect to the benefits obtained. Instead it is possible to improve transnational communication by fine-tuning the definition concepts so that they can travel without losing their meaning. A list of terms and meanings can be drafted and processed in a numerical way so as to combine meaning A to the specific term A whenever term A is used in a text produced by ETUC on the Semester. Whenever term A appears in the text, meaning A is automatically visualized as a hyperlink or explication box.
- B. Drafting ETUC's documents to be mainly disseminated online. The communication strategy should capitalize on the communication/dissemination instruments already used to avoid fragmenting information sources even more. For example, the www.etuc.org website should feature the information made available by ETUC in the implementation of the methodology and provide the applications to collect information. The RSS functions already present on the European Commission's websites can be optimized to allow trade

unions to timely access the Semester strategic documents. In this way, it is also possible to benefit from the multilingual publications produced by the European Union.

- c. Restricting the scope to the optimization of the functions provided by website development systems. It is a web design effort without the need to develop ad hoc applications and with limited costs. Therefore, the best solution is to have a dedicated area on the www.etuc.org portal, bearing in mind that this area has to feature or make available more complex tools to gather, share and process information or data so as to achieve the other objectives of the methodology. In addition, strengthening the communication/dissemination effort is crucial to correctly implement information collection and data storage functions.

2. AN APPLICATION FOR COLLECTING NATIONAL INPUTS RELATED TO NATIONAL POLICIES WITH HIGHLY VARIABLE CONTENTS

The collection of information on national policies is mainly related to Country Reports, which have to be combined into a single report which is one of the strategic outputs of the methodology. These contents vary for one year to the other. They are presented in a discursive form (text) and are influenced by the social and economic context of the country. At the same time, these reports have to be drafted and processed in a limited period of time. The publication of the AGS (mid-November) initiates the drafting of the reports at the national level. The national reports of ETUC's member associations must be available in a single European report which can be used for the consultations with the European Commission on December 15th.

The Country Reports produced by trade unions should be drafted with a view to "communicating" with the Country Reports prepared by the European Commission on the basis of the three following drafting criteria:

- Identification and description of challenges.
- Definition and presentation of policy drivers.
- Scientific evidence-based support.

On the basis of this methodology, Country Reports may be related to all the social and economic areas which fall within the competency of the governments. In truth, the production of country reports by the European Union within the framework of the Semester is very broad and disseminated through a high number of sources. The scope of the analysis should be more limited for trade union inputs, striking a balance between an exhaustive analytical approach and the possibility to use this information in a European context.

Moreover, there is no doubt that the added value of the methodology used by ETUC lies in the exchange of information with its member organizations. However, this requires a smart selection of the information to be collected and transferred. In fact, an excessive amount of information which cannot be re-processed or modified also in language terms cannot eventually be utilized. The risk is to collect a high amount of non-information.

Moreover, Country Reports are drafted by several people/services within the framework of the same organization. The collection of all the information about the country is carried out by different people in a coordinated and complementary way.

This may be a constraint for those who collect and centralize information and who wish to optimize information technology tools.

In the light of the above mentioned points, we suggest the following actions:

- A. Developing an application to gather inputs through a simple data collection, like in a text format, and processing effort in order to more rapidly and orderly combine all these documents into a single Report which is available online or which can be downloaded as a PDF file.
- B. Creating a source document to gather Country information. An online questionnaire is not really useful because it may suffer from access restrictions and therefore may not be amenable to be drafted by "multiple hands". On the contrary, a document that is not online can be transferred to the different services and then returned to the coordinator once its specific parts have been drafted. The coordinator uploads the document onto the system which is able to identify and to process its sections.

This implies that:

- the source document requires different sections to be managed autonomously but within the framework of predefined drafting criteria.
- the source document should be then transferred to a database with a simple upload function
- this database should be able to generate a series of reports organized by country or sections.
- the application should be able to manage the inputs in different languages but it will not be able to translate the texts.

Adobe Acrobat might be one of the technologies to be used to for this activity and has the tools to draft the source document. It is advisable to develop a personalized database and reporting application.

Structure of the Source-Document

- COUNTRY A
 - o SECTION A (Drafting constraints, for example maximum number of characters)
 - Challenges
 - Policy drivers
 - Evidences
- SECTION B
 - o Challenges
 - o Policy drivers
 - o Evidences
- Etc.

The source document generates a Country Report that is a specific product which occupies an autonomous space on the www.etuc.org website. Moreover, it contributes to generating the single European report.

At this point, this unified report can use the structure of the source document to generate reports with a different content arrangement.

European Report by Country
Country e A (SECTION A, B, ...)
Country B (SECTION A, B...)

or

European Report by sections
SECTION A (COUNTRY A, B, ...)
SECTION B (COUNTRY A, B,)

3. AN APPLICATION TO MONITOR THE NATIONAL PRACTICES DEFINED ON THE BASIS OF AD HOC QUANTITATIVE AND STATISTICAL ANALYTICAL DATA.

The observable events can be monitored through numerical data and then analyzed by converting facts into numbers. A case in point can be the consultation of trade unions by governments. The consultation is an observable empirical event. This may happen or may not happen (0/1) or it may be more or less useful (on a scale from 0 to 5). A document may be transmitted or may not be transmitted (0/1) and may be complete or not complete according to some characteristics (concepts 0/1 applicable to A). And so on and so forth.

This requires processing the concepts to be analysed. In particular, in a supranational environment, concepts should be able to travel through space (with the same meaning in different countries) and time (for example living within the country's traditional system).

We suggest the following actions:

1. Defining a concept abstraction scale
2. Developing a decision tree according to the inductive method

Point 1 refers to the sociological analysis of concepts in order to eliminate any ambiguity in the processing of concepts under Point 2.

Example:

CONCEPT A

Denotation: it identifies the phenomena to which a term is applied.

Connotation: the features that an observable phenomenon should have to be defined as such.

This definition exercise paves the way to a computer analysis. In fact, the taxonomic classification of concepts and sub-concepts leads to the identification of the concepts that can be processed with a yes/no criterion and of the characteristics of the phenomenon which can be processed with measurement scales.

By arranging concepts on abstraction scale (from general to particular) it is possible to perform a computer analysis at the optimal level of abstraction, thus optimizing the trade-off between the use of concepts applicable to all national systems and a significant detail to utilize the information collected and processed.

Moreover, this exercise provides users with a sound information collection system on the basis of close-ended questions. This crucial rationale makes it possible to work in a multilanguage dimension, with a significant added value to the monitoring effort.

At this point, it is necessary to build an inductive approach according to the decision tree methodology.

It is possible to analyse the data with this algorithmic function and to automatically provide descriptive reports as well as statistical and infographic analyses.

Example:

Taxonomic analysis

Definition of consultation in the context of the European Semester: establishment of dialogue and exchange of views between trade unions and national governments, at such time, in such fashion and with such content as enables trade unions to express an opinion on the basis of the information provided about the proposed measures to which the consultation is related. Consultation may take place in ad hoc trade union/government meetings, bipartite discussions, tripartite discussions to obtain the informed opinion of trade unions on the content of national reform plans.

In order to fall within this definition, the consultation should have the following characteristics:

1. Being held before developing national reform plans
2. The government must provide the necessary information to the interlocutor so as to obtain its opinion
3. The interlocutor must have the time to express its opinion.

It is not a necessary condition for the concept of consultation that national reform plan will include the interlocutor's proposals. However, this event can be monitored to measure the effectiveness of the process. It is a value-driven piece of information which can be processed with a numerical scale (ex. from 0 a 5).

We know that governments prepare national reform plans from the publication of Country Reports until April 15.

EXAMPLE OF QUESTIONNAIRE:

Did the consultation of trade unions on national reform plans take place? Yes or No

If yes

How? (single choice) Ad hoc meeting, or Bipartite organization, or Tripartite organization or, Multistakeholder meeting, or not held

Has it occurred in due time? Yes or No

Is it possible to indicate a date? Yes or No

Has material been provided to form an opinion? Yes or No

If yes

Was it complete to form an opinion? (1 to 5)

Was it delivered in due time (1 to 5)

Do you think the government has considered the trade union's opinion? Yes or No

If yes:

You changed the text of the government: yes/no

You did not change the text but your contribution was attached to the government's text: yes/no

How much you value your contribution from 1 to 5? (1 to 5)

The survey takes place in May, each year. This leads to organize the data according to a geographical scale (by Country) and to a time scale (reference year).