

EDITORIAL

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This issue of *Transfer* publishes six original articles which cover key issues for industrial relations in Europe: the impact of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) on industrial relations systems; the changing political context under economic crisis and austerity measures, with its impacts on workers' voice and representation; the state of the European sectoral social dialogue; the role played by European Works Councils (EWCs) at national level; economic integration and union strategies in the EU; and trade unions and non-standard work. The contributions in this issue provide several new perspectives and insights, which can contribute to enrich the ongoing debates.

Ivan Dumka challenges the view that EMU was a key driving force of changes in industrial relations over recent decades. More precisely, he addresses the questions whether monetary integration corrodes coordinated bargaining structures, thereby contributing to the tendency towards disorganized decentralization, and what institutional settings may help to fence off new pressures and constraints under EMU. The article focuses on the period following the launch of the euro and the taking over of monetary policy by the European Central Bank on 1 January 1999. According to Dumka's analysis, EMU has had comparatively little impact on wage-setting institutions in Germany, the Netherlands and Belgium, where coordination capacity has remained stable. Recent changes in these countries' collective bargaining systems can be traced back to different dynamics, which are internal to the different countries and predate EMU, such as in the cases of Germany and Netherlands. It should be said that EMU is not completely 'neutral' in terms of wage bargaining. In fact, the constraints introduced by EMU are threatening the performance of wage-setting institutions, with emerging signs of institutional drift and displacement at least in Belgium. But, following Dumka's analysis, this is more linked to the specific coordination mechanism introduced in Belgium, the statutory wage ceiling established in 1996, rather than to coordination per se, which is still functioning effectively in Germany and the Netherlands through different arrangements. The article also considers the role the state can play in supporting industrial relations and collective bargaining systems, and this is certainly important for the current debate and for further research.

Sofía Pérez de Guzmán, Beltrán Roca and Iban Diaz-Parra address the issue of the possible representation crisis of trade unions confronting, on the one hand, austerity measures and, on the other hand, the possible competition of new emerging social movements. They study the case of Spain and analyse trade union strategies in recent years aimed at preserving the (narrowing) space for political exchange. The analysis focuses on the relationship between the major Spanish trade unions and their rank-and-file members which is challenged by the dilemmas produced by the need to voice criticism and discontent with regard to the increasingly unilateral introduction of austerity measures and structural reforms and the goal to influence the same reforms through political exchange. The space for influence can be narrow and the presence of competitors in the political arena, like the 15M movement, can make this path even narrower. How do unions respond to these challenges? The article illustrates the complex, ambiguous and at times contradictory relationship between the major trade unions and the 15M movement, whose constituencies at least partly overlap. In order to avoid a 'representation crisis', the major unions have tried to maintain their role in social mobilization and adopted some of the repertoires of action and goals of social

movements. At the same time, they struggled to keep open the door of dialogue with the government. In this way, their actions oscillated between somewhat divergent paths as well as different stances towards the 15M movement. The article concludes with a first assessment of the effectiveness, as well as the prospects, of these strategies.

Emmanuelle Perin and Evelyne Léonard study European sectoral social dialogue and provide an assessment of its capacity to deliver and to influence industrial relations at national level. According to the authors, sectoral social dialogue can produce norms that influence employment relations within Member States and this depends on the active relationships established between the EU and the national levels and between actors. In other words, sectoral social dialogue does not operate as a top-down process, which relies on hierarchical regulatory power, as it is often simplistically assumed of hard regulations. Due to the nature of the non-binding texts often produced by sectoral social dialogue committees, bottom-up relations and notably the two-way relationships that characterize soft forms of regulations are crucial for the effectiveness of sectoral social dialogue. This points to the importance of the active involvement of national actors in EU-level processes, in all phases of consultations and negotiations, including to ensure the relevance of EU-level processes for national-level employment relations. Indeed, according to the authors, the effectiveness of European sectoral social dialogue at national level should not only be assessed in formal terms, but also against the capacity to exert cognitive and procedural influence, which can relocate the EU-level agreements into the national systems. The reverse side of the coin is that, in order to be able to participate in the EU-level processes and to transfer the results into their own Member State, national actors need to have considerable resources to invest and the capacity to act on the themes covered by social dialogue. This leads to the issue of capacity and capacity-building. In this context, the emphasis put by the European Commission's 2015 initiative for 'A new start for Social Dialogue', confirmed by the recent joint statement of 27 June 2016, on the links between the EU and the national levels, on capacity-building and the strengthening of social dialogue at national level, seems to be well-placed.

Patrick Ziltener and Heinz Gabathuler analyse the experience of EWCs in a non-EU country, Switzerland, and assess their relevance for the protection of the national workforce. The article covers four case studies of EWCs of companies headquartered outside Switzerland. Although the general impact of EWCs on the protection of the Swiss workforce seems limited, local circumstances may enhance the potential of EWCs for national actors. At Alstom, the EWC has played an important role to ensure the application of a European Framework Agreement, which provided for a three-year employment guarantee, to a Swiss plant affected by a restructuring process in the grid division. Here, we can observe how a purely national-level restructuring could benefit from the voluntary inclusion of the Swiss plants in the EWC. In a case of transnational restructuring, in the power generation division, the relationship between the EWC and the local works council and trade unions became somewhat strained over the priority to be assigned to negotiations within the EWC. However, it seems that also in this case the presence of the EWC exerted some beneficial effects on the protection of domestic workers. In sum, the potential of EWCs to benefit workers in 'peripheral' (not home country) locations is confirmed, although the ability to exploit such potential greatly depends on the quality of information and consultation practices, on one side, and on the activation of actors at EWC and local levels, on the other.

Magdalena Bernaciak addresses the important issue for European trade unionism of whether labour organizations from relatively low-wage and low-protection countries try to exploit such 'comparative advantages' to foster the interests of their members, and their economies, within the European Single Market. Is 'social dumping' a road that trade unions may be tempted to follow, despite their rhetoric on the improvement of workers' economic and working conditions? Her

article provides some answers to this question by looking at the experience of Polish trade unions, namely OPZZ and Solidarność. Since EU accession, which was regarded as a way to promote the upgrading of workers' protections through the extension of the *acquis communautaire*, the statements and actions of the major Polish trade unions have been consistently against 'social dumping' in areas such as intra-EU labour mobility, posting, and service market integration. This has also led on many occasions to cross-border union cooperation and joint actions with unions of western European countries. Although neoliberal deregulation policies often found wide support in the Polish domestic political debate and at times in public opinion, trade unions did not follow such orientations. The article includes some reflections on the impact of trade union stances on the internal public policy debate and prospects for cross-border coalitions and actions.

Ann Cecilie Bergene and Cathrine Egeland show how the growth in non-standard employment, notably temporary agency nurses, can be turned into an opportunity to strengthen organizing and action by a trade union. Having regard to the professional nature of the work of nurses and possibly to the specific features of the Norwegian health sector and industrial relations system, the authors analyse the shift of the stance of the Norwegian Nurses Organisation (NNO) towards temporary agency work from opposition to open support. The shift is linked to the ways in which NNO addressed the challenges posed by the often culturally supported professional subordination of nurses to the needs of patients (and doctors) and the proletarianization of employment and working conditions, linked to health sector and labour market reforms. Gender lies at the centre of the analysis, as the traditional image of nursing as a mission whereby the profession is closely 'associated with culturally feminine meanings of nurturing, caring and comforting' is challenged by the more recent moves to militancy and conflict, which often put nurses among the most unionized and active professions. In Norway, the union's support for temporary agency work, to the point of promoting resignation and re-entry as agency nurses, was explicitly linked to the rejection of the vision of nursing as a calling and was instrumental in fostering wage increases, due to the scarcity of professional nurses. Quite surprisingly, turning to the 'market' was seen as a move to manifest the 'worth' of nurses' work as opposed to their 'duty', and to empower nurses, notably in their collective actions. Moreover, this move, which the authors qualify as 'discursive intervention' in traditional notions of care work and gender, enabled the union to include and legitimize agency nurses as union members, terminating any exclusionary practice and thereby contributing to revitalizing the NNO. Indeed, NNO succeeded in concluding a number of collective agreements with temporary work agencies and secured higher wages and equivalent norms in many areas, compared to public sector nurses. The authors make a theoretical contribution to the union renewal debate by drawing attention to gender and the gendering of union strategies as well as to the potential of 'discursive intervention' for union revitalization.

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