

Report

Berlin, 21-22. March 2011

The objective of the working group seminar was to study the structures and external relations of European Works Council and their cooperation with trade unions. The organisations participating in the project were to analyse the impact of fast company transformation on the decision making competencies and the fulfilment of requirements of forums that are guaranteed by the EU regulations and the corporate practises. Finally, the working group's aim was to look into the operation of the communication channels between the different decision making levels, forums and the actors.

The seminar was started by the welcoming words of **Rezső Gál**, president of EVDSZ and was continued by the presentation of **dr. József Szilágyi** on the changes in the production structures.

This was followed by **Eberhard Schomburg** (VER.DI), president of the E.ON AG works council on the relations between the German works councils and European Works Council. He described the relations in the company between the trade unions and the European Works Council as well balanced and added that they have an equal representation of 50-50%. The co-decision rights are guaranteed both at the company and the group level.

The next point was work in small groups. The participants had to answer the following main questions:

- how does the EWC communicate with the employees?
- how does the EWC communicate with the employers?
- how does the EWC communicate with the trade unions?
- what questions do employees ask from the European Works Council? (when, how often, on what issues?)

Mention was made of the fact that frequent communication with employees is not always typical because the background of the information is also important and explaining that would go beyond the frames of passing on information.

Trade unions at E.ON provide for communication. At the corporate and group level, however, communication is not appropriate in spite of the fact that the union representatives of EMCEF and VER.DI are constantly invited. Employees trust the work of the EWC. But there is no great interest. EWC-members try to give answer to all questions of the active employees.

Proposals

It would be important that companies provide internet access for every employee. This would make a two-way information flow possible. This could be arranged for in an agreement.

The conclusions of the small group work was that there is room for improvement in communication; if we want to make all activities of the EWC members known we need a closer communication with the trade unions at the company level.

The first speaker of the second day was **Sven Bergelin** Energy and Mining Workers Trade Union **Verdi**, president of the EPSU energy group. In his introduction he expressed his solidarity with the trade union colleagues in Japan. He explained that the nuclear catastrophe

in Japan generated a major discussion in Germany on nuclear energy. The main issue is if the nuclear power plants are going to be prolonged or not in Germany. An agreement was made on conducting a stress-test in the European Union which should give answer to how nuclear power plants react in crisis situations.

Then Sven Bergelin talked about the current situation of the energy sector. Enterprises in Germany discuss the strategy to be followed.

In the second part of the morning session the topic of the previous day was discussed. Mention was made of the fact that works councils and trade unions need to strengthen their communication. In the last 10 years the cooperation between works councils and trade unions has improved. It has to be noted that works council have the right for information and consultation and not trade unions, similarly to co-decision rights -this is the case at least in Germany. Therefore European Works Councils must be strengthened. It is good if EWCs and trade unions exert jointly pressure.

In the conclusion of the discussion **Rezső Gál** drew the attention to the fact that we need to learn the company processes and the operation of the different levels if we want to have a clear picture after the conference in June on the points we need to pay special attention to in the EWC agreements. The rights of the EWC negotiation delegation should refer to the decisions making competencies.

The next contribution was made by **László Kozák** on the results of the EPSU survey on the companies' reactions to the changes of the European energy market. The survey arrived at the same conclusions as the experiences of the speakers at the working seminar: high level of indebtedness, oversupply due to the crisis and the perspectives of the world economy cause uncertainties in European energy markets. Therefore, energy companies try to cut costs and start to reorganise.

No accident that that almost parallel to the seminar, the Italian trade unions announced a strike 18. March 2011 in all E.ON sites in Italy. The Italian trade unions went on strike because of the lack of social dialogue and the lack of an investment strategy of E.ON. Without investments (and the renewal of the existing sites) the jobs of the Italian energy workers are jeopardised. The EWC wants more information on how E.ON intends to adapt to the specific national energy situations. Therefore the EWC created a „*generation working group*” to discuss the investment strategy of the concern. Similar situations may occur in other countries, too due to the lack of an investment strategy and insufficient social dialogue.

In his concluding remarks **Rezső Gál** drew the attention to the fact that information flow and cooperation is needed among the trade unions present, what is more we should consider the possibility of a cross-border trade union federation of a new type.

László Kozák