

EPSU RESOLUTION on the role of trade union coordinators in existing EWCs and the role of national organisations

Considered at the EPSU EWC Coordinators Seminar

13 September 2001, Luxembourg

Adopted at the Executive Committee meeting 28-29 November 2001

1.

EPSU Executive Committee adopted a policy paper on EPSU and European Works Councils (EWCs) in November 1995. Since then, the Standing Committees, most notably those on Local and Regional Government and Public Utilities have received regular information on the activities of Transnational companies (TNCs) in public services. The EPSU Secretariat has participated in several EWC negotiations and activities. The EPSU Executive Committee has received regular reports on developments.

2.

Recent developments have demonstrated that, due to various processes such as concessions, out-sourcing, public-private partnerships and privatisation, the number of transnational companies in public services has increased. Detailed information on the companies and their problems are available through Public Services International Research Unit (PSIRU) that also produces sectoral reports for EPSU.

3.

The EPSU General Assembly Policy Statements: 'Public Services for People in Europe' and 'Public Service Trade Unions and Collective Bargaining in a European Environment' underlines that EPSU does not welcome these developments. They result in public authorities that seek to escape their responsibility for the provision of essential services, stable employment and proper democratic control. It is also clear that EPSU and affiliates have to deal with these developments.

4.

The need for EPSU to relate to these developments is reinforced by:

- The European Company Statute that will also be based on a negotiated procedure.
- The need to amend the European Works Council Directive in the light of plant closures such as those of Mark & Spencers and Danone.
- The relation between the sectoral social dialogue (sectoral trade union policy) and the EWCs, and
- The relation between the intersectoral social dialogue and the role of EWCs in overall trade union strategy.

5.

EPSU believes that EWC members play an important role in a European trade union strategy and in building a European trade union movement. EWCs bring together several thousand trade union representatives each year. This is an opportunity that should not be missed by the trade unions. EWCs can also provide an (additional) structure for trade union campaigns in case companies do not respect trade union rights. It is against this background that EPSU decided to bring about a better coordination of the EWC activities of affiliates and EPSU to ensure that EWCs contribute to trade union policy and are instrumental in such a policy. A first meeting of EWC trade union coordinators took place on 13 September 2001 in Luxembourg.

6.

Monitoring and guiding existing EWCs will be a main EPSU challenge. The objective is to ensure that all workers enjoy their rights to information and consultation. If properly guided, EWCs can serve as a lever to enforce workers involvement in decision-making, and to foster co-operation between workers' representatives at European level. This task can only be achieved with a strong trade union presence in the EWC through the assistance of a trade union representative.

7.

Experience with several EWCs in public service sectors and with several hundreds of EWCs in other sectors has confirmed that a trade union coordinator is necessary to assist these newly created bodies. Trade union presence is essential to draw the EWC together into a cohesive group and to anchor a European trade union perspective. It will ensure that the EWC does not just echo management decisions.

8.

We have reached a point where we see a need to define the role and function of the EWC coordinator on the one hand and the role of national organisations in supporting and implementing this policy on the other hand.

Role of the EWC trade union coordinator

9.

For each EWC, a trade union coordinator will be appointed to be the contact between the EWC and the EPSU. This coordinator should be identified as an EPSU representative. He/she is the first point of contact for the EPSU affiliates when problems arise with an EWC. He/she guarantees that workers' European interests are safeguarded.

10.

It is clear that in some cases the EPSU coordinator will also be the expert paid by the company to assist the EWC as provided for in the agreement. This, however, will not be the case in all EWCs.

Tasks of the EWC trade union coordinator

11.

The role of the coordinator is to ensure a positive development of the EWC by guiding the EWC, especially in its initial stage and fostering the cohesion of the group. He/she will help the EWC to develop a truly European profile.

12.

He/she will support the EWC in promoting cooperation between the trade unions involved in the company. For this purpose, he/she will make the best use of the pre-meeting. As EPSU will often cooperate with other European Industry Federations that organise workers in a particular company, the coordinator will consult with eventual coordinators from other Federations.

13.

In case of exceptional circumstances such as transfer of production, plant closure, redundancies that are likely to affect workers substantially, he/she will be actively involved and will ensure that the cohesion of the group is maintained. In such cases it is essential that the trade union coordinator embrace a European position.

14.

In cases where a country is dominant in terms of number of employees, the EPSU coordinator will ensure that the interests of employees from other countries are fairly represented and voiced and that the EWC is not just a replica of a domestic works council.

15.

The EPSU coordinator should be able to relay the EPSU general guidelines on collective bargaining and industrial policy. More specifically, he/she should be aware of the actions taken by the EPSU Standing Committee that covers the EWC company. It is therefore important that he/she receives appropriate training on the activities of the EPSU and is briefed on a regular basis.

16.

He/she should ensure that the EPSU Secretariat is kept informed of EWC developments and activities on a regular basis. Report back channels should be developed.

Designation of an EPSU coordinator

17.

The EWC coordinator will be designated in accordance with national culture and practices.

18.

It is most likely that the coordinator will come from the country where the multinational company headquarters is located. Should the EPSU organisations in this country not be able to provide such assistance, a substitute from another country should be discussed with the organisations involved in the EWC.

19.

The coordinator nomination should be endorsed by the EPSU EWC coordinators

network.

20.

In EWCs where EPSU organisations have a strong presence, the coordinator should be endorsed by the EWC. Where the trade union presence is very weak and the assistance of a coordinator has been formally rejected, a trade union coordinator should be designated by the EPSU organisations to influence and follow the EWC from the outside.

21.

The coordinator should preferably have experience of the company with which he/she is dealing.

22.

For efficiency purposes, a coordinator should not be responsible for too many EWCs. It is essential that the proposed coordinator inform the EPSU and the EWC of any EWC in which he acts as a coordinator.

Role of the EPSU organisations and EPSU Secretariat vis-à-vis EWC trade union coordinators

23.

National organisations will make sure that the coordinators that are nominated have the appropriate profile to fulfil this task. They will ensure that coordinators are properly trained on EPSU and European issues. They will also update them on a regular basis.

24.

The EPSU Secretariat will set up a network of coordinators. A provisional list will be drafted. It will endeavour to bring these coordinators together on a regular basis to update them on policy orientations taken by the EPSU. It will provide the EWC coordinators with regular information on EPSU activities and specifically EWC activities (newsletter, list of signed agreements, other important developments...).

25.

EPSU also works with Public Services International (PSI) on transnational companies that are active in Europe and other parts of the world to extend TNC networks and in providing assistance when problems are encountered. EPSU coordinators can therefore be asked to raise trade union rights issues.

(This resolution is based on a similar resolution by the European Metalworkers Federation (EMF) and adapted to reflect EPSU realities. The EMF have experience with over 200 EWCs and its experience can be considered relevant).

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