New Challenges for Industrial Relations at Decentralised Level: the Case of the Business Network Contract in Italy.

The Business Network Contract (Contratto di rete – BNC) was introduced by Law 99/2009 as a means for companies to enhance their potential in innovation and competitiveness in the market: companies subscribe a common network programme in order to collaborate in certain fields, exchange information or performances, jointly carry out economic activities. In 2013, the Italian legislator increased the potentials of this instrument by facilitating and extending the possibility of posting workers in the context of companies that have subscribed a BNC, allowing a sort of exchange of employees between them. On the one hand, the BNC is fully consistent with the approach outlined in the «EU Quality Framework for anticipation of change and restructuring»: it can certainly contribute to «companies’ long-term competitiveness and sustained employability of their workers», mitigating «the associated expense, including the social cost of change». On the other hand, it raises new important challenges for industrial relations and collective bargaining. The paper aims at analysing the role of the social partners in the regulatory framework of business networks, focussing on the case of Italy as an interesting example of the new challenges that are characterising the development of social dialogue at company level.

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