Trade Unions in the EU: National Retreat or Mobilising for Social Europe?

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I. The European trade union landscape
The ETUC

- Foundation in 1973 (17 affiliates in 15 countries, 29 million members)

- Today
  - 85 affiliated confederations from 36 countries
  - 10 European trade union federations
  - representing some 60 million members
Organisation of ETUC

- **Congress**: every four years (last 2011), delegates according to size of affiliates

- **Executive council**: meets four times a year; members delegated according to size of affiliates

- **Steering committee**: 21 members elected by EC

- **Secretariat**: day to day business: General secretary, 2 deputy GS, 3 confederal secretaries
Staffing and finances

- The ETUC has about 50 + staff (plus some 60 staff at ETUI)

- Partly financed by affiliation fees (2010: €161 per 1,000 members in the top range and about a quarter of that for CEE unions)

- Substantial payments come from the Commission (e.g. €10 million in 2009/2010 for ETUI)
Different national union landscapes
(in brackets number of ETUC affiliates)

- One single confederation covering all or almost all employees:
  - Austria, Ireland, Latvia, Slovakia, UK, close to this: Germany (1), Greece (2, public/private divide), Slovenia (1),

- Divisions along manual/non-manual and educational lines:
  - Denmark (3), Finland (3), Norway (3), Sweden (3), partly Estonia (2)

- Divisions along (historical) ideological/religious-lines:
  - Belgium (3), Cyprus (3), the Czech Republic (1), France (5), Hungary (6), Italy (3), Lithuania (3), Luxembourg (2), Malta (3), the Netherlands (3), Poland (3), Portugal (2), Romania (4), Spain (3), Switzerland (2)
  - CEE countries: additional divide between unions which are based on former state unions and those which grew from opposition
The largest confederations

- > 4 million members:
  - DGB (Germany), 6.1 million members; TUC (UK), 5.9; CGIL (Italy) 5.7 million (of which 3 million pensioners); CISL (Italy) 4.5 million (more than 50% pensioners)

- between 1 and 2 million:
  - UIL (Italy), 2.2 million; LO (Sweden), 1.5 million; TCO (Sweden), 1.2 million; UGT (Spain), 1.2 million; CCOO (Spain), 1.1 million; LO (Denmark), 1.1 million;

- less than 100.000: Bulgarian, Estonian, Lithuanian, Luxembourgian, Slovakian, Maltese confederations
European Trade Union Federations

- formerly known as *European Industry Federations*
- Associations of unions, organized by sectors
- ETUFs differ largely in size
- The biggest are:
  - EPSU, public services, ~8 million members, ~210 affiliates, 23 staff
  - IndustriALL European Trade Union, manufacturing, ~7.1 million members, ~200 affiliates, 27 staff
  - Uni Europa – various service sectors; ~7 million, ~320 affiliates
- ETUFs have in total > 1.500 affiliates
  huge differences in size, largest are: IG Metall and ver.di with some 2 million members each
Union density & bargaining coverage

Source: WSI, based on ICTWSS and national sources
Note: data mostly as of 2010; data for Portugal, Spain and Greece are questionable
– e.g. current PT barg. coverage is about 32% (incl. public sector)
Bargaining coverage & union density
II. Tasks of unions
“What are we here for”
- Diminish competition between workers
- Improving working conditions (and living conditions)
- Provide help and advice
- Organise mutual support
- Principle: „better together“
III.
Which interests do unions represent?
- Members ?
- Class ?
- Society ?
IV.
The levels / arenas of union activity
- International
- Nation state
- Industry / sector
- Work place
- Individual member
Break
- What do unions do at the given level?
- Who are their interlocutors / bargaining opponents?
- How would you rank that level of activity?
5 levels of union action

1) Europe
   - lobbying, campaigning; acting within supranational institutions

2) Germany
   - talking to national government, trans-national campaigns;

3) Industry or economic sector
   - collective bargaining; acting within the system of collective bargaining

4) Establishment or company
   - collective bargaining; supporting and counseling works councils; organizing and recruitment

5) Individual member
   - individual support and counseling; legal advice and legal aid in all workplace or social security related disputes;
The nation state as main arena

- Trade unions are predominately organised along nation states
- Here they usually have a legal status and retain some institutional powers
  - tripartite consultation, collective bargaining, industrial action and workplace representation
- However, scope and levels of bargaining differ considerably between countries (take the examples of France, Germany and Romania)
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The European arena I

- There is no European collective bargaining
- A meaningful transnational coordination of collective bargaining has to struggle with differing enthusiasm of national unions
The European arena II

- The so-called social dialogue is limited by its largely voluntaristic character

- The European counterparts of the unions BUSINESSEUROPE (private sector) and CEEP (public sector) are even less able to make commitments which oblige their affiliates

- Many employers’ associations refuse to enter into a meaningful dialogue with trade unions, others are not representative
V. Unions and European Union
Key dates

- **1985-1995**: Jacques Delors' presidencies of European commission
  - Single European Act (SEA) 1986, Treaty of Maastricht in 1992 (including social chapter)
  - Delors aim: integrate the unions to give single market additional legitimacy (R. Hyman: ‘social gloss’)
    - > in exchange for giving the single market their approval unions were promised the institutionalization of ‘social dialogue’ with the ETUC and the ETUFs as ‘social partners’;
    - Hope for upward harmonization
- **1994** directive on European Works Councils
- **1995** Stability and Growth Pact > staged introduction of Euro
- **2004** Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe (TCE), 2005 rejected in France and the Netherlands
- **2007** Lisbon Treaty, replaced TCE
- **2007/2008** Rulings by European Court of Justice: Viking, Laval, Rüffert, established hierarchy of norms, market freedom was giving priority before social rights
- **2010** EU 2020
- **2011** ‘Six Pack’; Euro Plus Pact
- **2012** Fiscal Compact
‘Yes but …’ or ‘no, unless …’?

- ETUC approved the treaties from Maastricht to Lisbon
  - regarding its partial involvement as an opportunity
  - anxious not be depicted as anti-European

- Unions were initially more divided but most critics eventually moved from ‘no, because’ (e.g. CGT) or ‘no unless’ (some Nordic unions) to a ‘yes, but’ or ‘yes, and’ position (early e.g. DGB, Italian confederations)
Competing logics

- Logic of membership and logic of influence

- Hyman (2005): balancing the two is difficult
  - By adapting their strategies to the EU decision making process and to compromise only for the sake of remaining in the game, unions run the risk of losing their representative credentials in the eyes of their constituency.

- Danger of an ‘elitist embrace’ (Hyman 2005)
  - ‘Europe’ is mainly the business of full-time specialists within trade unions.
Progress requires contention

- Influence of unions is diluted without a readiness to say ‘no’
  - Without the capacity to counteract their role within the policy-making process runs the danger of being reduced to collective begging

- Political considerations shape opposition or support:
  - e.g. unions are often less prepared to oppose social-democratic than conservative governments
  - Acceptance of the paradigm of competitiveness
VI. Different interests between unions
Three examples
Port Package Campaigns

- The eventually successful campaign against the directive to deregulate port work (2003-2006) was not supported by Italian unions
  - what was opposed by the other unions was already practice in Italian ports
  - fear for protectionism by 'Northern' unions and harbour companies
Debate on a European minimum wage

- Scandinavian unions are opposed to a European minimum wage
  - fear of losing their bargaining autonomy
  - fear of creating a wage floor which puts pressure on higher wages
  - fear of weakening the incentive of workers to join
European citizens’ initiative

- At the latest ETUC congress 2011 in Athens
- The Swiss unions proposed to launch a European citizens’ initiative for a Europe without wage and social dumping
- This was successfully opposed by DGB and all French confederations on the grounds of being ineffective and to bureaucratic and proposed a comprehensive campaign instead
  - behind this argument stood scepticism towards the instrument as such
  - the Swiss unions on the other hand argued with their experience in such initiatives
VII.
‘Mobilising for social Europe’
Mobilising capacities

- ETUC depends on the good-will of the affiliated confederations
  - Some confederations have autonomous mobilising capacities
  - Other confederations are largely representative bodies which entirely depend on affiliates
- ETUFs: depend on affiliates
Mobilising in Europe

- Mobilising in Europe depends on the willingness and capacity of the unions and their leadership to act.

- This in turn depends on their activists and members' willingness to act.
Prerequisites of social mobilization

- Common interests
  - Shared perception of injustice
  - Shared sense of European vulnerability
    - framing of conflict is decisive
- Perceived effectiveness of collective action
- Appropriate organisation
Shared perception of crisis?

Eurobarometer survey November 2012
Perception of national economy („rather good“ + „very good“ in %)

Quelle: Standard Eurobarometer.

[Bar chart showing percentage of positive perceptions of national economies across different countries.]
VII.
Is there a chance for joint action?
Break
How to build coalitions and avoid blockades between:
- Those who do not want to do rather nothing
- Those who are prepared to do something
- Those who want radical action?
- Balance between structural determinism and voluntarism
- What is thinkable? (and desirable)
- Please: neither mysticism nor ‘musticism’
Thank you for listening!

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