



Civil Society Forum under the EU-Korea FTA

Civil Society Forum under the EU-Korea Free Trade Agreement
7th meeting 12-13 April 2021 via video conference

CONCLUSIONS

1. The Civil Society Forum (CSF) under the EU-Korea Free Trade Agreement held its 7th meeting on 12-13 April 2021 via video conference. It was co-chaired by Mr Thomas Jenkins (ETUC, Chair of the EU Domestic Advisory Group) and Prof. Ho-Geun Lee (Jeonbuk National University, Chair of the Korea Domestic Advisory Group).
2. The CSF expressed its satisfaction to be able to hold this meeting – though as a virtual meeting – and that it took place in conjunction with the meeting of the Committee on Trade and Sustainable Development (CTSD) of the EU-Korea Free Trade Agreement, giving the Co-Chairs the opportunity to address the CTSD meeting.
3. Both EU and Korea Civil Societies are facing challenges in the coming period, and the Co-Chairs expressed their will to work together to meet these challenges during this mandate.
4. This year celebrates the tenth anniversary of the EU-Korea Free Trade Agreement, applied since 1 July 2011, and the CSF decided to undertake a study of the work of the Domestic Advisory Groups (DAGs) and CSFs to find the best ways forward.

On Working Time

5. The CSF underlines that there are challenges and opportunities ahead with regard to reducing working time both in the EU and in Korea.
6. Korea is known for having long working-hour culture, and the CSF stresses that very long working hours can reduce workers' wellbeing.
7. The CSF recognises the efforts made so far in Korea, with the 2018-2021 reform that has brought working time regulation in line with dominant OECD practice, reducing the incidence of very long working hours.
8. The CSF underlines the importance of combatting long working-hour culture to improve workers' health, productivity and wellbeing.

On the ratification of the ILO Conventions

9. The CSF recalls that both Parties to the FTA have committed to ratifying and fully implementing core ILO Conventions and should mutually encourage each other to this purpose.

10. The CSF welcomes Korea's ratifications of the ILO Convention on Forced Labour (C29), the ILO Convention on Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise (C87) and the ILO Convention on the Right to Organize and Collective Bargaining (C98).

11. The CSF recognises these ratifications as an important step in establishing labour rules and systems that are in line with international standards.

12. The CSF expects the Korean Government to ensure that amendments to labour legislation fully implement the provisions of ILO Conventions C29, C87 and C98.

13. The CSF urges continued and sustained efforts towards ratification of the ILO Convention on the Abolition of Forced labour (C105), taking advantage of the support of the ILO office.

On Social Dialogue as a Driver for Future Development

14. The CSF recalls its Conclusions from its 6th meeting in Seoul, April 2018, requesting both parties to engage constructively in social dialogue with representatives of employers and workers on issues of designing and applying labour and employment policy and law.

15. The CSF underlines the importance of social dialogue as a driver for future development. More importantly, the ILO's Centenary Declaration for the Future of Work (2019) and the Employment and Decent Work for Peace and Resilience Recommendation, 2017 (No. 205) recognized and emphasized the role of participation of employers' and workers' organizations in planning, implementing and monitoring measure for resilience and recovery in crisis context.

16. Social dialogue is the ILO's governance paradigm for addressing contemporary socio-economic challenges, achieving internationally set objectives such as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2030 Agenda) and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and making a firm contribution to attaining social justice around the world.

17. Particularly over the past 12 months, effective social dialogue has taken a pivotal role in shaping immediate response to the COVID-19 crisis in some countries. The social dialogue on sectoral level and collective bargaining of unit based approach has contributed to effectively recover from the Covid-19 impact by promoting employment stability and sustainable business activities. Global Framework Agreements could also help in the workplace response to the pandemic at international level. The CSF notes that companies with a solid social dialogue were fastest to adapt to the health and safety concepts needed to keep workers safe and restore production and service schemes.

18. Collective bargaining between employers and employees is the most prevalent form of collective bargaining in a number of countries. It is an effective, direct way of agreeing compromised solutions to achieve sustainable socioeconomic development.

The TSD Chapter from the DAGs' perspective

19. The CSF highlights that the EU-Korea Free Trade Agreement is now in its tenth year of application.

20. Against this background, the CSF makes the following provisional assessment of the work of the DAGs under the Chapter of Trade and Sustainable Development of the EU-Korea Free Trade Agreement and suggests the following improvements of the Civil Society Forum:

21. The CSF recognises that, being composed of independent civil society organisations, and by providing analyses, advice and input to the dedicated government bodies, consultation mechanisms and panel of experts, institutionalised DAGs are key to monitor and contribute to the enforcement of the human rights, labour rights and environmental commitments of the FTA.

22. The CSF specifically recognises that fostering the interaction between governmental bodies and civil society bodies (participation of the DAGs' chairs in the TSD committees, holding meetings back-to-back, and regular meetings of Parties' representatives with DAGs to ensure follow-up to recommendations presented by the civil society bodies) are among the best practices that should be maintained and shared with the stakeholders in other EU-FTAs.

23. The CSF expects working further for enabling civil society, including the Social Partners, to play a greater role in implementation and will examine whether additional measures are needed to ensure the full and effective implementation of the TSD chapter and ensure that the FTA benefits to sustainable development, human rights, labour rights and environmental commitments.

On environmental issues

24. The CSF looks forward to the workshop on "Circular Economy and the Recycling of Batteries", and underlines its intention to work further on the environmental aspects under the chapter of Trade and Sustainable Development of the EU-Korea Free Trade Agreement.

25. The CSF already in its Conclusions from its 5th meeting in Brussels in 2017 underlined that electric vehicles could be a crucial part of green economy which can bring job creation as well as greenhouse gas reduction, and recommended both Parties to cooperate and collaborate in bringing about technological innovation to improve battery performance and fast charging mechanisms.
