

Thursday 28 June 2018, 15:30-17:00, room: Netherlands III

Jobs in a clean future automobile industry

In the introduction it was stated that there are big megatrends affecting the automotive industry, which will impact upon existing and future jobs in the industry and in the economy as a whole. The automotive industry may have its ‘Kodak-moment’ now. The significance of these changes is especially obvious, if we take into account the fact that the automotive industry is a major employer in Europe (more than 12 million jobs in Europe!), it has a large foreign trade surplus and it usually offers ‘good’ jobs with proper working conditions, relatively good wages and from the point of view of trade unions/workers’ organisation.

The panel had four different presentations, which seemed to contradict each other but in reality it turned out that the key challenges (digitalisation, globalisation of markets, greening, demographic change, digitalisation, the shift towards electronic or hybrid vehicles), which pose tremendous challenges for the automotive industry, will have most probably different impacts in terms of changes in the volume and quality of jobs in the automotive industry, in selected regions, countries (depending on their level of specialisation on automotive production/services) and on the European economy as a whole. Thus this triggers different challenges for individual companies, the various supplier firms, or individual workers. While there is a high probability that there will be substantial job losses in the automotive industry, there will be additional jobs created especially in services and in certain other manufacturing industries. At the same time in the automotive industry, the fewer jobs will be different: with the new labour-augmenting devices, maybe more interesting, more creative – and more stressful as the new systems track every movement, every activity of the worker. There may be large increases in R&D-related jobs. There may be an upskilling of tasks, which has important consequences for education, training, retraining and the labour market as a whole.

Another interesting challenge can be the further strengthening of China’s automotive industry -partly through the country’s own efforts, partly through the increased investment activities of outside Chinese, including European automakers there. (In 2016, European OEMs invested seven times more in China than in Europe!) Here, changes in regulations, which help developing the European electronic car market would be important to ‘channel back’ investments to Europe in order to avoid importing electronic cars from China - and the related job losses in Europe. However, we should note that China’s role will be further growing both in demand and in supply in the world automotive industry.

The upcoming changes in the automotive industry will clearly bring changes in employment, as it is mentioned above, these will be concentrated to certain cities, regions, countries (even to certain, badly performing companies, as the case of Honda, raised from the audience showed or to certain, highly specialised automotive supplier SMEs) – it is important that trade unions should be prepared and active/pro-active in this area. There are signs that job losses are already taking place e.g. in diesel development and production.