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## Summary of the Operation of the Tripartite Commission for Socio-Economic Affairs in 2001–2015 The Case of Polish Social Dialogue at National Level

*Abstract:* This article presents the results of the work of the Tripartite Commission for Socio-Economic Affairs (TC) in 2001–2015. To show the effectiveness of the TC's work, the author's adaptation of the associational participation scale (Tálos, Kittel 2001) was employed. The result was categorisation of the effects achieved by the TC within social dialogue and a periodisation of the TC's activity in the research period, which quantitatively confirmed the results reported by other researchers. The article concludes with a discussion about the potential use of results in order to formulate expectations about the future effectiveness of the new tripartite body in Poland (the Social Dialogue Council) and elaborate a framework for comparing the effectiveness of tripartite bodies worldwide.

*Keywords:* Poland, tripartism, social dialogue, Tripartite Commission, effectiveness

### Introduction

The origins of the Tripartite Commission for Socio-Economic Affairs (hereafter: TC) as an institution of social dialogue at national level can be traced to 1994. Following the changes to the socio-economic system in 1989, social dialogue was not one of the mechanisms of transformation, but rather emerged as a need in reaction to the first serious difficulties associated with the introduction of liberal economic reforms (cf. Meardi et al. 2015: 407). The prelude to the TC's foundation came in 1993 with the adoption of the Pact on National Enterprise in Transformation (Gardawski 2009: 142). The difficulties with implementing the resolutions made in the pact triggered a series of strikes, and after a new government was formed, the decision was taken to establish the TC in order to monitor the implementation of these resolutions. A similar story accompanies the origin of tripartite committees or bodies of social dialogue across Central-Eastern Europe (CEE) countries in transition to market economy at the end of 20<sup>th</sup> century. In return, numerous studies and analysis have been provided by sociologists, economists or political science scholars, especially devoted to the varied development of tripartism in New European Capitalisms (Avdagic 2006), state-labour relations (Avdagic 2003), illusory corporatism (Ost 2000/2010), stability of industrial relations (Meardi 2007) and trade union strategies in CEE region (Dimitrova, Vilroks 2005) or, regarding West-European countries, policy concertation (Baccaro, Simoni 2008), to point just a few.

In Poland, leaving aside the various conflicting visions of the new institution, described in detail in the subject literature (Gardawski 2009),<sup>1</sup> we can trace the legal and institutional consolidation of the TC back to 2001, and the passing of the Law on the TC (JL 2001)<sup>2</sup>—the so-called “second Commission.” The Commission operated formally until 2015, when it was replaced by the Social Dialogue Council (hereafter: SDC). Two years previously, the Commission’s regular work had collapsed as a result of the trade unions’ decision to cease participation. The work of the TC in terms of the possibility to make binding decisions therefore came to an end in 2013 (and as a result, the effects of the TC’s operation discussed in this article encompass the period 2001–2013). On the one hand, the matter of the trade unions’ “departure” from the commission concluded a period of crisis of dialogue at national level (more on which later in this article). On the other hand, it was a catalyst for work on the new law regulating the objectives and principles for social dialogue in Poland. The representatives of the social partners worked together on the new legislation, on the often emphasised basis that “the old dialogue formula had been exhausted” (cf. Guz et al. 2013).

In the aforementioned work, Gardawski (2009) made a partial attempt at a periodisation of the TC’s activity in the period in question, 2001–2013. In general terms, he divides these years into the relatively productive time of Jerzy Hausner’s stint as chairman of the commission (2001–2005) and the “post-Hausner” period of diminishing dialogue. The analyses cited in this article, based on quantitative categorisation of the effects of the TC’s work, confirm the exceptional nature of the first years of its operation under Hausner’s leadership. The next results supplement the findings of Gardawski—his outline of the TC’s activity and suggested periodisation go as far as 2008, i.e. five years before the representatives of trade unions left, and seven years before the SDC officially replaced the TC.

The in-depth analysis of the effects of the TC’s operation described in this article constitutes a point of departure for explaining the conditions of its effectiveness as an institution of social dialogue. Three, main research questions have been posed. 1) What stages of TC’s operation can be distinguished accounting for its effectiveness during whole 2001–2013 period? 2) What types of effects can be linked with these stages? and 3) What are the characteristics and nature of factors, suggested in subject literature, shaping each of the stage (i.e. whether they are external or internal respect to TC institution)? From the position of new institutionalism, these questions aim to deepen the study of institutional changes, especially in regard of sources of change (March, Olsen 2005a). Shading a light on (changing) effects of TC’s activity, as well as factors accounting for it, seems also useful to explain the periodisation of TC’s work in terms of cyclic change of aggregative and integrative institutional processes (March, Olsen 2005b).

The article, in the second part, provides an operational definition of the effectiveness of an institution that takes into account its character and the context in which it operates—something that cannot be said of the definitions of “institutional effectiveness” or “effectiveness of an organisation” available in the literature.<sup>3</sup> The analysis makes it possible to

<sup>1</sup> Gardawski’s study is perhaps the most extensive and complete analysis of social dialogue in Poland at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

<sup>2</sup> Each time the author use “JL” abbreviation throughout the article, it means Dz.U. (“Journal of Law”) and a proper law indicated in the reference list.

<sup>3</sup> Still, definition proposed in the article tends to be more “grained” and measurable than the concept of “efficacy of institutions,” used by March and Olsen (2010).

supplement, in the third part of the article, the existing descriptions of the TC and propose a periodisation of the entire period of its institutionalised activity from the perspective of the achieved effects.<sup>4</sup>

The last part of the article is discussion of results. The picture of the TC that emerges in this study points to major limitations in its effectiveness, at the same time suggesting the importance of the changes that took place in Polish social dialogue when the SDC replaced the TC. Results suggest the usefulness of considering as equally important “critical junctures” (Hall, Taylor 1996) as well as intra- and inter-institutional dynamics (March, Olsen 2005a).

As of future study areas, identifying the factors that determined the (periodical/partial) effectiveness or ineffectiveness of the TC—now a historical institution—can make it easier to form predictions regarding not only the effectiveness of currently existing social dialogue institutions, but also potential scenarios for development of social dialogue. While in the past certain researchers have been inclined to announce the imminent demise of tripartite dialogue (Meardi et al. 2015: 413), at the same time we should note its increasingly lengthy presence and resilience, in spite of periods of crisis (cf. Croucher, & Wood 2015: 354).

### Measuring the Effectiveness of Social Dialogue Institution

No single, clear definition has been proposed in the literature for effectiveness of social dialogue or the various institutions established to conduct it. To provide one would mean considering effectiveness in general terms, referring to praxeology. In this respect, we can state that

[...] “an effective action entails the execution of actions enabling set objectives to be achieved. An effective action need not result in the realisation of the main objective; it suffices for indirect objectives to be achieved that enable or facilitate its realisation, i.e. bring the effect intended as the objective closer” (Bieniok 2003: 82, quoted in: Mazurkiewicz 2011: 49).

“The effectiveness of an action can therefore be measured by the degree of achievement of objectives or by coming closer to achieving them. This means that effectiveness is identical to the purposefulness of actions” (Zieleniewski 1974: 20, quoted in: Mazurkiewicz 2011: 49).

According to this definition, it would suffice to indicate the objective which an institution (e.g. the TC) was established to realise, and possibly check to what degree the individual actors involved share this purpose. Taking this conclusion literally, Article 1 Item 2 of the Law on the Tripartite Commission for Socio-Economic Affairs and regional social dialogue commissions (JL 2001) reads that “the objective of the Commission’s activity is to strive to achieve and preserve social peace.” With the benefit of hindsight, was this goal attained? Without doubt—according to data (ILO 2018a), the scale of strikes in Poland between 2001 and 2013 was among the lowest in European countries (especially if we take into account similarly sized countries). Does this mean that the TC is assessed as effective? Certainly not. This is demonstrated by the opinions of researchers and commentators as

<sup>4</sup> This approach constitutes a significant complement to Gardawski’s division of the periods of the TC’s activity in terms of the person acting as the chair of the institution.

well as, in particular, the main stakeholders in the dialogue, who point to a lack of effectiveness, inefficiency and unwieldiness as the main reason for the collapse of the commission's work and the trigger for the groundwork for setting up the new institution (the SDC). This situation requires a commentary, and several additional issues must be taken into account regarding the way in which effectiveness of social dialogue is understood. First and foremost, it is important to note the approach reflected in International Labour Organization's (ILO) definition of social dialogue. To evaluate the effectiveness of a dialogue institution it is necessary—in addition to assessing the degree of preservation of social peace—to refer to institutions' abilities to influence resolving important socio-economic issues and to include stakeholders in the decision process (cf. [ILO 2018b](#)).

Inclusion of social partners in the process of formation of public policies is also an issue emphasised by the European Commission. Although at the level of individual countries it is impossible to identify one criterion or benchmark for assessing the effectiveness of dialogue, the suggested dimensions of such an evaluation refer to trust and cooperation between partners, autonomous dialogue and collective negotiations, as well as to inclusion of social partners in the creation of public policies ([Van Rie 2016](#)). In the European context, it is worth noting that the effectiveness of social dialogue and of industrial relations is also considered in relation to problems from outside the agenda of the workplace—this strengthens the understanding of dialogue as a tool of cooperation and problem solving. From the perspective of the EU's agendas, dialogue is a tool that serves (to support) realisation of specific objectives, especially in the light of the changes taking place concerning globalisation, economic and monetary union, EU membership, technology, demography and the labour market ([European Commission 2002](#)). In this sense, its effectiveness and efficiency may be evaluated in a similar way to other public policies.

The approach to measuring the TC's effectiveness presented below refers not only to the degree of inclusion of social partners in the process of creating public policies, but also to the results of this participation. In the formal and legal framework designated by the TC, stronger forms of inclusion cause a specific result (an agreement taking the form of a resolution, for example), which corresponds to the expected greater effectiveness of an institution. The ultimate criterion of an assessment, however, is content, as well as—to the extent to which a researcher can ascertain them—the social and economic consequences of the agreements that are secured.

### **The Scale of Organisational Participation in Creation of Public Policies as a Point of Departure for Examining the TC's Effectiveness**

In order to measure the effectiveness of the TC as a social dialogue institution, following the definition of effectiveness accepted previously, Emmerich Tálos and Bernhard Kittel's (2001: 75–76) scale of associational participation/influence in creation of public policies was employed. Compared to other proposals in corporatist literature, this distinguishes three levels of influence (accordation,<sup>5</sup> concertation, involvement), while at the same time

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<sup>5</sup> In its original use by Tálos and Kittel (2001): *Akkordierung*. This was subsequently translated into English as *accordation* by Kenworthy and Kittel (2003), the latter of whom being the coauthor of the original concept. In

taking into account the spectrum of organisations engaged in the process, which allows the degree of inclusiveness/exclusiveness of this process to be assessed (Kenworthy, & Kittel 2003: 16).

Accordation is associated with the means of forming public policies whereby a state negotiates proposals with the peak organisations of employers and trade unions, with the result of an agreement that is binding, albeit not necessarily made public. Concertation, meanwhile, concerns the tri- and bipartite discussions held among the same (limited) parties, which may take the form of intensive negotiations and leave their mark on the final shape of the adopted policy, but do not result in an agreement. We can then assume that the “main player” is the state. Involvement is the weakest level of associational influence on the process of shaping public policies. It encompasses a form of consultation (or rather presentation of the government position) in which the objective is not to reach an agreement with the participants (*ibidem*: 16).

As mentioned above, from the perspective of the premises of corporatism, involvement of social partners—employers’ organisations and trade unions—in forming public policies has a specific aim, which is to adopt solutions resulting in accelerated economic growth and maintaining a low unemployment and inflation rate (*ibidem*: 12). An equally important objective that is sometimes stated directly<sup>6</sup> is preservation of social peace. Determining the long-term impact of policies adopted as a direct consequence of the activity of a social dialogue institution, especially at central (national) level, is complex and requires examination not only of the legislation process, but also of the implementation carried out in a given time and socio-economic context. It is also worth noting that social partners are almost never (or relatively seldom) responsible for implementation of a policy at national level. This makes it particularly difficult to evaluate the “final” effectiveness of their activity. From the point of view of the citizen and taxpayer, however, it is pertinent to ask to what extent tripartite social dialogue, co-financed from public funds, is able to develop solutions that have a chance to filter into legislation, and then to socio-economic life.

In its original version, Talos and Kittel’s scale is an 8-point one, with 1 denoting the lack of any involvement of social partners in formation of public policies, and 8 meaning bipartite agreement between employers and trade unionists with the support of the state. The highest result indicates that the solution is developed through the social partner, which is a more desirable situation than a tripartite agreement on government proposals. Although in the further analyses and interpretation of results, the particular value of so-called autonomous dialogue (without any or with minimal participation of the state) was considered, the way of categorising the effects has been simplified to the three main types: accordation, concertation, and involvement. However, the order relation of the original scale was retained, i.e. the least effective form of dialogue was taken to be involvement, followed by concertation at intermediate level, and the greatest effectiveness of dialogue was attributed to the category of accordation. Let us now discuss the course and effects of the adaptation

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this text, therefore, Kittel’s translation of the concept is adopted as the closest to the original. However, especially for non-German readers, it will probably be useful to switch to an equivalent term—*corporatist compromise*—proposed by Afonso (2013: 77).

<sup>6</sup> Cf. art. 1, item 2 of the Law of the 6.07.2001 on the Tripartite Commission for Socio-Economic Affairs and regional social dialogue commissions.

work which led to the operationalisation of these three levels of associational participation in creation of public policies, taking into account the specific nature of the TC's work.

In order to adapt the categories of accordation, concertation, and involvement to the subject and the context of the study, first of all an exploratory qualitative content analysis (Mayring 2000) was conducted on statements from meetings (plenary sessions) of the TC. The statements selected for the analysis constituted 20% of the total 74 statements from 2001–2013, chosen at random, giving a total of 15 statements. Three ways of coding material characteristic of exploratory analysis were used: holistic coding, process coding and in vivo coding (Saldaña 2009).<sup>7</sup>

### Results of the Exploratory Analysis and Modification of the Categories of Effects

The exploratory coding of the 15 statements resulted in the following conclusions:

1. The most frequent codes were “informing” (43), “giving an opinion” (26), and “pointing out” (22). In the coded material, therefore, the number of informal elements of discussion exceeded that of formal elements (“submitting an application”—13, “negotiating”—11, “adopting a common position”—6).
2. The extracts concerning informing also proved to be the discussion longest codes. On this basis, we can assume that, whereas the statements accurately convey the course of meetings, the “dialogical” efficiency of plenary meetings may have been limited in favour of unilateral transmission of information.
3. “Informing,” “discussion,” and “pointing out” also occur in the largest number of the analysed statements, which reinforces the conclusion that the main dialogical effect of plenary meetings was “soft” exchange of information.
4. Disputes, settlements and negotiations are of secondary importance. Alongside exchange of information, in second place in terms of numbers were decisions, especially in the form of resolutions. The most interesting element to us therefore appears—formal agreement.

Table 1 (in the appendix) contains a summary of the modifications to the original definitions of effects resulting from the exploratory analysis.

### Effects of the TC'S Operation in 2001–2013

The analysis of the effects of the TC's operation was based on the principle of moving from general aspects to details. In total, four categorisations of effects were performed. First, the effects achieved or communicated during the Commission's plenary meetings were sorted into one of the three categories identified above (accordation, concertation, or involvement). Next, the first of the three types of effects (accordation) was analysed, divided into formal (resolutions) and informal (other) results. The next step involved categorisation of

<sup>7</sup> Taking into account the characteristic language and vocabulary used in the statements, it was assumed that, even if this source of data should be assessed as potentially distorted, especially in the content level (statements might be incomplete in terms of the actual course of meetings), the linguistic level conveys relatively accurately the categories used by participants in meetings.

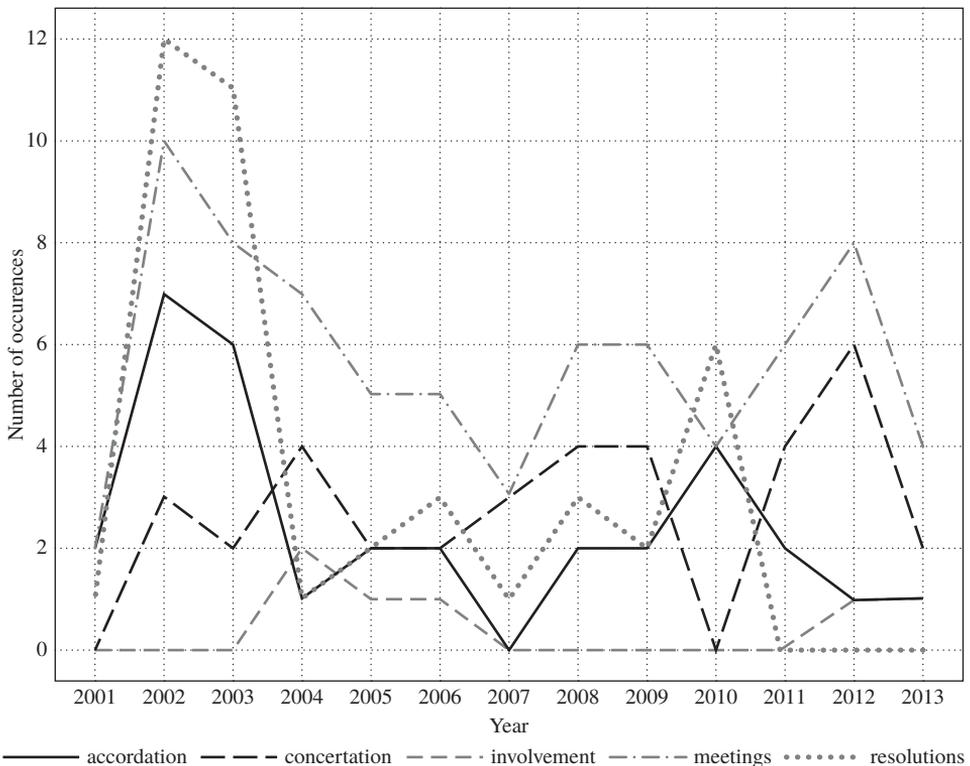
the formal accordations (resolutions) according to their type—internal (concerning issues of the Commission itself) and external (concerning substantive issues in the scope of the TC’s competences). The final categorisation entailed thematic differentiation of the resolutions—both “internal” and “external,” as a result of which the total 41 adopted resolutions were divided into six categories. Although each of the four categorisations provides interesting observations, I treat the last one as the most significant, as it allows us to evaluate the effectiveness of the TC in terms not only of the nature of the dialogue (whether its instrumental or expressive functions are realised—cf. [Traxler 2010: 52–53](#)), but also of its importance for the socio-economic surroundings.

### *First Categorisation*

Based on the content of the statements, each of the TC’s 74 plenary meetings was assigned to one of the three effects categories, on the assumption that: a) each session had to be allocated to one of the effects categories, and b) in the case of accordations (which applies particularly to resolutions), during one meeting there may be several different accordations. The results of the allocation are presented in [Figure 1](#).

Figure 1

### Main Types of Effects of the Operation of the TC in 2001–2013



Source: own elaboration.

The first categorisation of effects based on the definitions developed for types of effects provides indications concerning the differentiation of the dynamic of the TC's work in the various parts of the study period (2001–2013). Particularly noteworthy is the high frequency of accordations in the first period of the TC's work (2001–2003; in total 15 of 32 plenary sessions culminating in accordations overall). This was also when the most resolutions were adopted (respectively 12 and 11 in 2002–2003, i.e. more than half of the 41 resolutions passed by the TC in the research period). The second period of “revival” as far as reaching accordations is concerned comes in 2010 (four meetings concluded with accordations; six resolutions were passed then). In numerical terms, accordations were the second effect of the TC's plenary meetings (32 of 74 sessions: 43%).

As for the effects included in the second category (concertation), there were three periods of increased frequency—2004, 2007–2009 and 2012. By the last of these, dialogue in the TC had entered a crisis phase, manifested, among other ways, in a drop in the number of accordations (in 2011–2013 the TC did not pass any resolutions). This was also the most common category of effects (36 TC meetings were classified in this way out of a total of 74, i.e. almost half), which suggests that social dialogue within the TC should be viewed as an exclusive (almost entirely limited to a group of seven representative organisations of employees and employers) consultation instrument, mostly utilised by the government (an impression reinforced by the fact that the TC was headed by a government representative). According to Pochet (2005), the most important quality of the existence of social dialogue is its ability to achieve social peace; something of particular interest to the government. This assessment of dialogue, close to that of the social partners, was at the basis of the proposals for organisational changes later expressed in the Law on the Social Dialogue Council passed in 2015. The presidency of the SDC's work transitions between the government, employers and trade unionists, which is intended to allow greater freedom for the social partner to shape its actions.

Effects described as “involvement” and assuming participation in the dialogue of a broader social representation (especially of the third sector or institutions with a direct interest in planning changes and reforms) occurred so seldom that we can assume that they played only a marginal role during the activity of the “second Commission.” If we refer this fact to the conclusions concerning the second type of effects (concertation), this points to the distinctly closed nature of tripartite dialogue and the few attempts at linking it with civic dialogue (cf. Abramowicz 2009).<sup>8</sup>

Taking the above results into account, we can refer to the emergence of a periodisation of the TC's work between 2001 and 2013: from a period of intensive “dialoguing” in 2002–2004, via a less intensive spell in 2005–2007 and a subsequent time of revival of dialogue in 2008–2010, to a period of crisis of dialogue in 2011–2013. The in-depth analysis of the effects of the TC's operation in these periods presented in the next part of the article will provide further detail on the periods in question.

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<sup>8</sup> Civic dialogue is not part of the subject of analysis of this paper, but it is worth emphasising that during the “second Commission” period there were times when the representatives of civil society were engaged in dialogue, either directly at TC plenary meetings or in collaboration with individual, representative social partners.

### *Second Categorisation*

The second categorisation of effects refers only to accordations, which it differentiates on the basis of the degree of formality: whether, as a result of the accordation, a) a tripartite adoption of a resolution ensued,<sup>9</sup> or b) the accordation did not result in a resolution being adopted. Some 27 of the 32 meetings (more than 4/5) culminating with an accordation concluded with the signing of one or several resolutions. In the other five meetings, another type of accordation was secured. This entailed, for example, the social partners assuming a common position (for the employers and employees), within the plenary meeting or thematic groups, which was then presented to the government partner. This was the case where the interest of employers and employees coincided, e.g. constituting a rational reaction to attempts at legislative changes whose costs would have to be borne by both employers and employees. An example is the common position of these two groups, which gave a negative evaluation of the draft of the so-called “tobacco directive.”<sup>10</sup>

### *Third Categorisation*

The third categorisation only concerns effects in the form of TC resolutions, which it divides into two types: a) resolutions geared towards selected socio-economic issues associated with fulfilling the TC’s institutional, statutory mission (hereafter: “external” resolutions), and b) resolutions geared towards the Commission itself: its organisation, operation, members’ status etc. (hereafter: “internal” resolutions). The categorisation of resolutions suggests that—bearing in mind the assumed, at least in statutory terms, accordance<sup>11</sup> and conclusiveness of TC resolutions in the analysed period, to a great extent the conclusions involved determining the way in which the work of the Commission itself was conducted and organised. Seventeen of the 41 resolutions in the analysis concerned internal Commission affairs (e.g. setting or changing the regulations, appointing permanent case groups), its position (a resolution calling upon the government to provide funds for the Commission’s operation and social dialogue) and organisation of work (resolutions concerning postponing deadlines).

The remaining 24 resolutions focused on ongoing socio-economic issues in the scope regulated by the Law on the Commission. It is important to note that among these resolutions there was no document of a status high enough to confirm the decisions and document the initiatives concerning the government’s acceptance of the anti-crisis package proposal developed autonomously by the social partners in 2009. This topic is expanded upon below.

<sup>9</sup> The rules of the TC’s operation allowed for a deal to be made in the form of a resolution only on a tripartite basis, as a result of achieving agreement between the government, at least one employers’ organisation and one trade union organisation. This does not mean that no autonomous dialogue took place during the time of the “second Commission,” but among the reasons for the low number of resolutions in the period of analysis was the need to reach a deal with the representative of the government.

<sup>10</sup> As „tobacco directive” we refer to the EU law (finally entered into force in 2014) aiming to improve the functioning of the internal market for tobacco and related products, while ensuring a high level of health protection for European citizens. Under this law, for instance, distribution of menthol cigarettes has been prohibited. Before that, polish social partners—employers’ organisations and trade union had insisted on government not to accept such resolutions. They had been pointing out it’s potential harmfulness for polish labour market (job destruction) and budget incomes.

<sup>11</sup> From the government, at least one employers’ organisation and one peak trade union organisation.

An inflation of “internal” resolutions took place mostly in the first period of the Commission’s operation, which is a natural consequence of developing detailed regulations defining the functioning of the institution, including its rules, groups, their composition etc. The second such moment can be observed in 2010 (thereafter there were no longer any such resolutions). We can assume that this was a turning point, the “final showdown” over the form of dialogue conducted in the TC. Later, there was only growing frustration among social partners at the disregard for social dialogue shown by Donald Tusk’s government. First, trade unions expressed their dissatisfaction at the partial realisation of the decisions made in the anti-crisis pact. An unprecedented situation came with the government’s ignoring of the proposal for minimum wages for 2011 negotiated by the social partners in the TC (the government adopted its own amount, which differed from that proposed by the TC by 14 PLN—slightly more than 3 EUR).

At the same time, as regards “external” resolutions, the end of the first period of the Commission’s operation was unmatched (nine such resolutions in 2003). We should be careful about looking for simple explanations, but we can follow Gardawski in noting that this was the rather unusual period when the TC was chaired by the minister of labour and social policy in the SLD-UP-PSL government and later deputy prime minister, Prof. Jerzy Hausner. As Gardawski writes, the social partners were positive in their response to the chairman, finding him to be authentically committed to dialogue (Gardawski 2009: 177–178). The next increase came in 2008, during the period of revival of dialogue. In late 2008, renewed talks were held—invisible in this list—on responding to the consequences of the global economic crisis, which, as they continued the following year, concluded with Tusk’s government’s adoption of a package of anti-crisis laws. Important as this event is for contemporary social dialogue in Poland—constituting a relatively rare example of autonomous dialogue between employees and trade unionists—stakeholders’ verdicts on it vary with the benefit of hindsight. Certain researchers and representatives of employers mention the anti-crisis package as a success of dialogue. Representatives of trade unions are distinctly less enthusiastic, pointing to the failure to implement some decisions, especially those that mattered most to the unions.

#### *Fourth Categorisation*

The fourth categorisation constitutes an extension of the third one, and takes into account thematic differentiation (the subject) and not only the type of resolution (“external” or “internal”).<sup>12</sup> “Internal” resolutions (17) largely concerned adoption of or changes to internal regulations influencing the TC’s work (e.g. determining the number of representatives of representative organisations in the Commission, or providing reimbursement of travel costs to Commission members from the funds earmarked for TC member organisations). Seven such resolutions were passed. The second type of internal resolutions was those appointing permanent Commission task forces, and thus organising the substantive work of the TC into a specific structure, with their own tasks and dynamic of meetings. Five such resolutions were passed, appointing nine task forces. The remaining “internal” resolutions (five

<sup>12</sup> This categorisation corresponds to some extent to the—more legal-based—list of the TC’s formal competences proposed by Dagmir Długosz (2005).

in total) concerned changes in the timetable for addressing specific issues, with one being a call for the government to strengthen the role of social dialogue by providing funding for the Commission's operation. Although many of the "internal" resolutions are evidence of the relatively low efficiency (and therefore also limited effectiveness) of the TC as an advisory body, consulting and proposing various actions and solutions for or on behalf of the government, there are two positive aspects that should be noted. Firstly, the resolutions appointing permanent task forces should be regarded as significant, as they opened a space for intensive and detailed discussions on specific topics and paved the way for specific issues to regularly reach the TC's plenary forum. Secondly, we can entertain the hypothesis that preparation of "internal" resolutions for the social partners constituted a kind of training ground of cooperation, meetings, discussions and building of mutual trust. To a certain extent, it also acted to consolidate the social parties around the idea of social dialogue—an idea which was not entirely successfully included in the founding act of the TC and not entirely successfully implemented by the frequently changing series of governments in power in the period (seven cabinets in total). The later engagement of both employers and trade unionists in devising the premises of the activity of the Social Dialogue Council is evidence of the internalisation of the idea of dialogue and years of development of their capacity to conduct a dialogue.<sup>13</sup>

From the perspective of the TC's institutional influence on current socio-economic issues, however, most important are resolutions of an "external" nature. These can be divided into three types: a) resolutions resulting from the Commission's statutory authority, of a regular character; b) resolutions concerning announcements of action to be taken on a given issue, e.g. through appointment of a short-term task force; and, most interestingly, c) irregular resolutions, following the social partners' or the government's bringing a specific issue to the table.

#### *Regular Resolutions Resulting From the Commission's Statutory Authority*

According to the Law on the TC (JL 2001), Section 1—Objective and tasks, as well as resolution no. 2 of 6 March 2002 on the Commission Regulations, one of the areas of the TC's activity is to enact works, defined in five pieces of legislation:

- 1) Determining the amount of annual average rates of the increase in public sector salaries for the following year (JL 1999).
- 2) Determining the amount of the minimum working wage for the following year (JL 2002).
- 3) The minister responsible for social security submits information to the TC on an annual basis on the amount of the minimum subsistence income determined by the Institute of Labour and Social Affairs. If, in a given calendar year, the amount of the income criteria for a single-person household and the amount of the income criteria for a person in a family are equal to or lower than the subsistence minimum, the TC can petition

<sup>13</sup> A symbolic event in the light of the argument, referred to in the above passage, concerning the "distortion" of the idea of dialogue, mostly by representatives of the succession of governments, was the proposal for social partners to invite politicians to the Social Dialogue Council. This invitation was dictated by a desire to help to find a solution to the parliamentary crisis that occurred in late December 2016, during the heated dispute between the ruling Law and Justice party and the opposition over such issues as the procedure for passing the budget for 2017.

the Council of Ministers to verify the income criteria. Income criteria are subject to verification every three years, taking into consideration the results of studies of the social intervention threshold. In the year in which verification of the income criteria is conducted, the TC, after submitting proposals via the Council of Ministers concerning the income criteria as well as other information indicated in the legislation, sets the income criteria (JL 2004).

- 4) Determining the increase in the pension revaluation rate for the following year (JL 1998).
- 5) Determining the level of family allowances and benefits. The Commission's statutory work is conducted according to strictly regulated timetables for specific legislation and is performed on the basis of consultation or negotiation (JL 2003).

The resolutions in the first of the three aforementioned types of "external" resolutions constitute the most numerous group, with 10 of the 24 "external" resolutions. This means that the most frequent agreements of TC members concerning socio-economic matters addressed relatively narrow and recurrent issues. At the same time, it is worth remembering that the most discussion about an institutional crisis of the TC came when the partners failed to reach an agreement on apparently fundamental questions (a symbol of the crisis was the aforementioned concerns of finance minister Jacek Rostowski over the amount of the minimum wage for 2011, negotiated on a bipartite basis by trade unionists and employers).

#### *Resolutions Announcing Action on a Given Issue*

Accordations in the form of resolutions promising to deal with a given issue, e.g. examining a case, commencing negotiations or appointing a short-term specific task force, are an important category of effects because they highlight the thematic scope of the issues introduced by the social dialogue partners to the TC agenda outside of the permanent scope designated by the Law on the TC and the structure of the task forces present (in most cases) in the TC since the first years of its operation. At the same time, effects of this type are weak and inconclusive. Such an agreement does not mean that a socio-economic issue is suddenly solved when it is reached. It means nothing more (or less) than social partners' decision to deal with a given issue. This type of resolutions can be observed in six cases, half of which concern complex (comprehensive) accordation projects, e.g. resolution no. 29 on the social contract "Economy—Work—Family—Dialogue" (an example of a social pact that the change in government in 2007 prevented from being concluded).

#### *Irregular "External" Resolutions*

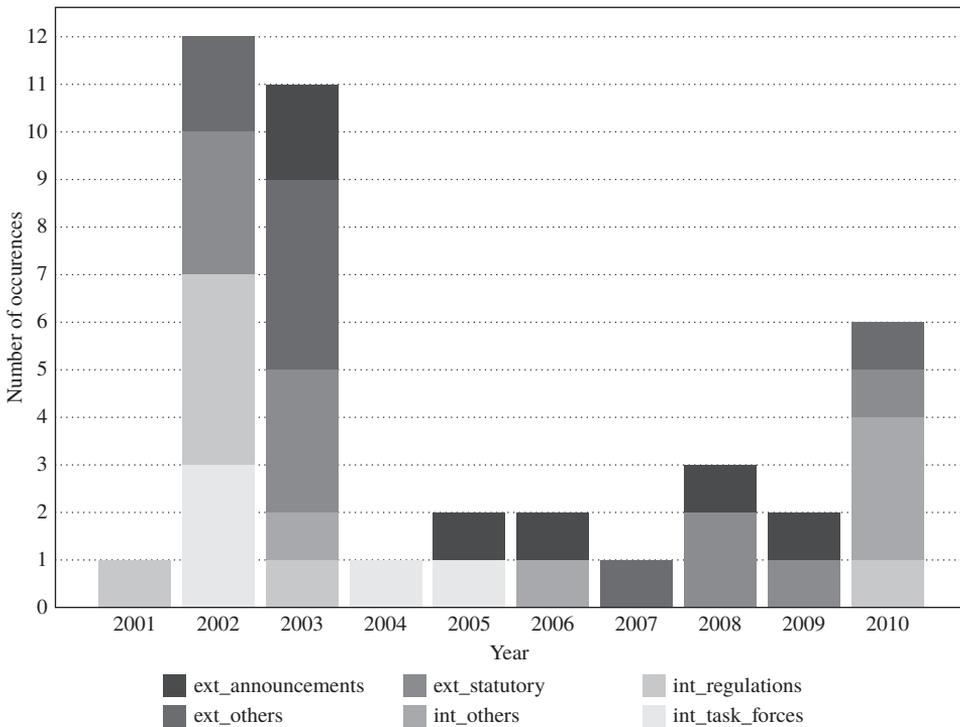
This is the most interesting type of effects in the category of accordations, as they concern agreements on socio-economic issues that, rather than resulting from the Commission's "planned" work on the statutory tasks entrusted to it, constituted a reaction to current socio-economic issues or were undertaken by one of the parties in the dialogue. Examples of this are resolutions concerning: the bill on social insurance against accidents in the workplace and occupational illnesses (consultation on the government draft legislation), the bill

on the rules for employing temporary workers (consultation on the government draft legislation), the bill on the State Treasury's acquisition of the Social Security Office's (ZUS) liabilities from failure to transfer contributions to Open Pension Funds, and the resolution on the programme for constructing a system of local government loan funds (on the initiative of the Polish Craft Association). Eight cases of such resolutions were recorded in the analysis. An ad hoc external accordation which did not take the form of a TC resolution was the preparation on the part of the social partners and presentation to the government of a proposal for an anti-crisis package.

A summary of the distribution of the various types of "internal" and "external" resolutions is presented in [Figure 2](#).

Figure 2

**The Six Thematic Types of Resolutions Adopted by the TC in 2001–2010  
and the Dynamic of Their Occurrence**



Source: own elaboration.

Particularly interesting is the fact that six of the eight "external" resolutions of an irregular nature were adopted in the first years of the TC's operation. The record year in this respect was 2003, when the TC passed regular resolutions, announced that it would undertake new actions, and adopted conclusive resolutions on current socio-economic issues. This period can therefore be identified as exceptional compared to the Commission's overall activity. In 2005–2009, the Commission attempted to react to current affairs, adopting

resolutions announcing work following which intensive consultations took place, including in newly appointed task forces.

### Discussion

The results of the analysis of the effects of the TC's operation provide a source of verification and a supplement to the numerous analyses conducted in Poland mainly in the first years after its inception. On their basis, we can summarise the work of the TC from its establishment by the legislation of 2001 until its replacement by the SDC in 2015. These results generally corroborate the opinions of researchers, experts and stakeholders of social dialogue, according to which the role of social dialogue at national level in Poland at the beginning of the 21st century has been disappointingly weak, diverging far from corporatism (Cox, Mason 2003; Fałkowski et al. 2006; Sroka 2007; Zagóra-Jonszta 2009; Szklarczyk 2013) or has been an instance of "illusory corporatism" (Ost 2000, 2011). The main type of effects of the TC's operation among those identified in the article, however, was consultation—and this within the thematic and temporal framework designated by the government. This necessarily entails a drastic limitation of the potential role of the TC. The total of 41 accordations in the form of resolutions, of which only 24 referred to current socio-economic issues, confirms the TC's ineffectiveness when it comes to the means of involving social partners in the formation of public policies and the possibility of influencing socio-economic life.<sup>14</sup> Particularly telling is the low number of "external" resolutions of an irregular nature (eight)—i.e. those constituting a reaction to current socio-economic issues, and not resulting from the regular scope of the Commission's work.

Two years after the formation of the TC, Rafał Towalski wrote of the "awakening of the Tripartite Commission" (2005: 251), pointing to the preponderance of opinions regarding its growing role as "an important institution of social life." Looking at the entire duration of the TC's operation, however, we now know that this was not the case. Moreover, TC seems to have never reached such level of social or popular recognition to aspire the role of institution (co)creating social trust. Representatives of social partners interviewed by the author have been pointing out that "people do not know, what is TC and what is it for" and that media are generally not interested in capturing social dialogue events or presenting results of social dialogue to the public. But, in fact, there are social partners who, to some extent, were responsible for that. Their efforts to restrict the social dialogue on the peak level only to a few organisations (that meet so-called "representativeness criterion") have limited the development of civil dialogue in Poland (cf. Hausner 2007), what exemplifies "negative social capital" (Portes 1998).

However, it is also important to note that the TC's weakness does not mean that nothing happened in social dialogue at national level. First, there were autonomous agreements outside of the TC, albeit not many (Gardawski 2005). Second, negotiations between the

<sup>14</sup> To be fair to the TC members, this often resulted from the government's disregard of their conclusions. The weak translation of the TC into socio-economic life is also demonstrated by another example. One of the few initiatives of the social partners to culminate in accordation in the form of a resolution in 2010, involving creation of a programme for constructing a system of local government loan funds for SMEs, was implemented as a pilot programme only in 2016.

government and individual social partners took place within tactical alliances, some of which were formed immediately before parliamentary elections (Sroka 2005). However, since we are interested in the translation of results concerning the TC into the operation of other social dialogue institutions, rather than forms of pressure and/or consultation in general, we will not discuss these cases here.

Taking the entire analysed period of the TC's operation into account, we should certainly support Gardawski's (2009) verdict highlighting the first years of its work with Jerzy Hausner as chairman. Our analysis confirms that it was then that the Commission was most active, securing the highest number of accordations, including "external" resolutions. The later declining intensity of the TC's activity in 2005–2007 seems to have been chiefly dictated by political changes, including three changes of government. The stability of conditions necessary for dialogue was lacking. Here one could recall the March and Olsen's observation, that suggests institution like TC would be of "integrative" type (as opposite of "aggregative" one),<sup>15</sup> and as such would be potentially successful in the "hard times" of crisis (cf. March, Olsen 2005b). Hausner came into charge in TC during economic crisis (growing unemployment, public finance crisis—so called "Bauc's hole"<sup>16</sup>); and also one of the most prominent examples of autonomous dialogue, anti-crisis package in 2009, was prepared as the anticipated reaction to economic crisis. Thus, social partners and government were probably more motivated to dialogue and finding common solutions. Nevertheless, in later periods, which the article refers to as the revival (2008–2010) and crisis (2011–2013) of dialogue in the TC, the institution was unable to work equally effectively as in 2002–2004, what provokes to investigate of other factors necessary for TC's effectiveness and responsible for change in it. All the more, so that "integration processes" are intertwined in the analyzed period in (so far) an unexplained way with "aggregation processes," for example those aimed at guaranteeing social partners (through the presence in the TC) of a privileged status in dialogue.

The first, successful period of work is important not only because of the visible effects—we can assume that one of the greatest successes of Hausner's tenure was building the capabilities between social partners to hold an autonomous dialogue. As it has been mentioned above, probably each resolution taken by TC for the social partners constituted a kind of training ground of cooperation, meetings, discussions and, as the common, personal experience of leaders, was building mutual trust (cf. Newton, Norris 2000). It also generally positively influenced their social capital (cf. Newton 2001): a culture of dialogue, which had previously certainly been weak, began to develop, and would demonstrate its strengthened status in the period of crisis of dialogue and the later work on the Law on the Social Dialogue Council.<sup>17</sup> The cases of former successful dialogue could be thus considered as one of potential drivers of consequent ones. On the other hand, mutual trust and social capital of partners have been repeatedly undermined by norms violations, like alliances

<sup>15</sup> In fact, these two types of political process, as proposed by March and Olsen, can not be treated as comprehensive typology, which is illustrated by the obvious fact that the opposite of „integrative processes" is not „aggregative processes," but „disintegrative processes" (Sjöblom 1993).

<sup>16</sup> Jarosław Bauc was a finance minister in Solidarity Electoral Action (AWS) government in 2000–2001.

<sup>17</sup> Now, taking into account the first years of the SDC's work, its institutional developments and vocal calls from unions and employers to strengthening its role, some predicted directions of the future of tripartism in Western and Eastern Europe (Ost 2011) still need to be discussed.

between trade union and ruling parties or recalled example of government by-passing of TC's resolution. Ultimately, trade union representatives motivated their decision to leave TC with a loss of confidence in government. As it is reasonable, in institutional approach, to consider external conditions, government approach to social dialogue and trust as important factors intervening in "critical junctures" (what often means some kind of crisis—cf. Hall, Taylor 1996) as well as intra- and inter-institutional dynamics (March, Olsen 2005a), it seem still more favourable in explaining the failure of TC as an effective social dialogue institution. More difficult (if possible at all) would be to explain why and how such an institution could be effective.

If we acknowledge Gardawski's view that leaders like Hausner play an incalculably important role in the development of social dialogue institutions, we might wonder what state the TC would have been in ten years later if it were still headed by an individual of Hausner's calibre, with a genuine standing in the government,<sup>18</sup> and if this government were favourable to corporatist solutions. Yet this is only an incentive for identification of other, potentially important factors—political, economic, institutional and others—that might have an impact on the effectiveness of social dialogue institutions like the TC. In author's opinion, a more complete explanation of the effectiveness of the TC and possible extrapolation of the explanation to other institutions of tripartite dialogue are possible through verification of the configuration of factors jointly affecting the character and effects of the dialogue. Such possibilities are provided by configurational comparative methods, e.g. qualitative comparative analysis—QCA (cf. Rihoux, Ragin 2009) or mvQCA (Cronqvist 2004; Bechter et al. 2017), which demonstrates the combined impact of factors on the final effect, identifying the conditions necessary and sufficient for the effect to occur. Such an analysis might provide an opportunity for a precise description of the circumstances in which specific effects of the TC's work—and especially accordations—occur. This may in turn represent a point of departure for forming strong hypotheses regarding the effectiveness of tripartite social dialogue institutions operating at national (or at least inter-institutional) level.

### Funding

This article was prepared as a result of funding from the Polish National Science Centre, project number 2014/15/N/HS6/04213.

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<sup>18</sup> Following Hausner, the TC's work was sometimes led by an individual of the status of deputy prime minister (Waldemar Pawlak). However, a deputy prime minister from a party in coalition with the leader of the government does not have sufficient authority to guarantee respect of the Commission's stipulations on the part of the government.

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## Appendix

Table 1

**Modified Definitions of the Effects of the TC's Operation**

Type of effect	Original definition	Definition adopted for the study	Example
Accordation	Means of forming policies based on negotiating proposals with social partners, resulting in a binding (but not necessarily open) agreement	Negotiations leading to binding and unanimous deals between partners, e.g. on preparing, passing or revoking a resolution, adopting a common position or signing an agreement	By definition each TC resolution adopted
Concertation/cooperation	Bi- and tripartite, intensive negotiations, influencing actual results, but not leading to an agreement	Negotiating/consulting on a position, leading to a change in the original position of (at least one of) the parties. Comprises a number of activities characteristic of "dialoguing" within an institution: proposing, holding, presenting and maintaining a position, jointly addressing an opinion and positions, expressing differences in opinions, discussion and proposing discussion (topics), supporting a proposal, insisting, appealing, persuading, suggesting, dealing with a given topic within separate bodies, committing (oneself and other parties) to do something, consulting, voicing reservations, giving written comments and proposals, negotiating, protesting, expressing opposition and outrage, criticising, requesting intervention, searching for a consensus, announcing plans to take action/legal steps, putting cases on the agenda and reviewing cases	Criticism of draft National Development Strategy for 2007–2015 at the TC meeting in 2006, as a result of which the government representative pledged to respond in detail to the comments sent by the social partners
Involvement	Discussion of proposals with umbrella (superior) organisations without aspirations to achieve a common position of all participants (in the discussion)	Loose (non-binding) presentation of the government position or planned programmes with the participation of social partners or other social organisations, comprising e.g. informing and listening to information, discussing issues, voicing opinions and doubts, pointing out, speaking out, formulating questions and answering, explaining, listening to critical comments	Involving representatives of such organisations as the Consumers Federation and the National Unemployed Persons' Accord in the TC meeting and talks on government programmes introducing rationalisation of public and social spending

Source: own elaboration.