

## Better Regulation Watchdog – Q&A

The Better Regulation Watchdog – a network of 55 organisations was launched today, 18 May – a day before the European Commission presents its Better Regulation Package. UNI Europa took the initiative to form the network.



UNI Europa's Head of EU Affairs Christina Colclough explains the benefits of the Better Regulation Watchdog.

### **Q: How did you come up with the idea to create the Better Regulation Watchdog?**

Christina Colclough: In a meeting with some trade union colleagues back in the autumn of 2014, we discussed the new Commission's policies. I had written a rather critical analysis of the Commission's policies and we were discussing what all of this would mean for Social Europe. I got an itchy feeling that something was in the making that would require us to be on our toes. The Commission already then seemed very employer-friendly and cleverly chose their words and phrases so it wasn't so much what they said that was worrying, but more what they didn't say. A lot was left undefined and unclear.

This Commission is smart. I expected they would change aspects of Social Europe, then environmental or consumer related ones – meaning that before we would know of it, European policies would be changed for good. It was just one of those gut feelings.

So the idea was formed. We needed to create a Watchdog – a group of organisations of all kinds that could share information, connections, gossip and news and together watch what the Commission is up to.

### **Q: How did you go about getting so many organisations on board?**

CC: I started talking to some organisations, and introduced the idea. Everyone really liked it. Then a couple of organisations offered to help and spread the word. Our first meeting to openly discuss



whether the idea was doable, whether we all could work together and under what frames was held just before Christmas 2014. Back then, we were maybe 15 organisations. Since then we slowly, but surely have developed the idea, our aims and goals, and have today in full force launched the network. We are now 55 partners representing a wide range of public interest groups including consumer, environmental, development, financial, social, and public health organisations and of course trade unions. Together we represent tens of millions of European citizens

**Q: How will all of this benefit UNI Europa's members?**

CC: Even though we officially launch today, the network has functioned for quite some time. We share information and analysis and have already conducted a media campaign in connection with some leaked Commission documents that were sent to us. Already now, I have received input, comments and analysis that I couldn't have done on my own. We have quietly told people in the European institutions that the network is under formation, and almost immediately we began to receive information. I probably would not have received this otherwise. Much of this has been concerned with the Commission's Better Regulation plans, so I have had time to discuss it all with the network in general and our trade union colleagues in particular. We have a very good idea of what the Commission will be presenting tomorrow, and we are ready to do all we can to safeguard our rights and standards.

In the future, as the Watchdog hopefully succeeds in lobbying and campaigning for a fair and democratic Europe, our brilliant work at UNI Europa in and across the sectors, will be seen and heard even more. Just think of the sectors' work in the social dialogue that adds values to the employees as well as the companies. Or the work we do on securing quality jobs and bargaining power in Europe, on the effects digitalisation will have on our services industry, our continued strive for inclusive, just and empowering conditions for all our employees in multinational and national companies alike. All this needs to be respected, listened to and incorporated into EU policies. With the combined efforts from the Better Regulation Watchdog and UNI Europa we will make a change for the better.

**Q: So what do you expect the Commission to propose tomorrow?**

CC: The proposals are extremely smartly written, so much so that at a first glance, it is hard to disagree with them.

The devil is in the detail, and we are very concerned about what kind of EU legislation we can expect in the future, and how this legislation is going to come about. What we can see is that social and



environmental Europe will not receive much attention from the Commission who seems to be concerned with one thing only: improving the conditions for businesses. Commission First Vice President Timmermans confirmed this recently at a seminar organised by FEPS, by saying: *“It would be rude to criticise the policies of previous Commissions, so I won’t. But let me be clear, our Better Regulation Package will not include social and environmental issues. We are here to improve the conditions for Europe’s businesses, especially the small and medium-sized ones.”*

The Commission is even daring to challenge the European social dialogue and social partners’ Treaty rights to conclude agreements that the Commission then passes to the Council. They have said (although we have heard they might change this after massive critique from both employers’ federations and the united trade union movement) that they want to open up our agreements to public opinion. This means that anyone would be allowed a say on whether the social partners in for example the Commerce sector want better health and safety standards. This is absurd and totally unacceptable.

We can also see that democracy in Europe is under threat as the Commission’s proposals will limit the European Parliament’s influence. Not only will more power be given to technocratic and unaccountable bodies under the control of the Commission, the Parliament is also expected to sign up for the principles of Better Regulation and commit to respecting them as they issue opinions and amendments on legislative proposals from the Commission. This must be seen as an attempt to control the Parliament’s democratic right to say what they think is best for Europe, regardless of any pre-defined principles from the Commission. In addition, the Commission wants the Parliament to conduct a new round of so-called impact assessments, if the Parliament makes “substantial” changes to legislative proposals. You can imagine that this will both slow down the legislative process, but also act as a control mechanism on Parliamentary proposals.

This is all extremely worrying.

**Q: Are you saying we can expect that our conditions and standards will get worse?**

CC: No, but they probably won’t get better either. The Commission cannot roll back existing legislations and rights. But we must expect that no, or very few, improvements to social rights will be made. The Commission wants to cut red tape (or whatever they choose to define as such), lessen the burden on companies, and make sure the EU only proposes legislation that is simple and easy to implement. As sensible as this sounds, it can also mean that good health and safety standards, existing or desired employment and social rights, might well be seen as an administrative burden on companies, and therefore be neglected by the Commission.



**Q: What do you hope the Watchdog Network can change in all of this?**

CC: I believe we must do all we can to prevent Europe becoming a slimmed down version of itself, where all concerns go to businesses and very little to the social, civil and environmental challenges facing us. A powerful Watchdog, one that is able to take stock in a year or two and prove where the Commission has failed or where they have blocked policies of interest for us, will certainly benefit our battle towards a balanced, sustainable yet also competitive Europe. We have loads of plans, that's for sure.

**Q: Do you believe you can get the Commission to listen?**

CC: I am a born optimist. So yes! But we must be smart, we must be courageous and we must dare to seek new avenues. It is good to be challenged, it forces us to think and re-think. UNI Europa can contribute a lot in making Europe an even better place to work and live. Combine that with the strength of the Watchdog, and I do believe that the Commission will learn to welcome our perspectives and appreciate that a strong Europe requires that social and economic policies go hand in hand.