
European trade unionism: from crisis to renewal?

Magdalena Bernaciak, Rebecca Gumbrell-McCormick and Richard Hyman

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european trade union institute

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Preface

European trade unions are under considerable pressure. Their status in the West as building blocks of a ‘social model’ has been undermined by globalisation and neoliberalism. In the new EU member states of Central-Eastern Europe, they have never possessed this status and they are unlikely to achieve it in a foreseeable future. The recent economic crisis added to long-term difficulties: in many countries, it brought about harsh austerity measures and served as a pretext for radical attacks on collective bargaining institutions.

In this report we have two main objectives. The first is to map the diversity of European trade unionisms and the challenges they face. Differences in unions’ organisational structures and institutional configurations at national level have an impact on the power resources at their disposal; they also translate into different sets of problems that unions have to solve. We argue, however, that unless trade unionists in each country understand how and why their counterparts elsewhere are different, they are in no position to learn from the experience of others.

Second, we outline some imaginative initiatives undertaken by European unions in recent years that might serve as an inspiration for their counterparts in other settings. We accordingly look at their activities in the fields of membership organising; mergers and organisational restructuring; collective bargaining; social partnership; and at their cross-border cooperation. We conclude that unions are not condemned by external forces to continuing decline and eventual irrelevance. Against the odds, they still have scope for strategic choice.

1. Varieties of European trade unionism, varieties of challenges

The diversity of trade unions in Europe

It has become common to distinguish between different ‘varieties of capitalism’ according to how far, and through what mechanisms, markets – including labour markets – are socially and politically regulated. Hall and Soskice (2001) drew a dichotomy between ‘liberal’ and ‘coordinated’ market economies; subsequent studies have developed more elaborate classifications, taking into account in particular the role of the state in managing the economy and structuring the labour market. On this basis, students of industrial relations have constructed comprehensive typologies of West European regimes, distinguishing between Nordic, Central, Southern and Anglophone countries (Ebbinghaus 1999; Sapir 2006).

Most Nordic countries – we focus on Sweden, Denmark, Norway and Finland – possess industrial relations systems based on institutionalised class compromises between encompassing organisations of both workers and employers. As Table 1 (in which countries are listed within the groups used in this report) shows, these four countries have the highest levels of unionisation in Europe. In general, unions lack the ideological divisions common in many other countries, but comprise separate organisations for manual, white-collar and professional or graduate employees. Historically, all possessed ‘Ghent’ systems of ‘state-subsidised, but voluntary unemployment insurance administered by unions’ (Vandaele 2006: 647), though the Norwegian system was abolished in 1938. Such systems are widely seen as providing strong incentives towards union membership. Most of the countries (Finland is a partial exception) have for many decades had strong social-democratic parties with a dominant role in government; one consequence has been highly developed, egalitarian welfare states.

The Central group – we here consider Germany, Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Belgium – possesses long-established traditions of social partnership, often embodied in formal tripartite institutions. Union density is relatively low, except in Belgium (where the Ghent system originated); but in general, encompassing collective bargaining (at sectoral or cross-sectoral level, or both) combined with provisions to extend agreements to non-signatory employers ensures a far higher workforce coverage. Statutory systems of works councils are usually dominated by union representatives, even in workplaces with only a minority union presence. Welfare states, often constructed on Bismarckian principles, are less egalitarian than in the Nordic

countries, but provide an important arena for trade union involvement in public policy-making and administration. In most countries, the norm of cross-party coalition governments creates a bias towards negotiated, incremental policy change, reinforcing unions' privileged role as social partners.

Table 1 Trade union density and collective bargaining coverage

	Union density				Bargaining coverage			
	1980	1990	2000	2010 ^a	1980	1990	2000	2010 ^a
DK	79	75	74	69	72	69	80	85
FI	69	73	75	70	77	81	86	90
NO	58	59	54	55	70	70	72	74
SE	78	82	80	68	85	88	91	91
AT	57	47	37	28	95	99	99	99
BE	54	54	49	52	97	96	96	96
CH	28	28	23	17	48	44	42	49
DE	35	31	25	19	78	72	64	61
NL	35	24	23	19	79	82	86	84
ES	19	13	17	20	76	82	83	73
FR	18	10	8	8	85	92	95	92
GR		39	34	24		65	65	65
IT	48	39	35	36	85	83	80	85
PT	55	28	22	19	70	99	92	90
IE	64	57	40	34	64	60	55	42
UK	51	39	30	27	70	54	36	31
SI		69	42	26		100	100	92
CZ			27	17			41	47
HU	94	83	22	17			47	34
PL	65	37	17	14			42	29
SK			32	17			51	38
EE		94	15	8			29	25
LT			17	10			12	14
LV			26	15			21	22
BG	98	81	28	20				18
RO	100	80	40	33				70

^a For some countries, 2008 or 2009.

Source: ICTWSS database for 2010, based on national sources (Visser 2013).

The Southern countries – France, Italy, Spain, Portugal and Greece – have a history of strong communist parties and ideologically divided labour movements, linked to adversarial industrial relations. The regulation of employment usually depends more on legislation than collective bargaining.

Many observers perceive a vicious circle of highly politicised industrial relations, with unions primarily concerned to influence government rather than negotiate with employers. Others however point to significant change in recent decades, and emphasise the growing diversity within this group of countries.

The Anglophone countries, Britain and Ireland, approximate most closely to 'liberal market economies', with only weak legislative embedding of employment and trade union rights. Trade unions are not ideologically divided, as is the case in many other countries, but are relatively fragmented along occupational and industrial lines, with giant general unions numerically predominant in both countries. Multi-employer bargaining at sectoral level has virtually disappeared in both countries, meaning that (at least in the private sector) unions have to win recognition company by company; though in Ireland the series of peak-level 'social partnership' agreements, first signed in 1987, seemed to mark a very different path from that taken in Britain.

In addition to these sixteen Western European countries, we examine the ten Central-Eastern European (CEE) states that became EU members in 2004 and 2007. While it is common to divide the western countries into the groups identified above, similar classifications have not been customary in the case of CEE. Ten years ago, Kohl and Platzer (2004) argued that these countries still adhered to a 'transition' model of industrial relations, marked by weak and fragmented structures of interest representation and a dominant state role in the formulation and implementation of socio-economic policy goals. Likewise, Visser (2009) found it difficult to predict which of the established models of industrial relations the CEE would ultimately follow.

The initial hesitancy to open the 'CEE black box' seems justifiable, given that new member states shared many important characteristics. First, for over forty years they had remained under communist rule, which imposed fairly uniform political and social structures. Industrial relations were subject to the control of the state as the sole employer, whereas unions assumed the role of 'transmission belts', communicating party decisions to their (often involuntary) members. Second, all underwent a simultaneous transition to liberal democracy and market capitalism. The latter required the creation of market-sustaining institutions, as well as a major reorientation of trade and opening to foreign capital. It also involved painful restructuring and social hardships, with growing unemployment and rising income inequality. Third, all chose the path of EU integration, submitting applications for accession between 1994 and 1996. At least at the formal level, they implemented social provisions enshrined in EU law, the social *acquis*, including legislation on workers' representation, health and safety and employee information. Fourth, national income is generally well below western levels, and welfare expenditure generally remains proportionately below the average for the EU15 (Bohle and Greskovits 2012).

However, it is increasingly clear that referring to CEE states as a single category obscures important cross-country differences. At the same time, the established western classifications are of little use, given the different origins

and developmental paths of CEE institutions. Bohle and Greskovits (2012) have proposed a typology based on the analysis of communist legacies, transitional policy choices and transnational influences during the economic transition period, with three groups: the Baltic states plus Bulgaria and Romania; Slovenia; and the Visegrád counties. We employ the same classification.

The three Baltic states – Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia – gained independence following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The belated start of the reforms, and the zeal to catch up with other CEE countries, resulted in a radical path of transition that favoured macroeconomic stability over labour market protection and welfare provision. The Baltic countries did not attract high-value-added foreign direct investment (FDI) and hence experienced substantial de-industrialisation. Organised labour is largely excluded from policy-making, while industrial relations are marked by extremely low union density and collective bargaining coverage. Bulgaria and Romania share many similar characteristics, such as high levels of financialisation, ‘lean’ welfare states and a relatively high share of low-value-added products in their exports. However, the transition process was more protracted, with less radical privatisation and de-industrialisation. In the industrial relations sphere, at least until recently, the Romanian social partners were stronger, and collective bargaining coverage higher, than in the Baltic countries. In Bulgaria, union density is relatively low and is declining even further.

At the opposite end of the spectrum, Slovenia most closely approximates the Central countries’ model of social partnership. As the most economically developed Yugoslav republic, it had already forged strong links with Western countries before the system change. After independence, it hosted substantial FDI inflows, at the same time preserving a strong domestic industrial base and a nationally-owned banking system. The self-management tradition provided a framework for subsequent capital-labour compromises. Union density has been high; most employees are covered by collective agreements, and multi-employer bargaining is dominant. Unions have assumed an important position not only at the company, but also at the national level, influencing the course of transition and the process of eurozone entry through tripartite deals and social pacts. More recently, though, Slovenia too has undergone a ‘neoliberal turn’ (Stanojević 2014).

The Visegrád countries – Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic and Slovakia – occupy intermediate positions. Like Slovenia, most had already experimented with a market economy in communist times. In the years that followed, they largely preserved their welfare states and managed to attract – not least thanks to generous subsidy packages – high-value-added, capital-intensive FDI that transformed and renewed their industrial base. Unlike Slovenia, however, they have not granted organised labour institutionalised access to the policy-making process, relying instead on a legalistic approach to labour market regulation and combining it with weak, ‘illusory’ tripartism (Ost 2001). Industrial relations systems, if stabilising in recent years, have remained conflict-ridden, fragmented, and marked by diminishing power of the social partners. Collective bargaining is decentralised and sectoral agreements are

scarce (except in Slovakia); extensions, even if legally possible, are rarely used in practice.

This short overview of European capitalisms and industrial relations regimes provides a picture that is far from uniform. As will be shown in the following sections, differences between the groupings translate into specific sets of challenges faced by unions. They also shape power resources that unions can build upon, as well as their strategic responses.

On the defensive: varieties of challenges

In the past quarter century, trade unions across Europe have faced severe challenges. These include a decline in the large-scale manufacturing industries in which unions long had a major stronghold, followed by budgetary pressures and the drive to privatisation in unions' other main stronghold, public services; this has resulted in labour market insecurity and the growth of diverse forms of 'atypical' employment. As Table 2 shows, officially registered unemployment in 2012 was 10% or more in all the Southern countries and in many in CEE. Moreover, official statistics often understate real joblessness, and levels in most countries have worsened further as a result of austerity measures. The level of part-time employment – usually associated with relatively low unionisation – is high in much of the west, and fixed-term contracts have grown rapidly in most western countries, together with Poland. Young workers are particularly severely affected by the growth in labour market insecurity.

Associated with all these challenges, though in complex ways, is the process of 'globalisation', which weakens trade union capacity to regulate work and employment within the national boundaries in which they are embedded. There has been a political drift to the right and, as we discuss below, a decline in electoral support for social-democratic parties – which often appear unable or unwilling to contest the neoliberal agenda, particularly in CEE where traditions of social democracy barely survived the previous regime.

One outcome has been a loss of membership density over the last three decades. In the West, the decline in some countries has been roughly half, though in others it has been far less dramatic, as Table 1 indicates. In much of the East, if the benchmark is the almost 100% membership in the former 'official' unions, the losses have been even greater. Falling membership results in depleted financial resources. In some countries, it has also meant a decline in collective bargaining coverage; though this is not the general rule, as we saw above, mainly because of multi-employer bargaining, often buttressed by legal provisions for the extension of agreements to all firms in a sector. But if unions' power is reduced, the efficacy of these bargaining institutions cannot be taken for granted. Almost universally, as we discuss below, the content of sectoral agreements is being hollowed out as decision-making shifts towards the individual company. Membership decline also results in a weakening of political influence.

Table 2 Labour market indicators, 2012

	Population (million)	Employment rate 15-64 (%)		Unemployment (%)		Fixed-term (%)		Part-time (%)	
		All	Female	All	15-24	All	15-24	All	Female
DK	5.5	73	70	8	14	9	21	25	36
FI	5.3	69	68	8	19	16	41	14	19
NO	4.8	76	74	3	9	8	24	27	42
SE	9.3	74	72	8	24	16	57	25	39
AT	8.4	73	67	4	9	9	36	25	44
BE	11.1	62	57	8	20	8	31	25	44
CH	7.7	79	74	4	8	13	53	35	60
DE	82.0	73	68	6	8	14	53	26	45
NL	16.5	75	70	5	10	20	51	49a	77a
ES	46.2	55	51	25	53	24	65	15	24
FR	62.5	64	60	10	24	15	57	18	30
GR	11.2	51	42	24	35	10	26	8	12
IT	60.0	57	47	11	35	14	53	17	31
PT	10.6	62	59	16	38	21	56	11	14
IE	4.5	59	55	15	30	10	35	24	35
UK	62.0	70	65	8	21	6	15	26	42
SI	2.0	64	61	9	21	17	72	9	12
CZ	10.4	67	58	7	20	9	27	5	9
HU	10.0	57	52	11	28	9	22	7	9
PL	38.1	60	53	10	27	27	66	7	11
SK	5.4	60	53	14	34	7	19	4	6
EE	1.3	67	65	10	21	4	13	9	13
LT	2.2	62	62	13	26	3	9	9	11
LV	3.2	63	62	15	28	5	10	9	11
BG	7.5	59	56	12	28	5	7	2	3
RO	20.4	60	53	7	23	2	6	9	10

^a In NL, part-time status is defined as working under 35 hours a week; elsewhere, it is based on employees' self-definition.
Source: Eurostat.

While the changing world of work, the impact of globalisation and the rise of neoliberalism have affected the environment of trade unionism in all European countries, they have done so in different ways and to different degrees. We here outline some of these differences, which are closely related to emergent threats to nationally specific constellations of trade union power resources.

In the Nordic countries, increasing support for right-wing parties – together, as in many other countries, with a shift by the social democrats towards neoliberal economic policies – has posed major challenges to trade unions. The most important has been a weakening of the Ghent systems. In Sweden – where unemployment levels have risen considerably, particularly for young workers – unemployment insurance contributions were increased dramatically (roughly fourfold), tax allowances were abolished, and contributions were linked more closely to the rate of unemployment for members of each fund. The changes, imposed in 2007 and 2008, meant that the most vulnerable workers were hardest hit, while benefit levels were reduced. Since unemployment insurance is voluntary, the result has been a substantial decline in membership of the union-controlled funds, and a corresponding decline in union membership. In Denmark, the government in 2001 ended the trade union monopoly of unemployment insurance, and allowed funds to compete across sectoral and occupational boundaries; soon afterwards, contribution rates were doubled, followed by a reduction in tax allowances, and the duration of unemployment benefits was halved. The largest confederation, LO, lost 22% of its membership between 2000 and 2011. In Finland too, legislative changes in 1991 made it possible to take up unemployment insurance without being a union member, resulting in a sharp decline in density.

A key principle of Nordic trade unionism has been that the main conditions of employment should be regulated by collective bargaining rather than by law; so, for example, there is no minimum wage legislation. This has come into conflict with EU rules on free movement of labour and freedom of establishment, signalled by the Laval judgment of the European Court of Justice (ECJ) in 2007, which insisted that the directive covering workers ‘posted’ from one member state to another ‘cannot be interpreted as allowing the host Member State to make the provision of services in its territory conditional on the observance of terms and employment which go beyond the mandatory rules for minimum protection’. This ‘has struck at the very heart of the [Nordic] model for setting wages and conditions’ (Woolfson *et al.* 2010: 347), since the terms of collective agreements are not universally binding by law. The ruling thus prohibits unions from taking industrial action to enforce these terms on non-compliant foreign service providers (see also our discussion in section 6).

Unions in the Central group of countries face somewhat different challenges. First, the ‘Rhineland’ model of coordinated market economy depended crucially on the role of ‘patient capital’: banks and other institutional investors were committed to a long-term relationship with major companies, protecting employers from short-term market pressures. Germany was here the archetype, with the tradition of the *Hausbank* and with the important role of such banks (as well as worker representatives) on supervisory boards. While all five countries have always been integrated into international product markets, they were thus relatively insulated from the volatility of global financial markets. This has changed significantly, with an incremental shift towards Anglo-American principles of ‘shareholder value’ and with the encroachment of associated financial instruments and institutions (facilitated, and in part driven, by EU competition rules). A dramatic illustration is the spread in

Germany of hostile takeovers, previously virtually unknown: the symptomatic case was the takeover of Mannesmann by Vodafone in 2000. Such changes expose employees to previously unknown levels of instability and insecurity, posing major problems for trade unions.

Second, as noted above, unions have long enjoyed strong institutional supports which have made them less dependent on membership numbers. As Table 1 showed, while union density in Austria and Belgium was over 50% in 1980, in Germany, the Netherlands and Switzerland it was far lower. Since then, density in the last three countries has fallen to around 20%, in Austria it has halved; only Belgian unions, buttressed by a weaker version of the Ghent system, have withstood the trend. But institutional supports may induce a dangerous complacency: without adequate organisational power resources, unions may lose representative legitimacy and find that their institutional supports are undermined. It is possible for the form of institutions – such as German codetermination – to remain intact but for their practical effect to atrophy. German unions present an extreme case of a more general problem: disproportionately comprising a core of relatively secure, male manual workers in traditional manufacturing (as well as the public sector), whose own security is threatened by the growth of a more diversified and often precarious workforce outside the ranks of trade unionism.

The Southern countries face specific challenges which are distinct in character. In France, where unions have the lowest density in Western Europe, membership traditionally implied a far more active commitment than in other countries; and unions measured their support, first by votes received in elections to works committees and second by willingness to follow calls to strike action. But the number of strikes has fallen dramatically in recent decades, at least in the private sector; while workplace elections are marked by a high rate of abstention (over a third of the constituency) and the election of many non-union nominees (roughly a quarter) (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2006). Unions became increasingly dependent for their effectiveness, first on their implantation within the extensive public sector, which once employed almost a quarter of the labour force, and allowed generous time off work for union workplace representatives; second, on their ability to mobilise to press government to regulate the labour market, social benefits and working conditions. This industrial relations model has been challenged by systematic programmes of privatisation; by the rise of company bargaining; and by more sophisticated and assertive managements.

While there are some parallels in other Southern countries, more recently the overriding challenge has been the sovereign debt crisis and the externally imposed austerity measures. In both Spain and Italy, threats to continuing membership of the eurozone brought direct intervention by the European Central Bank (ECB), leading first to radical cuts in public expenditure and public employment and then to more systematic changes in the industrial relations regime. Greece and Portugal suffered even more brutal intervention by the Troika, comprising the European Union (EU), the ECB and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), with demands for the decentralisation

of collective bargaining, reductions in minimum wages and the removal or restriction of provisions for extension of agreements. The most dramatic outcome was in Portugal, where the number of workers covered by collective agreements fell from 1.9 million in 2008 to 0.3 million in 2012 (Campos Lima 2013).

In the Anglophone countries, unions have traditionally enjoyed only limited institutional supports and are thus particularly dependent on their own internal power resources. In the UK, union density has almost halved since 1980 and – because of the virtual absence of sectoral bargaining and the lack of extension mechanisms – collective bargaining coverage has fallen even more sharply. Unions have also faced sustained government hostility, with legislative changes designed to make effective trade union organisation and action extremely difficult, and extensive programmes of privatisation. Many managements have utilised the new legal regime to exclude union representation, or at least to minimise the scope of collective bargaining. As in other countries, the proportion of precarious jobs seems to be increasing. Most recently, the savage austerity measures imposed by the Conservative-Liberal government elected in 2010 threaten many areas of public services and public employment. In Ireland, the public status of trade unions was boosted by a quarter century of peak-level social partnership; yet at company level, many employers – particularly foreign multinational corporations (MNCs) strongly resisted unionisation. Hence union density has fallen as fast as in Britain; bargaining coverage has held up better, but largely because of the increasingly hollow social pacts. Since 2008 all other challenges were overwhelmed by the impact of the global financial crisis, which exposed the fragility of Ireland's growth model based on cheap credit, speculative banking and an artificial housing boom. The government was the first to impose a massive austerity programme, with a major impact on jobs, wages and pensions in the public sector. The threat was intensified under the terms of the Troika 'bailout' of November 2010. This crisis tested social partnership to destruction, but also created serious divisions between public and private sector unions.

Unions in CEE, despite the differences we have indicated, face some common problems. In general, their identities remain shaped by the early years of transition; most have yet to redefine a role for the 21st century. Lacking the institutional supports which are common in the west, they are particularly dependent on their own resources; but these resources are meagre. There is a vicious circle: widely viewed as relics of the former regime, unions lack public legitimacy and a committed membership; yet without these, they are in a weak position to demonstrate a capacity as defenders of workers' rights. In the majority of CEE countries, union density continues to fall despite the recent intensification of organising efforts. This trend, in combination with the ageing of the current membership base, raises serious concerns about the future of organised labour movements in the region. The situation is particularly dramatic in the Baltic States, where union density oscillates around 10% of the active population and is further decreasing (see Table 1 for details). Weak unions have also found it difficult to challenge a neoliberal policy course followed since the launch of the systemic transition by the majority of

CEE governments, right- and left-wing alike. During the recent crisis, social and collective bargaining systems in the region have come under additional pressure as a result of government actions and external conditionality, especially in countries subject to international rescue programmes offered by the EU, the World Bank and the IMF.

In the sections which follow, we explore some of the ways in which unions across Europe have responded to these challenges.

2. The 'organising model' and union democracy

As we have seen, union density varies radically across countries, from under 8% in France to (until recently) over 80% in Sweden. Membership in some countries has fallen drastically and almost continuously for the past three decades; in others the decline began later and has been less severe. In some cases, absolute numbers have increased, but more slowly than the growth in the labour force. The composition of union membership often reflects the structure of the labour force several decades ago, concentrated among male manufacturing workers and public employment, with weak representation in the expanding private services sector. In most cases, density is far below average for younger age groups. In some countries, half the present membership will retire within roughly a decade, while in Italy half are already pensioners. This presents unions with two connected challenges: first, to halt and reverse the aggregate decline; second, to build membership in particular among the under-represented groups – which may in turn require that unions take greater account of their distinctive interests. How have they responded?

To reverse the decline in membership density, unions must improve either recruitment or retention, or both. Some two decades ago, certain US unions saw the answer in the 'organising model', instead of the dominant 'servicing model' of North American trade unionism. In the latter, a bureaucratic apparatus of union professionals provided benefits to members through collective bargaining and representation over individual grievances; members were treated as largely passive consumers of these services. But if the union in hard times could no longer deliver evident results, they were likely to leave. The aim of the alternative model was to engage members collectively in developing their own representative capacities, so that much of the day-to-day work of representation and bargaining could be undertaken from below, with the union apparatus providing background support. This was intended both to save resources and to increase the attractiveness of the union to actual and potential members. Organising, in the face of hostile employers with a large repertoire of 'union-busting' tactics, required careful 'mapping' of the characteristics of target workers and the vulnerabilities of their employers, the 'framing' of their grievances in ways which would build collective solidarity, and aggressive one-to-one recruitment drives.

Trade unions in Europe have responded to falling density to various degrees and in a variety of ways. Some have remained complacent but most now take seriously the challenges of recruitment, representation and mobilisation. In some, but by no means all countries, the 'organising model' has been accepted,

at least in part. There are good reasons to expect significant contrasts. First, as we have seen, the actual extent of membership decline varies substantially across countries. Second, the implications of objectively similar challenges vary according to national context: ‘membership loss... has different meanings in different national systems’ (Frege and Kelly 2003: 20). Third, national traditions and national institutions give rise to different opportunities and constraints; hence particular remedies (especially if drawn from the USA, with its distinctive industrial relations system) may seem inappropriate in many countries. Finally, the meaning of the organising model is itself often unclear, ambiguous and contested. Is it simply a toolkit which can be applied selectively, or does it require an integrated approach with a radical rethinking of broader trade union objectives and ways of operating? Can organising be reduced to recruitment, or does it require a much wider range of activities in order to rebuild organisational power? As Dörre *et al.* argue (2009: 35), ‘the problem of trade union renewal strategies is not the adoption of single organising practices, but instead their conjunction and consolidation in a coherent concept of associated power’.

Representing women workers

The representation (or underrepresentation) of women’s interests has long been a contentious issue for unions in Europe, and almost universally there now exist special structural arrangements. In nearly every confederation there is a women’s committee, usually prescribed in the constitution and with input to the collective bargaining process. More controversial is the introduction of women’s quotas or reserved seats in decision-making bodies. There have also been moves to provide special training to encourage women’s participation in representative positions. A more recent policy issue has been gender mainstreaming, which means monitoring and where necessary changing all union activity to ensure gender equality; this has been recommended by the ETUC since 1999. According to a survey by Sechi (2007: 22-5), ‘almost all confederations reported that they do implement gender mainstreaming [but] only one third of them incorporate systematically gender mainstreaming in all their policy, as this principle requires.... Only three action plans appear to include all of these elements, targets, timetable, monitoring procedures and evaluation mechanisms’.

The manual worker confederations in the Nordic countries were among the first to create specific representative structures for women members and to target training and other initiatives at them. Some unions have also introduced mentoring programmes for women. The effective representation of women’s interests can also be seen in the early adoption of family-friendly policies and the advocacy of a supplement to the wages of low-paid women to compensate for the gender pay gap. All German unions have women’s committees, some long-established, and in many cases there are strict rules for proportionality in executive bodies; similar initiatives have been undertaken more recently in Austria. However, in almost all countries with effective proportionality on elected committees, this is not matched in full-time officer positions and the

top leadership. In France, Ardura and Silvera (2001: 7) write of ‘undeniable advances in the integration of equality in the main unions... but also persistent obstacles to genuine parity in their executive bodies’. Of the Italian unions, CGIL stands out in terms of women’s representation in leadership. In 1996 it adopted a rule that all official bodies should contain at least 40% women, and two years later it established a forum to coordinate the activities of women leaders and representatives of self-organised groups and to develop equal opportunities initiatives. Yet according to Beccalli and Meardi (2002: 133) there is a contradiction between ‘the distinctive egalitarian policy of the Italian unions and the unique alliance they formed with the feminist movement’ and the fact that ‘the unions as organisations have remained rooted in basically male social, cultural and organisational models and they find it increasingly difficult to cope with the emerging issues of diversity (an example being the enduring diffidence towards potentially women-friendly atypical and part-time jobs)’. British unions also have a relatively long history of equal opportunities initiatives, including reserved seats for women on executive committees, women’s committees and special conferences. Irish trade unions have adopted similar policies and structures, albeit rather later than their UK counterparts.

In CEE, many unions have similarly set up women’s committees in order to promote female employment and the principle of equal pay for men and women. At times, however, conflicting priorities and ideological differences within the organisations have led to the marginalisation or even dissolution of such bodies. For instance, a women’s committee at the Polish *Solidarność*, created shortly after the systemic change in 1989, was soon dismantled because of its criticism of the official union stance favouring a stricter abortion law. Despite the absence of a formal female representation, *Solidarność* did stand up for women rights at workplace. In 2008 it defended female workers exposed to sexual harassment at a large food-processing company, and organised training for shopfloor union representatives on how to fight this type of abuse (Kubisa 2009). Across the region, new labour unions have been created in predominantly female occupations: *Ogólnopolski Związek Zawodowy Pielęgniarek i Położnych*, OZZPiP (All-Poland Union of Nurses and Midwives), set up as a result of bottom-up organising initiative, has attracted nearly 80,000 members.

In developing special arrangements for women, and also for ‘minority’ groups with distinctive interests, there has been an evident process of mutual learning. This has been significantly stimulated by the ETUC (which has its own women’s committee); it has issued guidelines and disseminated ‘best practice’. But some elements of this agenda can be contentious. The whole idea of special treatment, though designed to correct existing inequality of opportunity, may be seen as negating the principle of equality and non-discrimination. In France, Ardura and Silvera (2001: 7) note a widespread fear that special measures may create ‘a risk of marginalising or even ‘ghettoising’ women and minorities. In part this may reflect the distinctive French conception of ‘republican values’: all citizens are equal and thus there should be no differentiation, for example through ethnic monitoring. But the fear that special arrangements may be divisive exists elsewhere, as in the Nordic countries.

The existence of special structures is no guarantee of their effectiveness in shaping policy or that they will be adequately resourced. Much of the literature on women's representation tends to argue that outcomes have been disappointing, though most writers agree that nevertheless there has been significant progress in recent years.

Recruiting young, 'atypical' and migrant workers

In most countries, unions have also established separate structures for young workers. Vandaele (2012), in a survey of youth committees at confederal level, found that while most had a dedicated budget and some administrative support, almost all respondents felt that their resources were inadequate. Interestingly, representatives from countries where young workers had a reserved seat on the executive committee were least satisfied – though this might reflect higher expectations. And it is also likely that in most countries it is less the confederations than their affiliated unions which primarily shape interest representation.

The growing numbers of workers on precarious contracts (who are disproportionately composed of migrants and ethnic minorities and young people) are in all countries far less unionised than the rest of the workforce. Union responses to the challenge of 'atypical' work have taken many forms, involving organising and recruitment, revisions to internal structures and new industrial, political and societal policies and actions. First, though, unions have to decide to represent precarious workers. They naturally oppose the deterioration in job security, pay rates and terms and conditions of employment that has accompanied more precarious forms of work, and have concentrated on opposing initiatives by employers or governments to expand temporary and agency work and contracting-out – particularly, of course, when such moves are linked to reductions in existing staff. However, opposition to precarious work has also meant, in practice if not by design, that many unions have excluded precarious workers, for example by limiting membership to those working over a specific number of hours or with a particular contract of employment.

Conversely, some unions have tacitly accepted the outsourcing of risk as a means of enhancing the security of their core members, creating a conflict of interests between 'protected' and precarious groups. More generally, 'most European unions have a rather strong institutional position... [and thus] the incentive to organise new groups of workers is relatively weak' (Kloosterboer 2008: 120-1). Even when not formally excluding such workers, in the past few unions have actively recruited them because of the difficulty and expense, while failing to address their specific concerns in their services, collective bargaining and proposals for legislation. Devoting more time and resources to atypical workers was seen as reducing attention to 'traditional' members. However, most unions have come to understand that the increase in atypical forms of work will undermine their power resources and weaken their capacity to act, unless precarious workers become members: organising them has therefore become a priority for many unions and confederations.

While precarious workers are often in low-skilled occupations, there are also specific problems in organising highly-skilled self-employed workers, especially where these are separated from other workers for the same company or supply chain, such as technicians in research and development. These workers may have no experience of trade unionism, and may believe that unions are not necessary for them to achieve their career objectives; so unions have to present themselves in a more 'modern' and instrumental way, showing how they can be of practical help but also instil a spirit of solidarity. Many initiatives to organise these workers involve the use of information technology and its possibilities for networking and web-based services, sometimes creating a distinctive style of 'freelance unionism'.

Young and precarious workers are a major focus for recruitment and organising in a number of countries. In France, the CGT has a dedicated youth organisation; the CFDT has devoted resources to recruiting trainees and students, and also in call centres and temporary work agencies where many young workers are employed, but has no specific organisation for young workers. Both confederations dedicate resources to campaigns among agency workers and those with fixed-term and other precarious forms of employment, many of whom are not only young but also foreign-born or of minority ethnic origin. Such efforts usually depend on the commitment of local or regional structures rather than the industrial federations. It is the latter rather than the local structures that have the main resources; and the sectoral federations 'applaud these initiatives but do little to support them' (Bérout 2009: 85). Normally these campaigns have propaganda value but result in no sustained gain in membership.

In both Spain and Portugal, where – as Table 2 showed – there are exceptional numbers of young workers on precarious contracts, the main unions have established special departments for young workers and immigrants. In Italy, all three major confederations have created separate unions for temporary workers. Together they claim a membership of some 120,000 – a small proportion of the total precarious workforce, but more impressive than parallel efforts in other countries. As well as a national agreement signed in 2007, the unions have negotiated a range of sectoral and company agreements regulating the use of temporary workers and their conditions of employment. In some ways, organising atypical workers into entirely separate unions is structurally easier than accommodating them within existing union bodies. However, this may also be seen as a means of marginalising such workers, rather than mainstreaming their organisation within the core sectoral union structures. It also raises acutely the problem of cross-subsidising their recruitment and representation, which almost inevitably involves more resource costs per member than for 'typical' workers. The relative transparency of such cross-subsidies makes it likely that sectoral unions will resist the shift in resource allocation required. Another response to the problem of recruiting and retaining workers who often change jobs and sometimes occupations is to strengthen the territorial basis of organisation, though this also implies a redistribution of resources.

Unions in Britain and Ireland have been particularly receptive to American conceptions of the ‘organising model’, not only for obvious linguistic reasons but also because they lack most of the institutional supports common in continental Europe and have to recruit and negotiate company by company. The decline in membership density – severe in both countries – thus poses distinctive problems to which American recipes can seem an attractive solution. To a lesser extent, similar challenges have also stimulated attention to ‘organising’ in the main German unions.

Both Britain and Ireland opened their labour markets to CEE workers in 2004, whereas all other old member states except Sweden imposed transitional restrictions; and both experienced a substantial wave of immigration. Migrants are often employed as agency workers under far inferior conditions to those of native-born workers, posing a threat to established standards; and in both countries, unionisation rates are rather low. As a result of such challenges, many unions have moved towards an ‘organising culture’, particularly aimed at young, migrant and precarious workers. British trade unions stand out for their explicit embrace of the organising concept; in 1998 the TUC opened its Organising Academy, consciously imitating American practice. In the British case it is important to differentiate between ethnic minority workers, most of whom are UK-born or settled residents and have long had representative mechanisms in most unions, and migrant workers, some of whom are from ethnic minorities (and often undocumented) but many of whom are from other EU countries, particularly Poland, in many cases sent by foreign agencies. Some unions have used language training as a recruitment mechanism, and several have appointed officials fluent in the languages of migrant workers, although this can be very resource-intensive.

In the Nordic countries, it is common for unions to provide information to young people in schools and colleges and to recruit student members at nominal subscriptions or without charge. Nordic trade unions have been particularly active in responding to the risk of wage dumping by migrants from the new member states, particularly in the construction sector: in the absence of statutory minimum wage mechanisms, the Laval and Viking judgments of the ECJ threatened union capacity to maintain an acceptable wage floor, as we discuss further below. In Norway, for example, *Fellesforbundet* (which covers construction) has since 2006 undertaken systematic work to disseminate information in their own languages to workers from Poland and the Baltic states, providing language courses and achieving some success in recruitment.

Union efforts face the familiar dilemma that groups of workers with the greatest need for collective representation and solidarity are often hardest to organise. In part this reflects the vicious circle, in countries where unions must win representative status workplace by workplace, that potential members will only join a union if it shows its effectiveness by gaining recognition and negotiating improvements; hence membership remains low and the employer can refuse bargaining rights. The most cost-effective measure is thus ‘in-fill’ recruitment, directed at non-members where unions are already recognised.

Comparing the diverse range of national experience, we can see that there have been many successful responses to membership decline; many similarities but also contrasts emerge. One striking contrast is the unionisation of women in Germany and the Netherlands. In the former, the gender gap has remained unchanged over the past two decades: men are still twice as likely as women to be union members. Over the same period, Dutch unions have almost halved the gender gap. Two decades ago, German women were twice as likely to be unionised as their Dutch counterparts; now their union density is lower. This contrast may also in part reflect (though it may also have contributed to) the declining coverage of collective bargaining in Germany as against the high and stable coverage in the Dutch labour market.

Even precarious workers have on occasion undertaken successful collective action of a traditional kind. Probably the most notable was by contract cleaners on the Dutch railways and at Schiphol airport: the longest sector-wide strike since the 1930s. This won improved pay and conditions for the workers, most of them immigrants, organised by *FNV Bondgenoten*. This struggle, and a similar campaign for a living wage for cleaners in London, profited from coalitions between trade unions and community and religious groups. Similar successful strikes have been undertaken by mainly young, ethnic minority workers in Parisian fast-food outlets, organised by the CGT in particular. What is clear from these cases, however, is that success depends on long and careful preparation in order to build collective identity and collective confidence, and not all unions have the resources or commitment to make such an investment.

Approaches to organisation have taken distinctive forms in CEE. Following the collapse of the former regime, the previous 'official' unions needed to redefine their role in the new economic system and reform their organisational structures and internal decision-making mechanisms. Similarly, new unions established in opposition to the old system had to re-focus their activities, shifting from the pursuit of political goals to representation of employee interests. But the transition towards more inclusive and democratic labour movements proved to be a daunting task, given rapidly depleting human and financial resources. Between 1990 and 2008, unions lost two-thirds of their members, more than double of the loss experienced over the same period by their west European counterparts (Kahancová 2012). The reasons were threefold. First, in the course of the transition, most state-owned companies – traditional union strongholds – were closed or downsized; by contrast, greenfield sites and new small and medium enterprises were virtually union-free. Second, at least in the initial years following the system change, there was considerable public distrust of trade unions. 'Reformed' organisations were still identified with the old regime, whereas officials from the newly created unions were often viewed as co-managers of the painful restructuring process. Third, the structure of employment has changed, with new, non-unionised groups of workers (young graduates, white-collar employees and atypical workers) entering the labour market. All these processes made the issues of organising and internal democracy even more pertinent, confronting unions with a double task. Not only did they have to strengthen their membership

base, which required the development of innovative organising strategies, especially in relation to non-traditional groups of workers, but it was also necessary to ensure that the interests of the newly recruited members are adequately represented within the organisations.

The extent of membership and representation problems varied across the three CEE country groupings. In Slovenia, given relatively high density and extensive collective bargaining coverage, recruitment of new members did not seem a priority. As in most of the Central group of western countries, unions relied instead on their institutional position within the political and economic system, using workplace negotiations and social partnership deals not so much to cater to the interests of non-traditional workers or to attract them to the unions, but rather to limit the extent of atypical employment. At the same time, they tried to make sure that wages and working conditions of precarious workers were in line with labour legislation and collective agreements. This strategy has been pursued in sectors with a relatively high share of atypical employment, such as retail (Mrozowicki *et al.* 2013), but also at the national level, where unions actively mobilised against the ‘mini-jobs’ scheme. The latter initiative proved successful and resulted in the rejection of the proposal in a referendum, but unions have failed to translate their campaign into membership gains. As a result, union density in Slovenia has been slowly but steadily falling.

By contrast, the Baltic unions were well aware of the need to broaden their membership base, but the acute lack of resources prevented them from launching large-scale organising campaigns. As a consequence, density rates have been among the lowest in the EU (see Table 1). During the recent crisis, unions in all three countries tried to protect jobs and working conditions of precarious workers and undertook some organising efforts in cooperation with their Nordic counterparts (see section 6), but could not reverse the falling unionisation trend. In the late 2000s, Estonia’s biggest confederation EAKL lost 30% of its members (Osila and Masso 2013), while membership in Latvia’s LBAS shrank by 29% (Karnite 2013).

No major organising drives have so far taken place in Bulgaria and Romania, either. In the pre-crisis period, three out of five Romanian confederations undertook some attempts to bring vulnerable workers from the shadow economy back to legal employment, whether the latter was based on an atypical or standard employment contract (Varga 2011). In 2011 Bulgaria’s biggest trade union confederation, KNSB/CITUB, launched an innovative training programme *Моето първо работно място (My first workplace)*, aimed at future labour market entrants. In co-operation with the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES), the union provided a 10-hour course on labour legislation, social security and trade union rights to the country’s 68,000 final-year secondary school students. The training scheme was a part of a larger campaign designed to raise the awareness of social and labour rights among the Bulgarian population. During the campaign, 100,000 citizens signed a petition demanding more worker-friendly labour legislation, which was subsequently submitted to the Parliament.

Unions in the Visegrád countries had a weaker institutional position than in Slovenia, but possessed more resources than in the Baltic states and South-East Europe. This both required and enabled them to adopt a more proactive approach, with (at least partial) openness to a broader set of societal interests. Slovak counterparts tried to improve working conditions of atypical workers through litigation and mass media campaigns (Kahancová and Martišková 2011). Polish trade unions, in turn, have been particularly active in relation to membership recruitment. Applying US experience, *Solidarność* launched a major organising drive targeting security guards; it also recorded membership gains in the automotive industry and the retail sector, in the wake of a successful campaign for shop closures during public holidays. Polish unions were also remarkably successful in highlighting the problem of precarious employment, strongly criticising the increasing use of service-provision contracts, which were favoured by many employers over standard employment contracts. The label 'junk contracts' to signify the former, coined by a small radical union *Inicjatywa Pracownicza*, was picked up by mainstream organisations and entered public discourse (Mrozowicki and Maciejewska 2013). Even though the Polish unions seem, all in all, increasingly aware of the need to attract new members, but it is still too early to speak of a systematic turn to organising. By the same token, although unions have succeeded in capturing societal frustrations related to growing labour market flexibility, it remains to be seen whether the concerns of new categories of employees and other societal groups, such as women and the youth, will be integrated into their long-term agenda. In this respect, the reactions of Polish society to the September 2013 union rally against poor working conditions and growing labour market precarity were symptomatic: although 50% of the Poles supported the protest, more than a half were not sure if the organisers really sought to represent workers' interests (Wybieralski 2013).

Union democracy

Most trade unions insist, with reason, that they are democratic organisations. However, there is great diversity in the formal decision-making structures in unions, both within and between countries. The relative powers of national officers, executive committees and conferences, the degree to which middle-range officials are elected from below or appointed from above and the balance of authority between confederations and their affiliated unions all vary. Cross-national differences reflect diverse understandings of the meaning of union democracy, but also relatively contingent decisions made a century or more ago (for example, unions subject to state repression often adopted highly centralised, almost military methods). Unions in some countries (such as Germany) have a high ratio of paid officials to members, others depend heavily on 'lay' activists (as in Britain and France); such differences have evident implications for the internal distribution of power. In most unions, organisational structures exist at workplace level, but patterns of authority between such structures and the national, regional or local union are complex and shifting; an added complexity in many countries is the relationship between workplace union representation and works councils.

Though the mechanics of its implementation differ widely across (and to a lesser extent, within) countries, all trade union movements tend to embrace a two-way conception of democratic policy-making. In one direction, members at the grassroots level meet to discuss policy questions, not least in respect of collective bargaining, elect their own local officers and also choose representatives to participate in higher-level structures (district, regional and ultimately national). There is also a general principle that top officials are either directly elected or else are chosen by a representative conference or congress. In some countries, there is a strong tradition of election of lower-level paid officials as well. In the other direction, the democratic credentials of top leaders and executive committees give them the authority to prescribe a policy framework for the lower levels of the union.

A major innovation in many countries is the use of membership surveys (sometimes extended to non-members as well) in order to establish their main concerns and opinions on union policy initiatives. In Sweden, LO has published very detailed surveys every few years since 1988. *IG Metall* in Germany undertook a wide-ranging survey in 2001 involving interviews, written and online questionnaires and focus groups. More recently FIOM-CGIL, the main Italian metalworking union, organised a survey of 100,000 workers in the industry. The Danish public sector union FOA has commissioned membership surveys since 1998. HK, the Danish retail and commercial union, has also undertaken surveys since 2007: 'we ask them what we can do better, to see how we can transform satisfied members into loyal members'. The Dutch FNV has commissioned panel surveys of members and non-members, while the French CFDT, in its plans for organisational reform in 2010, also agreed to conduct occasional large-scale national surveys.

It is common for unions to ballot their members before calling strike action (in Britain, indeed, this has been legally required for the past three decades). In some countries, in addition, the practice has developed of holding membership ballots before approving collective agreements, particularly if the contents are contentious. Baccaro (2001) has described how bitter intra-union disputes over the 1992 agreement abolishing the *scala mobile* led the confederations to hold a binding referendum over the tripartite pact the following year, a mechanism which allowed union leaders to insist on the democratic legitimacy of the outcome. Similarly in the Netherlands, ballots have been held over peak-level agreements since 2003, and also before ratification of some sectoral agreements.

Surveys and ballots can be seen as a complement to the institutionalised mechanisms of union democracy, involving decisions by elected executives and conferences; but could also be viewed as a means of bypassing these. In the case of ballots on collective agreements, opponents often argue that the leadership monopolises the presentation of the costs and benefits while the critics have no access to the official publicity mechanisms.

This links to a further theme: the use of new mechanisms of communication to inform members and explain union aims and policies to the wider public. In

Britain, the TUC has launched *workSMART*, a web-based service for workers in the 'new economy', providing advice and information on employment rights and some limited services as well as acting as a gateway to union membership. This includes special 'channels' covering health, pensions and job-searching.

Computerisation and internet technologies have brought a virtual revolution in trade union communications, though the degree of impact varies cross-nationally. 'Communication power is at the heart of the structure and dynamics of society' (Castells 2009: 3), and today communication power is increasingly electronic. After a late start in many countries, including the UK, the use of such technologies has extended dramatically. A decade ago, Freeman (2005: 182) noted that 'unions may have adapted less rapidly than firms to the Internet, but even so unions are innovating and experimenting at unparalleled rates'. Today the scale of qualitative improvement is as striking as quantitative increase: union web sites are now generally user-friendly, even though differing in professionalism (which is indeed resource-intensive). For example, LO in Denmark publishes a weekly electronic magazine, *A4*, which is one of the most cited sources on labour market and welfare issues in the country.

Almost universally, workers can now join a union online. Many union websites now have Facebook and Twitter links, and some general secretaries provide their own blogs. Web-TV is an increasingly common medium for spreading campaigning messages, used by all three Italian confederations for example. In some countries, unions are happy to collaborate with other online activists. The intranet has become a key resource for communication among officials and with workplace representatives, at least in Northern Europe. Unison in Britain is an example of a union that has launched 'virtual branches' to link members without a fixed workplace. As Greene and Kirton have suggested (2003), electronic technologies allow members to adapt union activity to their own time constraints, and also provide 'safe spaces' for those, such as women, who find traditional union meetings an uncomfortable environment.

In the main, union web sites are under firm leadership control, at least in their public domains. 'One reason is that unions have shied away from developing interactive websites that might encourage members or others to be critical of union leadership and policies' (Freeman 2005: 165). Nevertheless, there has been some movement in this direction in most countries, particularly as local branches or workplace organisations open their own websites (now a topic of trade union education and training, for example in Austria). Many unions also use their websites for online surveys or online signature-gathering. The latter mechanism was used by Polish *Solidarność* as part of its 2012 campaign against proposals to raise the retirement age to 67, during which 1 million Poles signed the union's petition to hold a referendum on this issue. In some countries, organised opposition groups have developed their own web presence.

Are new forms of electronic communication a threat to traditional mechanisms of union democracy, or can they enhance these? This is a vital issue which few unions have as yet systematically addressed.

3. Mergers and restructuring

In all European countries, most (though usually not all) trade unions of any significance are affiliated to peak confederations. Only Austria, Britain, Ireland and Latvia have just one central body. Austria is exceptional in that – following post-war reconstruction and more recent mergers – there exist only seven trade unions, all affiliated to the ÖGB. In Ireland, very few unions, all small, are outside the ICTU. In Britain, the TUC contains only a minority of registered unions but almost 90% of total membership; the only substantial unions outside its ranks are specialist bodies in the health service. Though post-war German trade unionism was remodelled along similar lines to its Austrian counterpart, the DGB has always faced rivals, and today accounts for 80% of total union membership in Germany.

Elsewhere there is greater diversity. In the Nordic countries, there are separate confederations for manual, routine white-collar and professional employees. In Sweden, the combined membership of the two non-manual confederations now exceeds that of LO; and in Finland, SAK is in the same position. By contrast LO in Denmark, whose affiliates have been more willing to cross the (increasingly blurred) occupational boundaries, remains far more dominant; the pattern in Norway is similar. In Greece, the main organisational division is between GSEE in the private sector and ADEDY in the public, though internally both confederations have complex and fragmented structures.

In other countries, the primary basis of division is ideological. To qualify this point, competing confederations derive from *past* ideological identities which may have lost much of their force over time. This is most obvious in the Netherlands, where the socialist and catholic movements merged over three decades ago. In Belgium too, old ideological conflicts have become muted. Switzerland has two rival confederations, derived from socialist and christian ideological traditions, though the distinction in part overlaps with the manual/white-collar division. In Italy the clear political differences which more than half a century ago split the CGIL into today's three main confederations have also become diluted, and a joint platform is often possible, though tensions frequently arise. There is also competition from numerous smaller organisations, some associated with right-wing political currents, others protagonists of militant sectionalism, particularly in the public sector. The pattern in Spain is similar, though in Portugal the division between the two main confederations remains sharper. The most complex picture is however in France: the five confederations traditionally regarded as 'representative' face competition from a number of more recent rivals, including the radical

leftist SUD. Unified action, whether in collective bargaining with employers or in political mobilisation, is rarely achieved and is usually fragile. Whether new rules on representativeness will simply the picture of extreme fragmentation despite very low membership is as yet uncertain.

What do confederations do? Their relationships with their affiliates can vary along a wide continuum. At one extreme, individual unions are autonomous and merely delegate to the confederation certain functions which they feel cannot be undertaken separately, or at least only at greater cost, such as political lobbying and public campaigning. The British TUC is an obvious example: it was created by unions that were already well-established but saw advantages in possessing a common voice. It is they who decide what resources to assign to the confederation and what authority to allow it. In Germany, though the DGB was in its early years more powerful, a similar relationship now exists. Here, debates about the future role and structure of the confederation have shown clear tensions between larger affiliates, which would prefer to provide the bulk of services 'in-house', and smaller unions which lack the resources to do so. In both countries, it requires astute manoeuvring by confederal leaders to assert their authority and demonstrate to affiliates the value of their activities (as, for example, in the efforts of the TUC to coordinate the turn by British unions to the 'organising model'). The situation in Ireland is similar, though two decades of centralised social pacts enhanced the authority of the ICTU.

At the other extreme, unions may be subsidiaries of the central confederation, to which they pay their subscriptions and which then distributes resources to its individual (usually sectoral) affiliates. While unions in many countries once approximated to this model, in general there has been a gradual loss of central authority. An example is Austria: in theory, 'member unions are not independent associations, but sub-units of the ÖGB itself, which therefore exercises control over their finances, officials and negotiating function' (Blaschke 2005: 68). In practice, they possess far greater autonomy; but the confederation still has a significant say in collective bargaining strategies, as well as deriving considerable authority from its central role in 'social partnership'. LO confederations in the Nordic countries once had stronger control over affiliates than today, when collective bargaining is more decentralised.

The countries with ideologically divided movements have traditionally had strong confederal authority. This was particularly true of communist trade unionism, where the ideal of class unity (as well as party control) allowed little space for internal diversity; today, however, it is possible to describe the internal politics of the French CGT as 'more or less organised anarchy' (Piotet 2009) while its rival CFDT has much stronger central authority. It is interesting that in Italy, while the (former communist) CGIL was a 'general confederation of labour' with industrial sections, its main rival CISL defined itself as a 'confederation of unions' – implying that its affiliates were more autonomous; here too, the old distinction has lost relevance. In most Southern countries, it is normal for confederations to determine the subscription levels and the proportion of income to be allocated to the sectoral organisations, though in some cases the latter may choose to set additional fees to supplement

their own funds. An important question, which links closely to the degree of autonomy in collective bargaining, is the payment of strike benefits. For example, in the Netherlands the FNV defines overall collective bargaining targets and provides the bulk of funding for strikes by its affiliates if their demands are within the specified limits; otherwise they have to use their own resources. In the Nordic countries, similar provisions apply.

In CEE countries, the old division between reformed ‘official’ organisations and their counterparts created in opposition to the former system still holds strong. Also, in many countries plant-level union activists do not want to grant additional competences and resources to their colleagues at the sectoral and confederal levels, which precludes union centralisation.

In Slovenia, trade unionism was initially divided between the ‘successor’ ZSSS and the ‘new’ KNSS, created in 1990. Though ZSSS remained dominant, it could not prevent the emergence of rival organisations, in particular the powerful alliance of public sector unions KSJS, founded in 2006 which has counterbalanced the export-oriented manufacturing agenda of ZSSS. Currently, seven confederations have representative status in the Economic and Social Council.

The Visegrád countries offer a very heterogeneous picture. In the Czech Republic and Slovakia, ČMKOS and KOZ SR, the successors of the reformed Czechoslovak Confederation of Trade Unions (ČSKOS), are the strongest confederations. Their challengers, such as the Christian democratic NKOS in Slovakia or ASO – a breakaway from ČMKOS covering agricultural workers, railways and medical doctors – have significantly lower membership. Polish trade unionism, by contrast, was long marked by sharp political conflicts and turf wars between NSZZ *Solidarność* – the challenger to the former regime – and the reformed OPZZ (Gardawski *et al.* 2012). The division has become less pronounced in recent years, with unions from both confederations cooperating at workplace level and in national protest actions. In 2002, a third large confederation emerged, *Forum ZZ*, consisting of breakaways from OPZZ and formerly independent unions that favoured direct mobilisation over political involvement. Recent years have also brought a growing popularity of radical movements; though their membership remains low, they have nevertheless influenced the strategy of mainstream unions, forcing them to take a more resolute stance on social issues (Mrozowicki and Maciejewska 2013). In Hungary the split between former ‘official’ unions and those emerging from the democratic opposition has also been very pronounced. Inter-union competition and conflicting political allegiances have precluded strategic cooperation among ‘old’ and ‘new’ confederations, discouraging each from joining protests called by their ‘rivals’.

The structure of the Baltic trade unions is diverse. In Latvia, LBAS is the only national confederation, and all significant unions are affiliated. Estonian unions are divided along occupational lines between EAKL, which covers mainly manual workers, and TALO, which is mainly white-collar. There are three Lithuanian confederations, based on ideological differences, though

they now largely cooperate. In Bulgaria, the division between ‘old’ KNSB and ‘new’ *Podkrepa* is still present, but the two confederations usually take similar positions and initiate joint protest actions. Romania has a more fragmented structure, with five umbrella organisations reflecting different ideological roots but usually able to cooperate.

In all countries, the shift in the weight of union membership towards the public sector has been a source of tensions. Concerns with competitiveness shape bargaining policy in export-oriented industries, whereas the economic constraints in the public sector are very different. Today, when governments in all countries are imposing restrictions – often severe – on public expenditure, such conflicts assume new forms. Confederations face a challenging task in sustaining a common trade union front despite divisive pressures.

As well as comprising usually sectorally-based affiliates or component unions, most confederations also have geographical substructures. These may be rudimentary, as in Britain: the TUC has eight regional councils, mainly responsible for campaigning and for organising education and training for union representatives. In Germany the DGB – which receives 12% of its affiliates’ subscription income – has a far more elaborate structure of local and regional offices, though pressure by some unions for a substantial reduction in the number of officials resulted in economies in 2010. Confederations with greater central authority can in principle devote more resources to territorial organisation. The constitution of the CGT in France is fairly typical: members pay subscriptions to the local union for their sector; this retains a third for its own activities and transmits the remainder to the confederation nationally, which distributes resources to the sectoral and territorial organisations in accordance with principles adopted by the national congress. As noted above, redistributing resources to strengthen the local cross-sectoral structures has often been proposed as a response to the less stable employment patterns of a growing proportion of the workforce. However, this usually encounters strong resistance from the sectoral federations, which would lose resources. For example, in Belgium (where the sectoral unions are known rather confusingly as ‘centrals’), tensions around such issues have absorbed ‘much energy and time’ to little effect (Faniel 2012: 23).

Mergers and amalgamations: unity is strength?

Almost universally, the number of trade unions has been reduced over the past decades through processes of amalgamation, take-over or ‘transfer of engagements’; we refer to all these processes as mergers. In most cases this has involved the amalgamation of small unions or the absorption of a smaller by a larger partner, thus making little impact on the overall structural pattern; but some mergers have created conglomerate or ‘mega-unions’, with profound implications.

The process has been particularly notable in the UK, where the number of unions has fallen by three-quarters in the past half-century; two organisations

now account for 40% of total union membership, and almost half the membership of the TUC. In Ireland too there has been a merger wave, less radical than in the UK. The most notable amalgamation was in 1990 between two large general unions to form SIPTU, which now accounts for a third of total union membership in the country.

Of the Central countries, the trend to conglomerate unions has been most marked in Germany and the Netherlands. The DGB had 17 affiliates in the 1970s but now only eight. The most substantial change was the formation of *ver.di* in 2001, straddling a range of public and private services, together with transport. Its membership is roughly equal to that of *IG Metall*, which has itself absorbed the textile and woodworking unions. Together they account for 70% of DGB membership. In the Netherlands a wide-ranging public services union, *AbvaKabo*, has existed since the creation of FNV three decades ago. A more protracted process of consolidation in the private sector culminated in 1997 with the merger of the two multi-sector unions in manufacturing and private services, together with several others, to form *Bondgenoten*. With *AbvaKabo* it represents 60% of FNV membership. In Austria there has also been considerable concentration: from 16 ÖGB affiliates until the late 1970s to seven today. A series of amalgamations culminated in the creation of *Pro-Ge* in 2009, covering virtually the whole of manufacturing. In private services and transport, another conglomerate (*vida*) was formed in 2006. The three largest unions now contain 60% of ÖGB membership. In Belgium, the number of unions in both main confederations has roughly halved over the past four decades. In both Swiss confederations there has been a process of consolidation; within the larger, the SGB/USS, *Unia* includes more than half the total membership.

The Nordic countries have seen numerous mergers in their manual and white-collar confederations. In Sweden and Denmark, for the most part these have involved rather small unions. It is also notable that the professional confederations have been virtually untouched by the merger process. Concentration has been greater in Norway, where *Fellesforbundet* is a merger of seven separate unions, and there have been some parallels in Finland, though two important planned mergers have not been accomplished.

In the Southern countries there has been a gradual, less radical process of consolidation. In France, the most notable change has been within the CFDT, which has reduced its number of federations by half to 15, sometimes against internal resistance. Its two main rivals still have roughly double the number of sectoral organisations. Mergers have been more general in Italy: all three main confederations had around 30 sectoral federations in 1970 and have reduced the numbers by approximately half. In Spain, the number of member unions of CCOO has halved in the last two decades, falling more modestly in UGT. In Portugal and Greece there has been far less progress in simplifying the complex internal fragmentation of the main confederations.

Since the mid-2000s there has been little evidence of merger activity in the CEE countries. Recently, however, it seems that the opposition to crisis-related austerity measures has acted as a unifying factor. Poland witnessed its

three major union confederations united in protests against excessive labour market flexibility and anti-crisis policy measures. Both in Lithuania and Romania, national confederations pledged to coordinate their strategies and protest actions against their governments' austerity programmes. In May 2013 Hungary's three 'old' confederations – MSzOSz, ASzSz and SzEF- announced their unification plans, and the merger process is currently under way. These examples send a positive signal and raise new hopes for closer coordination of employee voices in the region in the future.

Why merge? There is a broad consensus that 'the merger process in recent years has been essentially defensive and was primarily driven by adverse environmental circumstances' (Waddington 2005: 375). Often, membership decline and the associated loss of income caused budget deficits and put continued viability at risk. Traditional recruitment boundaries have been eroded. For example, technological change can break down the divide between manual and white-collar occupations in manufacturing; privatisation undermines the separation between public and private services; the growth of new activities such as logistics bridges previously distinct sectors. This may cause conflicts between previously distinct unions, with merger a solution. Or unions which are still numerically and financially viable may merge in order to secure a long-term recruitment base.

How far have amalgamations improved the position of the unions involved? In the business world there are examples of successful mergers and acquisitions, but also many failures. Among trade unions the same seems to be true. In some cases there is an unquestionable logic to integrating unions which compete for overlapping groups of workers and negotiate with the same employers; but most recent union mergers have involved far more heterogeneous constituencies. Over time, any union develops its own distinctive 'culture': shared beliefs, ways of working, relationships between different levels of the organisation. Integrating different union cultures is a problem not always anticipated; officials and activists may cling to their pre-merger identities and modes of action.

Recent surveys have reached rather sombre conclusions. At times, membership has stabilised, but often decline has continued as before. Financially, mergers offer the scope for economies of scale; but agreement to amalgamate usually requires guarantees of job security to existing staff. Hence initially there have often been high costs in providing generous early retirement or voluntary severance schemes. Aligning very different organisational structures is often difficult; so, for example, in the case of *ver.di* the 'matrix' structure of cross-cutting sectoral, geographical and functional divisions was a compromise between conflicting organisational logics, and proved costly and inefficient to operate. More generally, within merged unions organisational conservatism tends to predominate over innovation: it is easier to focus on the traditional (often dwindling) core membership than to pursue recruitment among expanding but more difficult groups of workers. Thus 'the merger process has the potential to contribute to union revitalisation, but very few examples have been unearthed where this potential has been realised' (Waddington 2005: 387).

Moreover, big is not necessarily beautiful. Rightly or wrongly, members may see the new ‘super-unions’ as remote, or may perceive their distinctive interests as no longer adequately represented. In the UK, Unison lost some of its manual membership (who now found themselves in the same union as their managers) to the general unions; conversely, *ver.di* in Germany has lost out to small, specialist associations. In this respect, it is significant that the mainly small professional unions in Scandinavia, as noted above, have shown little appetite for amalgamation, believing that a distinct occupational identity is a powerful resource.

A final issue raised by large-scale mergers is the impact on the role of confederations. As noted above, small unions often rely on their peak organisation to provide services (advice to members, education and training, information on political and legislative developments) which they cannot economically offer on their own resources. Large unions, conversely, may prefer to cover such activities on their own behalf and under their own control, and accordingly to reduce their contributions to the confederation. The rise of mega-unions shifts the balance in this respect.

Much more generally, the continuing trend to fewer unions with straitened financial resources will intensify pressures to streamline confederal organisations and functions. ‘The merger process has thus made a significant contribution to the opening of debates on the future of confederations [but] there is no convergence in the strategic options that are either being debated or implemented’ (Waddington 2005: 387).

4. Collective bargaining in hard times

Despite diminished union power resources, collective bargaining in most countries remains institutionally robust. As we have seen, regulation by collective agreements before the crisis was comprehensive, except in the Anglophone and CEE countries where only a minority of the workforce was covered; elsewhere (with the exception of Germany), the rate was at least 80%. Quantity is not however the same as quality; and an increasing dilemma for unions is whether to accept a dilution of the content of agreements, and perhaps also a reduction in their scope, as the price of sustaining a bargaining relationship. Another, related, is a shift in the key locus of bargaining from the sectoral (or cross-sectoral) level, where unions benefit from economies of scale in the negotiating process and the outcomes are more transparent, to company level. This makes it necessary to possess competent negotiators in each bargaining unit, and it is far harder to ensure that prescribed standards are maintained. Indeed, bargaining at company or workplace level has always been part of the industrial relations landscape; but normally this has supplemented the terms of multi-employer agreements. In many countries, a hierarchical relationship was formally prescribed: lower-level agreements could not undercut those at higher levels. But decentralisation has weakened the regulatory compass of multi-employer agreements (for example, determining only minimum pay rates, not increases for those paid above the minimum); and many countries have seen moves to allow company-level derogation from the terms of multi-employer agreements.

Two decades ago, Traxler (1995) argued that the trend towards company bargaining across Western Europe did not necessarily mean the disintegration of multi-employer systems. Only in Britain had sectoral bargaining been displaced by company or workplace negotiations (or, far more commonly, no collective bargaining at all); here, multi-employer agreements have now almost disappeared in the private sector. In most other countries, single- and multi-employer negotiations coexisted. Typically, there was a process of ‘organised decentralisation’, with sectoral agreements devolving the application of specific agenda items to local negotiations.

Since then, decentralisation has continued in Western Europe, with negotiations at company or workplace level acquiring increased importance; in some countries the shift in the locus of bargaining is no longer ‘organised’. A further trend has been the individualisation of conditions *within* companies through performance-related and ‘merit’ pay systems. This has posed particular challenges for trade unions, given traditional assumptions that

solidarity requires standardised conditions and rewards across the workforce as a whole.

In the Nordic countries, most sectoral agreements no longer prescribe actual pay increases but set broad parameters for decentralised bargaining. This often encompasses individualised performance-related pay, so indeed these might be described as ‘three-tier’ systems. In contrast to most other countries, individual and collective bargaining are closely intertwined, since unions negotiate the procedures for performance evaluation, advise individual members and submit appeals against unfavourable outcomes. In general, unions endorse such three-tier systems; in particular, professional unions see this as a means of achieving enhanced rewards for highly qualified employees (thus partially reversing the egalitarian outcomes formerly achieved by blue-collar unions). However, if unions are to retain effective oversight of the process, ‘the organisational resources at local level are crucial’ (Stokke 2008: 19). There are signs of growing unevenness in workplace organisation, making it more difficult to control the wage determination process.

Decentralisation creates serious problems where unions have lower membership density and less integrated relationships between national and workplace structures. Germany is an obvious example: as the price of achieving a reduction in the working week in 1984, *IG Metall* agreed that its detailed application should be determined at company level, setting in train a sustained process of devolution. After German unification in 1990, and the economic crisis in the east which soon followed, unions accepted the introduction of ‘hardship’ and ‘opening’ clauses in sectoral agreements, allowing firms in economic difficulties to undercut agreed conditions. A radical extension of such flexibility was adopted in the metal industry through the 2004 Pforzheim agreement, in the face of threatened legal changes to the institutions of collective bargaining. There has also been a trend towards pay individualisation. Some observers suggest that decentralisation may enable employers to reduce standards, but also offers unions an opportunity to mobilise in support of their own demands. Where works councils are effective, they can be ‘successful veto-players’ if employers press unacceptable demands (Behrens 2009: 108). However, this presupposes a capacity to sustain and extend organisational power resources at the workplace in a coordinated fashion. Other observers are pessimistic: unions face the threat by MNCs to choose the exit option if unionised workforces *do* act as ‘veto-players’; and a growing low-wage sector with a precarious workforce, weak unionisation and often without either collective bargaining coverage or works councils.

In Austria the architecture of centralised bargaining remains more robust than in Germany. An employer may negotiate a company agreement with the works council, but this may not undercut conditions agreed at sectoral level, and sectoral agreements very rarely contain opening clauses. However, as in other countries there has been a reduction in the effective impact of higher-level agreements, with low basic wage increases at sectoral level and scope for bonuses negotiated – or applied unilaterally by management – at company level. Sectoral agreements now often allow an uneven distribution

of increases at company level; in some cases this option is used to implement 'merit' pay, in others to benefit lower-paid groups. With the company level increasingly important in determining real pay increases, unions face obvious difficulties in sustaining central coordination. In the Netherlands, opening or hardship clauses have become common, though their impact seems less than in Germany. In the Dutch case, a two-year wage freeze contained in a tripartite agreement in 2003 also boosted company arrangements for performance-related pay; while in Belgium, a peak-level agreement in 2007 encouraged collective bonus schemes.

The rapid growth of enterprise collective bargaining has been one of the most notable features of French industrial relations. In 2010 there were over 33,000 company agreements, an increase from around 1,000 in 1980. For many observers this growth has been a reflection of union weakness and a façade for 'managerial unilateralism' (Goyer and Hancké 2004: 176). Until the recent changes to the rules on representativeness, the fact that a minority union could sign a valid collective agreement opened the possibility for 'sweetheart' deals that favoured the employer. There has also been a rapid spread of performance-related pay, though for manual workers this normally relates to collective rather than individual performance. Can French unions achieve a stronger influence in workplace negotiations? Union workplace representation possesses breadth rather than depth, with diminishing numbers of activists struggling to cope with the demands of increasingly decentralised industrial relations which require technical skills which most lack. There is evidence of similar problems in Spain and Portugal.

In Italy, by contrast, there is a long tradition of two-tier (or three-tier) bargaining. In the late 1960s there was an explosion of workplace bargaining, closely linked as both cause and effect to the 'hot autumn' of 1969; for several years, decentralised bargaining was often a vehicle for offensive workplace struggles. The balance of power shifted with economic adversity in the late 1970s, leading to some traumatic defeats – notably at Fiat in 1980 – but because of the institutional power resources derived from the 1970 *Statuto*, a common outcome was negotiated change. Decentralisation created space for more participative involvement of rank-and-file members, but also made overall coordination of bargaining policy more difficult, sometimes entailing 'an employer-led process of disorganised decentralisation' (Molina Romo 2005: 12). Recent attempts to reconfigure the relationship between levels have been driven, as in other countries, by the managerial pursuit of flexibility – reinforced by the deregulation drive of the Berlusconi governments – and have proved contentious. Sustained employer pressure to weaken sectoral agreements was blocked by resistance from the unions, in particular CGIL; but in 2009, CISL and UIL broke ranks to sign an agreement with *Confindustria*. Two years later CGIL, in the face of internal opposition, also signed a modified tripartite pact, which enabled company agreements to undercut sectoral standards if signed by unions representing the majority of the workforce. The new arrangements also imposed a peace obligation on signatories of company agreements.

As noted above, change in the UK was far more radical, with most multi-employer bargaining – at least in the private sector – ending two or three decades ago. As in other countries, there has been a rapid growth in individualised pay systems, extending to nearly half of all private-sector workplaces by 2004. Disorganised decentralisation, together with the systematic removal of institutional supports for collective representation, has made the overriding priority for private-sector unions the achievement and retention of bargaining relationships with individual employers. After a period of strategic disorientation, the dominant union response – spearheaded by the TUC in the 1990s – was to persuade employers that unions were willing to act as ‘partners’ in enhancing company performance. The record of partnership has been intensely debated, with advocates insisting that a shift from adversarialism to constructive engagement was a means of winning the support not only of employers but also of employees, while critics argued that partnership involved an essentially subaltern role which obstructed the creation of independent, activist-based organisation. Formal partnership agreements actually proved relatively rare, with a few dozen signed in the course of a decade. Much more extensively, though, union recognition appeared to involve a tacit acceptance of a constrained trade union function. Workplace unions often focused more on individual representation than on collective bargaining; and unions’ role on collective issues was commonly reduced from negotiation to consultation. There was also a growing focus on ‘soft’ bargaining issues, where employer opposition was less likely.

Ireland is a curious anomaly. For more than two decades, peak-level partnership agreements set the framework of industrial relations. However, while all other countries with cross-sectoral bargaining also have robust institutions at sectoral level, in Ireland (as in Britain) these largely disintegrated in the 1980s, partly because of the influx of foreign companies. Union attempts to achieve some peak-level support for their bargaining role at company level proved unsuccessful, resulting in a complete lack of articulation between centralised partnership and company industrial relations; here the Irish unions face the same difficulties as their British counterparts.

In CEE, while bargaining institutions and mechanisms are formally in place, their actual impact is generally much more limited than in the West. Government policies in response to the crisis have put additional pressure on the region’s weak bargaining structures.

Slovenia stands out as the only country with strong social partner organisations and robust multi-employer bargaining. In the public sector, both cross-sectoral and sectoral collective agreements exist, whereas in the private sector, after the abolition of the cross-sectoral agreement in 2005, negotiations are pursued predominantly at sectoral level and often supplemented by company-level deals. Overall, more than 90% of Slovenia’s workforce is covered by collective agreements. In other CEE countries, collective bargaining is less established and takes place mainly at company level. Fragmented unions represent only a fraction of the working population and are thus unable to set the bargaining agenda. Most employers, on the other hand, do not wish

to be bound by sectoral agreements, do not join employers' associations and refuse to engage in any form of dialogue above the company level. Some cross-country variation can nevertheless be observed. Bargaining coverage is higher in the Visegrád countries than in the Baltic states (see Table 1), and sectoral agreements are more frequent in Slovakia and Romania than in other countries. The Baltic states display the lowest coverage rates in the EU, with agreements concluded almost exclusively in the public sector and within large state-owned enterprises. Low incidence of bargaining translates into low levels of trust in bargaining institutions: as shown by a survey in Estonia in 2012, only 20% of employees believe in beneficial effects of collective wage setting (Osila and Masso, 2013).

The lack of institutional 'voice' in CEE has gone hand in hand with relatively low frequency of strikes and other public manifestations of discontent. This is not to say that the region has not seen major labour protests. In Poland, mass demonstrations of the early 1980s gave rise to the *Solidarność* movement, while in Slovenia the general strike in the early 1990s cemented trade unions' position within the country's socioeconomic system (Meszmann 2012). Beyond these spectacular cases, however, unions have generally been more quiescent than in the West, or than Latin American labour movements in the course of their countries' transition from autocracy. The low incidence of protests in new member states is often attributed to cultural factors, such as apathy allegedly inherited from the socialist system, as well as economic variables, in particular the hardship and insecurity experienced by workers during the transition. In addition to this standard catalogue, Greskovits (1998) pointed to alternative, individual-level forms of expressing discontent that became quite widespread in the region, such as protest voting, electoral abstention or 'escape' to the informal economy. Following EU entry, there appeared yet another strategic opportunity: 'exit' in the form of emigration, which constituted 'a case of workers voting with their feet' (Meardi 2012) against poor employment prospects and adverse working conditions in their home countries. Latvia, Slovakia and Poland have seen large shares of their working populations migrating to the West. The resulting labour shortages in certain occupations boosted employee assertiveness and translated into a growing incidence of standard forms of mobilisation. However, the onset of the economic crisis changed the situation once again.

Responses to economic crisis and austerity: the limits of radicalism

Though all Europe was affected by the global economic crisis, the impact varied considerably across countries. Ireland – with its own US-style housing bubble and deregulated financial sector – was the first victim; the cost of rescuing failed banks more than doubled government debt between 2008 and 2010. In consequence, the government obtained a bail-out in 2010 from the Troika, at the price of a drastic austerity package which has prolonged the recession and caused increasingly high levels of unemployment. In Western Europe, countries in the Southern and Anglophone groups fared worst, while

Sweden and the countries of the Central group recovered fastest. Germany, whose government lectures others on the need to reduce government debt, had one of the highest debt ratios at the outset of the crisis. Drastic austerity programmes have been far from universal, imposed by the Troika or by the ideological decisions of national governments (as in the UK). Since austerity is self-defeating, cross-national differences between winners and losers are likely to intensify.

Unions with depleted resources were not well placed to respond to the crisis. There is evidence both of radical or conflictual responses, and of a reinforcement of cooperation and partnership. Often the two types of response have been paradoxically interconnected. Radical actions, whether national general strikes – most notably in Greece and Spain – or company-level conflicts, have often been defensive in objectives. Conversely, efforts to seek consensual solutions through social dialogue have confronted an intensified opposition of class interests (who will pay for the crisis?) and diminished space for positive-sum outcomes.

‘There can be no return to business as usual’: this was the unanimous trade union response to the crisis. Yet was the aim to negotiate with those wielding political and economic power for a tighter regulatory architecture for financialised capitalism, or to lead an oppositional movement for an alternative socio-economic order? Two familiar and intersecting contradictions of union action were evident. One was the dilemma of short-term imperatives versus long-term objectives. One Belgian union leader commented: ‘it is easy to say: we need to change the balance of forces. But that does not tell us how to proceed Our members expect us to look after their immediate interests.’ An Italian leader made a rather similar point. ‘Right now it is difficult to discuss strategy, insofar as we are bound to react to situations of crisis.... As the first priority we have demanded an end to dismissals, then the application of every means of income maintenance, after which we can develop general analyses of industrial reconversion’ (Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2013: 124-5).

The second contradiction is between a global economic crisis and trade union action that is essentially national or indeed sub-national in character. The international trade union organisations produced powerful analyses and progressive demands, but their impact on day-to-day trade union practice was almost non-existent. Indeed the dominant response was to defend and enhance competitiveness, meaning a struggle of country against country, workplace against workplace, intensifying the downwards pressure on wages and conditions.

The crisis provoked a variety of conflictual responses at workplace level, including a spate of sit-ins against job cuts and plant closures, reminiscent of the struggles of the 1970s. France in 2009 saw a number of episodes of ‘boss-napping’, when senior managers were held hostage by workers; in three cases, workers threatened to blow up their factories with gas cylinders. The most publicised British dispute against job losses began in 2009 at the Lindsey oil refinery in Lincolnshire, owned by the French multinational *Total*. The

company subcontracted a construction project to an Italian firm employing only foreign labour – displacing existing workers – on terms inferior to those specified in the British collective agreement for the sector (see also section 6). An unofficial strike quickly escalated, with sympathy action across the country. Yet radical forms of action do not imply similar radicalism of objectives. In most cases, such workplace struggles seemed gestures of defiance and despair, with little belief that they would prevent announced closures or job losses. Rather, the aim was commonly to limit the number of dismissals or to achieve improved redundancy packages. For this reason, such disputes were usually relatively easy to resolve.

In a survey of initial responses to the crisis, Glassner and Galgóczi (2009) found widespread agreements on ‘partial unemployment’ or short-time working, often buttressed by partial pay compensation from public funds as well as by company negotiations to enhance compensation above statutory levels. In Germany, though more systematic job-saving measures were pursued, in many companies (often with at least tacit union approval) the protection of the core workforce was at the expense of temporary workers; the same occurred in Austria. In Denmark, badly affected by the crisis, numerous company agreements provided for work-sharing. The Dutch government subsidised short-time working and temporary lay-offs for firms in difficulties; while in Belgium, a substantial recovery package included funding for ‘technical unemployment’ and special provisions for short-time working and temporary lay-offs. In France too, the government funded a programme of ‘partial unemployment’ (*chômage partiel*); nevertheless temporary workers bore the brunt of the crisis. In Italy, a long established system of lay-off pay (*cassa integrazione guadagni*) was widely used to cushion job losses. One possible counter-example is Sweden, where work-sharing and temporary lay-offs have not traditionally been adopted; in consequence there was a sharp decline in employment, particularly of temporary and agency workers, and unemployment among young workers remains very high (Table 2), (though *long-term* youth unemployment is lower). Another demand pursued successfully in some countries, primarily at company level, was for temporary periods of slack demand to be used for vocational (re)training rather than resorting to lay-offs. Again, this was facilitated in some countries by state subsidies.

One outcome of the crisis has been a widespread reinforcement of wage moderation, with employers in some cases pressing for downwards renegotiation of existing pay agreements. This was particularly notable in France: in 2009, over 80% of workers were subject to nominal pay freezes, and in some cases reductions; much more generally, pay increases were below the rate of inflation. Negotiations over restructuring and job reductions, with the aim of agreeing some form of ‘social plan’, were common across most countries.

Even in parallel with symbolic protest action, unions in most countries endeavoured to manage the crisis through peak-level social dialogue: what Urban (2012) has called ‘crisis corporatism’. In some countries, however,

there were no serious efforts to obtain tripartite agreement on responses to the crisis; in others, such efforts failed, or provoked serious divisions among the parties involved. Even in countries with a tradition of national pacts, the crisis thus made peak-level dialogue very difficult. Since government action underlay national responses to the crisis, macro-dialogue was inevitably tripartite rather than bipartite. The outcome typically involved ad hoc, narrowly focused agreements – if any (see section 5 for details).

However, on broader issues of pay policy and restructuring of pensions and other social benefits the process of peak-level bargaining became fraught, with a breakdown of negotiations in some countries and in others serious inter-union divisions. Initially, Belgium seemed more stable; but after almost two years without a government, a new administration took office at the end of 2011 and initiated a major austerity programme, including cuts in social benefits and a two-year increase in the age for early retirement. All three confederations participated in a public sector strike in December 2011 and a general strike in January 2012. In the Netherlands, despite fundamental differences there was agreement on a crisis package in May 2009; this involved wage moderation in exchange for some measures to tackle unemployment. Government proposals to increase the retirement age were strenuously opposed by the FNV, and unions and employers were given six months to negotiate an alternative pensions plan. Shortly before the deadline the employers broke off talks and FNV organised a series of mass protests and strike actions. In the face of government obduracy, in June 2011 an agreement was signed by the FNV president and subsequently endorsed by a majority of the executive. However the two largest affiliates, with the majority of the membership, were strongly opposed and the result was to tear the FNV apart.

In France, internal divisions among the unions weakened their capacity to influence government responses to the crisis. Since the onset they mobilised a series of national strikes and demonstrations to call for more effective job-saving initiatives and to oppose a range of austerity measures; in many cases all the main unions participated, but often with evident differences of perspective. Proposals to raise the retirement age and to end the statutory 35-hour working week provoked several such actions in 2008; one of the largest national days of action for many years took place in early 2009, demanding measures to save jobs and increase minimum pay; there were national strikes against changes to pensions in autumn 2010; and another mass protest against austerity at the end of 2011. However, some unions were more anxious to seek negotiated solutions, and the change of government in 2012 seemed to create a more favourable climate for social dialogue.

In Italy, the initiatives of the Berlusconi government split the unions. Most previous social pacts – typically negotiated under centre-left or ‘technocratic’ governments – provoked internal opposition within CGIL in particular. In January 2009, in a break with precedent, a pact was implemented which was signed by CISL and UIL but not CGIL; this revised the collective bargaining system, devolving more responsibilities to the company level, extended the

duration of sectoral wage agreements to three years, and included a new (more limited) inflation index as a guideline for pay negotiations. A year later, CGIL called another general strike. In practice, however, the three confederations maintained a united front in most sectoral negotiations – though not, most notably, in metal-working; here, CISL and UIL alone signed an agreement, in line with the new bargaining rules. A more moderate position was signalled at the CGIL congress in May 2010, and all three confederations agreed a list of common objectives in response to the economic crisis. Then in June 2011 they agreed new rules on bargaining and representativeness, amending the 2009 agreement along lines more palatable to CGIL. The three unions also presented a common front against the liberalisation of labour law pushed by the new ‘technocratic’ Monti government in the spring of 2012, though this unity was strained at a number of points.

In Ireland, the government crisis package resulted in breakdown, particularly over its imposition of a ‘pension levy’ which involved in effect a cut in public sector pay. The ICTU attempted to maintain a united front, issuing in February 2009 a ten-point plan designed to meet the interests of both public and private sector workers. This was followed by a ‘day of protest’ – the biggest mass demonstration in Ireland for 30 years; a general strike was threatened but was called off pending further talks. In late 2009 a new phase of confrontation began, and the partnership agreement was suspended. However, in June 2010 the conflict in the public sector was temporarily resolved through the Croke Park Agreement, in which the government agreed not to impose compulsory redundancies or further pay cuts, while the unions agreed to abandon strike action and to cooperate in public sector reforms. In February 2011 a new government was elected, with Labour as a junior partner; it partially improved the industrial relations climate by restoring the minimum wage to its previous level. The government also suggested re-establishing a more modest version of partnership under the label ‘social dialogue’.

In the absence of peak-level dialogue in Britain, responses to the crisis have been particularly tense. The right-wing government elected in May 2010 made debt reduction a political mantra. Britain’s debt ratio was actually lower than in Germany, whose government preached austerity for others but did not practise it at home. In consequence, UK debt actually increased after two years of austerity while that in Germany fell. The government programme involved some half million public sector job cuts, a pay freeze and major reductions in public sector pensions, as well as massive inroads into welfare spending. However, unions have had to tread carefully when contesting the government, even in defending underpaid workers. TUC leaders were well aware of the risks, particularly given experience in Ireland. On the basis of a large-scale opinion survey they launched an extended campaign of argument and protest, under the titles *All Together for Public Services* and *A Future that Works*. A massive national day of action was organised in March 2011, and another in October 2012. Some affiliates, such as the civil service union PCS and the general union Unite, favoured a far more militant response, and a number of one-day public sector strikes took place.

The economic crisis hit new member states particularly hard. Even though Poland was the only EU country that managed to avoid recession (mainly because of its manufacturing links to Germany and relatively stable domestic demand), predictions of 'stormy times' in the region proved largely accurate. After more than a decade of spectacular growth, CEE states were among the first victims of the crisis, and three, Latvia, Hungary and Romania, needed to sign stand-by agreements with the IMF in order to stabilise their finances. Recently, Slovenia has moved under the radar of the EU and international financial institutions in view of its ailing banking sector and gloomy growth prognoses.

The downturn and the subsequent anti-crisis policies pursued by CEE governments had a considerable impact on collective bargaining outcomes and, more generally, on wage levels and working conditions. In an effort to reduce their budget deficits, Latvia, Romania, Hungary and the Czech Republic adopted drastic austerity measures in the public sector, including salary cuts and the elimination of supplementary payments. Crisis-ridden CEE countries have also witnessed a substantial fall in real wage levels: between 2007 and 2009, they shrunk by over 15% in Latvia and by 5 to 10% in Estonia, Hungary and Lithuania (Müller and Bernaciak, 2013). In the most affected countries, collective bargaining institutions and practices came under direct attack. In Estonia, for instance, the number of collective agreements fell nearly by half, whereas Slovenia recorded over five times more instances of collective agreement breaches than in the pre-crisis period. By contrast, in states that experienced merely a temporary decline in exports the incidence of plant and sectoral bargaining increased, as unions and management debated short-term working schemes and restructuring measures. There are indications, however, that many of these deals have cemented pre-crisis patterns of labour market segmentation, protecting the core company workforce at the cost of temporary and agency workers (see e.g. Myant, 2013; Kahancová and Martišková, 2011).

During the crisis some CEE governments took the opportunity to transform the institutions and procedures of collective bargaining. In Hungary and Romania, which remained under IMF surveillance, such adjustments went particularly far, weakening the position of trade unions and increasing the decentralisation of collective bargaining. In Romania, the Social Dialogue Act introduced in 2011 abolished the national agreement for the private sector, reorganised sectoral bargaining structures and raised representativeness criteria. The changes have brought the bargaining process to a virtual standstill, causing a fall in coverage from 70% to an estimated 20% (Visser, 2013). In Hungary, the new Labour Code that came into force in January 2013 restricted strike rights, limited protection for trade union activists and allowed collective agreements to deviate from the labour law. The anxiety accompanying the crisis also provided fertile ground for increased decentralisation in other CEE countries. Estonia, for instance, restricted the continuity of collective agreements after the expiry date, while Slovakia tightened its extension criteria.

With the crisis, conflicts over salary increases became less common. Nevertheless, unions in companies relatively unaffected by the downturn resorted to strike threats during wage negotiations. In Latvia, Slovenia and

Romania, anti-austerity protests brought down the governments, but did not translate into increased trade union popularity. In the Baltic states, rallies were staged by various social and occupational groups, such as students, police officers and drinks producers. Even though they rarely took the form of mass events, their incidence signified widespread societal dissatisfaction with the countries' tough austerity course.

Innovative collective bargaining strategies

Though the collective bargaining environment in all countries has placed unions on the defensive, there are also signs of innovative responses. We do not attempt to survey countries systematically, but provide some illustrative examples.

In a number of countries – notably Germany – unions have long played a role in initial vocational training, but influence on continuing career development has been less common. This has been a subject of contention for *IG Metall*, which achieved its first collective agreement on continuous vocational training in 2001. In Belgium, biennial inter-sectoral agreements have since 1986 included provisions for funding vocational training, while in Denmark such frameworks are negotiated at sectoral level. Elsewhere, any union bargaining role is usually more decentralised. One much discussed example is the workplace learning agenda in the UK, which received financial and institutional support from the 1997 Labour government and was coordinated by the TUC. Enthusiasts argued that Union Learning Representatives were able to develop both an advisory and a bargaining role, thereby strengthening workplace union organisation; others are more sceptical, suggesting that there is little evidence that unions have succeeded in collectivising the learning agenda.

'Humanisation' of work was often a key trade union demand in the 1970s, resulting in significant improvements in the quality of work. But a shift in the balance of power from the 1980s, and a growing priority for job-saving over job quality, resulted in a reversal of many of the gains. Work intensity has increased; a growing proportion of workers (almost half) perform monotonous work; exposure to most physical hazards has increased, as have feelings of insecurity – all factors which help explain the rise in work-related stress.

A decade ago, a comparative study (Llorens and Ortiz de Villacian 2001) found that stress had been addressed in collective bargaining in six west European countries. The most significant was Belgium, where an intersectoral agreement was negotiated in 1999. Stress obtained a more general profile when in 2004 the ETUC and the European employers' organisations signed an 'autonomous framework agreement on work-related stress'. Though the outcome has been uneven, unions in all countries have since given increased attention to the problem. Both largest British unions have issued guidance to workplace representatives and have supported legal action against employers. In Denmark, FOA reached a comprehensive anti-stress agreement with the

local government employers in 2005, resulting in a wide-ranging five-year campaign. In Germany, *IG Metall* developed its own anti-stress campaign, including a support pack for workplace representatives and a draft legislative proposal, in the context of the broader *Gute Arbeit* (good work) initiative which it launched in 2002. Since 2007 the DGB has organised a large-scale annual survey on the same theme, while *ver.di* has pressed for a collective agreement on stress in the health care sector. More recently, TCO in Sweden has published a large-scale 'stress barometer'. In France, where a peak-level agreement on stress was signed in 2008, the issue has assumed key importance for unions following a spate of work-related suicides, particularly at *France Télécom Orange*. By raising the problem of stress and wider work quality issues on the bargaining agenda, unions in many countries have endeavoured to find new ways of mobilising worker awareness that their personal job-related issues have broader collective relevance and that trade unionism can be part of the solution.

The concept of 'good work' also links closely to growing trade union attention to 'work-life balance' and 'family-friendly' work arrangements. In Sweden, work-life balance has been addressed in many collective agreements. In Belgium, this has been an element in intersectoral and sectoral agreements for the past decade. In Germany, *ver.di* launched a campaign in 2003 with the slogan *Nimm dir die Zeit* (take your time), in part as a reaction against company-level employer demands for increased working time, including at unsocial hours. Its interventions have included both sectoral bargaining demands and guidance to workplace negotiators. GPA in Austria has also made work-life balance a major bargaining issue, and has achieved some success in collective agreements. In both countries, unions have responded to employer demands for working time flexibility by insisting that this should provide workers with greater time sovereignty, and that there should be collective oversight of individual work schedules. In the UK, where working hours have traditionally been among the longest in Europe, this has also been a major concern for trade unions. Overall, Keune (2006b: 16, 23-7) has found that across Europe 'there is no unified trade union point of view on working time flexibility'; and in terms of outcomes, 'there has been a steady increase in employer-oriented types of working time flexibility', while 'trade unions have difficulties achieving their objectives through collective bargaining under the present economic and political circumstances'.

With the advance of mass manufacturing industry ('Fordism') in the 20th century, the focus of trade union strategy in most countries was to achieve the greatest possible standardisation of conditions, in order prevent employers from discriminating between workers. This neglected the extent to which workers' preferences might be differentiated, in part because of the diversity of their individual circumstances. One means of adapting to such diversity is the pursuit of more flexible forms of regulation, particularly in respect of the organisation of working time. A pioneer in this process has been the Netherlands, where in 1993 a peak-level policy document, *Een nieuwe koers* (a new course), recommended more flexible agreements, particularly in respect of performance-related pay. This was followed by the growth of 'à la carte' or

‘cafeteria’ collective agreements, allowing for instance a choice between increased pay or reduced working time. For example, since 2002 collective agreements in the metal industry have offered a menu of higher pay, extra days off, career breaks or early retirement. There have been similar developments in Denmark, with collective agreements providing ‘free-choice accounts’ which can be used for extra holidays, as pension savings or taken as increased pay.

Innovations in collective bargaining strategy are often designed to foster capacity-building at workplace level. An example is the campaign entitled *Besser statt billiger* (better rather than cheaper), launched by *IG Metall* in 2004, against the background of widespread employer demands for cost-cutting reductions on employment levels and adverse changes in work arrangements. In association with the campaign for ‘good work’ discussed above, the union aimed to move beyond a defensive and reactive response by developing alternative proposals for product innovation and new production methods, formulating arguments and analyses which could help mobilise members behind their workplace negotiators. Many of the new bargaining demands have been informed by surveys of workplace representatives or workers more generally. Often such approaches could be described as ‘militant engagement’ (Bacon and Blyton 2004), with unions acting as ‘constructive veto players’ (Urban 2005).

In hard times, innovative bargaining approaches are increasingly necessary. Yet given the immensity of short-term challenges, they may often assume a low priority. Indeed, effective responses to crisis require responses both above and below collective bargaining: rebuilding effective organisation and mobilisation capacity in the workplace, as we discussed earlier; and developing an effective political challenge to neoliberalism, as we discuss below. Otherwise, collective bargaining in the crisis can easily degenerate into a ‘beggar-your-neighbour’ form of concession bargaining.

5. New approaches to political engagement

Unions are inescapably both economic and political actors, yet the relationship between the two roles is complex and contradictory, and the priority assigned to each varies across countries and over time. In many European countries, trade unionism was an offshoot of an emergent working-class movement in which political radicalism shaped union identity and action. Unions were ‘schools of war’, as Engels put it: their task was to challenge capitalism, not to seek modest reforms within it. Where more moderate, social- or christian-democratic trade unionism prevailed, the focus was still on societal change, alongside the more prosaic functions of collective bargaining. Ideologies inherited from the formative period of trade unions have proved persistent, shaping identities that do not easily change. This has been most evident in the re-orientation of (former) communist unions in Southern Europe: the increased priority assigned to collective bargaining has often provoked substantial resistance from ‘traditionalists’ (who have accused the leadership of betraying the principles on which their unions were founded).

Power resources clearly shape trade union politics. In order to give priority to collective bargaining, at least if their membership is in the private sector, unions typically require relatively high membership density (associational power) and the financial resources to sustain prolonged disputes where necessary. If such resources are modest, mobilisation on the streets may be easier than sustained strike action – which is a component of bargaining power, even if not its only source. As an extreme example, the fragmented French trade unions with minimal density in the private sector have virtually lost the capacity to organise strikes there. Clearly there can be a self-sustaining elective affinity between trade unions’ ideological orientations and their organisational capacities.

Political identities have a material basis. In part this reflects opportunity structures. In most countries, early trade unions were subject to systematic repression, and the state was inevitably a target for collective action. Only when the legal status of union activity was secured could ‘free collective bargaining’ become a priority. And where employers remained resolutely opposed to union recognition, unions in turn still saw pressure on the state as an effective option to resolve their grievances. Conversely, ‘business unionism’ can be considered an outcome of distinctive opportunity structures. In countries (including most of those in Western Europe) where the state was from the outset an overt protagonist in the shaping of a market economy, the political dimension of labour market intervention was self-evident. Conversely, where

the emergence of capitalism was less dependent on active state initiative, and where the political system made alternative forms of regulation difficult to achieve, unions might conclude that there was no practicable option but to play the market as it currently existed.

In Europe as a whole, the economic crisis made the state a key interlocutor, even in countries in which trade unions traditionally drew a line between ‘economic’ and ‘political’ action. Financial assistance to struggling employers, special subsidies to sustain income in cases of short-time working and extensions to active labour market policies – all common trade union demands – necessarily required engagement in the political arena. Conversely, government attempts to tackle unprecedented budget deficits through attacks on public sector jobs, pay and pensions, and more general assaults on the welfare state, have involved even reluctant unions in sharp political conflicts.

Trade unions and political parties

Historically, unions in most of Europe emerged with a close and often subordinate relationship to political parties, whether social-democratic, communist or christian-democratic; but over time, the links have generally been weakened, or abandoned altogether (though formal separation may still permit close informal interlinkages). Below we explore some of these changes.

Three key developments have affected all European countries though to differing degrees. The first is cultural and ideological. Secularisation has undermined the identities of formerly christian-democratic unionism: the only significant exceptions are the Belgian ACV/CSC, the much smaller Dutch CNV, and *Travail Suisse*; a parallel process has turned most christian-democratic parties – even if their titles are unchanged – into conventional centre-right political actors, while others have dwindled into insignificance. An analogous process occurred in countries with mass communist parties and satellite trade unions. The CEE countries are clearly a special case, which we discuss below; in the Southern group, where communist parties once dominated the left, there has been a drastic decline (Greece is a partial exception). Social democracy has proved electorally more robust, but in most countries is far weaker than a few decades ago, as is clear from Table 3. Indeed in a post-Keynesian world, there is no clear consensus on what social democracy stands for.

The second key development is structural. Traditionally, both trade unions and left-oriented parties found their core support among manual workers in cohesive industrial communities. The decline of old industries, the growth in white-collar and professional occupations and, more generally, rising educational levels have posed challenges for both unions and parties. Many observers see structural and ideological shifts as mutually reinforcing, causing the erosion of membership support for any political project, let alone a specifically socialist one. Social-democratic parties for their part have tended to take their dwindling working-class base for granted while targeting the ‘median voter’, resulting in a policy convergence with their opponents to the right.

Table 3 'Left' seats in most recent national^a and European^b elections

Country	Year	Seats available		Social Democrats ^c		Other Left ^c		Greens ^c	
DK	2011	179	(13)	44	(3)	28 ^d	(1)	4	(1)
FI	2011	200	(13)	42	(2)	14	(1)	10	(1)
NO	2013	169		55		7		1	
SE	2010	349	(20)	112	(6)	19	(1)	25	(4)
AT	2013	183	(18)	53	(5)			24	(3)
BE	2014	150	(21)	36	(4)	2		12	(2)
CH	2011	200		46				15	
DE	2013	631	(96)	193	(27)	64	(7)	63	(12)
NL	2012	150	(26)	38	(3)	15	(2)	6	(2)
ES	2011	350	(54)	110	(14)	14	(11)	1	(4)
FR	2012	577	(74)	280	(13)	14	(4)	18	(6)
GR	2012	300	(21)	41	(4)	71	(8)		
IT	2013	617	(73)	292 ^e	(31)	48 ^f	(3)	f	
PT	2011	226	(21)	73	(8)	8	(4)		
IE	2011	166	(11)	37	(1)	20 ^g	(4)		
UK	2010	650	(73)	258	(20)	11 ^h	(2) ^h	1 ⁱ	(3) ¹
SI	2014	90	(8)	6	(1)	6			(1)
CZ	2013	200	(21)	50	(4)	23	(3)		
HU	2014	199	(21)	33	(4)			9	(2)
PL	2011	460	(51)	27	(5)				
SK	2012	150	(13)	83	(4)				
EE	2011	101	(6)	19	(1)				(1)
LT	2012	140	(11)	38	(2)				(1)
LV	2011	100	(8)	31	(1)			13	(1)
BG	2013	240	(17)	84	(4)				
RO	2012	412	(32)	158	(16)				

^a National elections: lower house only. Source: Election Resources on the Internet, <http://www.electionresources.org/> and Elections Monitor, <http://www.robert-schuman.eu/en/the-european-elections-monitor/2014/>

^b 2014 European Parliament election (in parentheses). Source: Results of the 2014 European Elections, <http://www.results-elections2014.eu/en/election-results-2014.html>

^c All these categories are inevitably somewhat arbitrary: for example, neither the Italian PD nor the British Labour Party labels itself as social-democratic; the boundaries of 'other left' parties are imprecise; the Green/EFA group in the European Parliament includes representatives of regionalist parties which are neither environmentalists nor left-oriented, and other parties which we have categorised as 'left' in national elections. In the case of Portugal, the Partido Social Democrata is actually a centre-right party, while the Partido Socialista is social-democratic and is listed accordingly in the Table.

^d The Red-Green Alliance (Enhedslisten) won 12 seats, here listed as 'Other Left'.

^e Italian election law provides additional seats to ensure a majority in the lower house for the largest party bloc; the PD-led bloc actually gained only 29.5% of the popular vote.

^f The Green-Left alliance (Sinistra ecologia e libertà) is here classed as 'Other Left'.

^g Including the Irish nationalist Sinn Féin, which is on the left in terms of labour policies and sits with the Left group in the EP; it won 14 seats in the national elections and 3 European seats.

^h Including the Welsh nationalist Plaid Cymru; we have categorised this party as 'Other Left', though it sits with the Greens in the EP; and Sinn Féin, which won 5 seats in Northern Ireland in the national elections and 1 European seat.

¹ We have not included the Scottish National Party, which sits with the Greens in the EP.

The third key change is the advance of neoliberalism. The pursuit of international competitiveness, efforts to contain public finances, loss of faith in Keynesianism and conversion to 'lean government' have become as much the hallmarks of centre-left as of right-wing governments. Neoliberal restructuring places inevitable pressures on the party-union nexus: electoral expediency, or simply the limited room for manoeuvre in the management of national economies within global economic disorder, places social-democratic parties on a collision course with union movements whose own commitments include the defence of workers' incomes and the social achievements of past decades. Little is left of a social-democratic 'project' to inspire either parties or unions and to bind them together.

In the Nordic countries there was for many years a particularly close institutional linkage between social democracy and the dominant manual trade union confederations. In Sweden, the relationship came under strain in the 1970s, as the party increasingly adopted economic policies that clashed with LO interests. In part, this distancing reflected party efforts to attract non-manual voters affiliated to the expanding minority union confederations. LO ended its collective membership of the SAP in 1987, though local union branches can still affiliate, and the confederation still nominates a member to the party's executive. In Denmark there was historically a similarly intimate relationship between LO and the *Socialdemokraterne*, with each organisation represented on the other's executive committee; but surveys in the 1990s showed that these links were unpopular amongst the membership. As in Sweden, LO agreed to sever the ties, in 2003, although many individual unions remain affiliated. In Norway the collective union affiliation to the *Arbeiderparti* was also abolished, but despite the weakening of formal ties, LO maintains a close relationship with the party. In Finland, partly because of the relative weakness of social democracy and strength of communism compared to other Nordic countries, there have never been the same formal links, though social democrats predominate in the leadership of SAK.

In the Central group there is a long tradition of both social- and christian-democratic trade unionism. In both Germany and Austria, the post-war reconstruction of trade unionism transcended former ideological divisions. In the German case, this involved formal party-political neutrality: most union leaders are social democrats, but by convention a minority of seats on executive bodies has been reserved for christian democrats, who have their own organised fraction. In Austria, political pluralism within the ÖGB connects to a semi-official structure of fractions, represented in leadership positions in relation to membership support (as reflected by votes for their separate lists in works council elections). In a country with an exceptional tradition of institutionalised 'social partnership', top union leaders are commonly also members of parliament and hold seats on the executive committees of their parties. However, many have seen the degree of union-party intimacy as excessive: disenchantment with the establishment politics of social partnership contributed to the electoral rise of the far right, and in 2008 the executives of both SPÖ and ÖGB agreed that it should no longer be possible to hold leadership posts in both. Dutch trade unionism in the first post-

war decades was dominated by three ideologically-oriented organisations, socialist, catholic and protestant. The first two confederations amalgamated in 1981 to establish the FNV, which required greater distance from the PvdA (Labour Party), though it still received the support of the majority of FNV members and officials. In recent years, FNV appears to have moved towards a more assertive and independent political stance, perhaps aiming to connect with widespread popular disaffection with the political elite. In Switzerland, the formerly socialist SGB/USS now declares its independence of political parties; so does *Travail Suisse*, formerly linked to christian democracy.

Belgium is the one country in the Central group in which trade unionism remains firmly divided between ideological ‘pillars’, though political-party links are complex, partly because of the intersecting division between the French- and Dutch-speaking communities with separate party structures. The largest confederation, the ACV/CSC, is associated with political christian democracy but has long observed the principle that officials should not be elected to parliament, and its leaders have developed some distance from the formerly allied parties. The ABVV/FGTB is linked to the socialist party, regionally divided since 1978, with union leaders holding a consultative role on both party executives. The third, much smaller confederation was traditionally linked to the Liberal Party; but in the 1960s the latter adopted an anti-union programme, and the union asserted its autonomy from political parties.

Industrial relations in France have always been highly politicised; despite the high formal coverage of collective bargaining (largely because of state extension of agreements) its real impact is far less than that of statutory determination, and the legislative route is typically the line of least resistance in regulating labour issues. France, like Italy, was marked for the first post-war decades by the dominance on the left of a communist party closely linked to the majority trade union; the fragmented trade union movement – for much of the post-war era dominated by the CGT – never shared a social-democratic identity, though both the CFDT and FO could be described as broadly socialist. With the electoral eclipse of the communist party, the CGT gave increasing emphasis to collective bargaining and in 2003 cut its links with the party, declaring that ‘debate with democratic political parties precludes support for or joint elaboration of any kind of political project’. Ironically, this was a return to the principle of party-political neutrality adopted by the original CGT a century earlier, and sustained by FO from its formation in 1948. The CFDT was close to the left of the PS in the 1970s, but re-oriented its position away from political attachments. Conversely, SUD has informal links to the anti-capitalist parties which have performed strongly in recent elections. Yet the distancing of the main unions from political parties coexists with a role in which the state remains a major focus of action.

The changing political environment of Italian trade unionism contrasts markedly in significant respects. Communist electoral support remained well above that for the (divided) socialists, reaching a third of the popular vote in 1976, until the PCI was dissolved after the fall of the Berlin Wall. Its post-communist inheritors constituted the only significant party of the left – apart

from *Rifondazione* and its successors, linked to a powerful minority fraction within CGIL. By contrast CISL, founded in 1948, reflected the tradition of catholic trade unionism, though it professed political neutrality. The third main union, UIL, was a mainly social-democratic breakaway from CGIL. Despite the shift of all three confederations to formal autonomy from political parties – and a far more effective turn to collective bargaining than in France – informal links have remained close and the political arena remained a common priority.

Both Spain and Portugal emerged from dictatorship in the 1970s with strong communist parties linked to the largest union confederations in each country, confronting rivals with a social-democratic orientation. In both cases the decline in communist electoral support has weakened trade union political identities, and common opposition to neoliberal government policies has brought a rapprochement between the main confederations, particularly in Spain. Greek trade unionism has a distinctive character: formed in 1918 through an alliance of socialists and non-socialist parties, GSEE re-emerged after the dictatorship as an encompassing confederation with internal political factions, of which the social-democratic tendency linked to PASOK comprises roughly half the membership. Both countries have since the crisis seen the rise on new leftist parties – *Syriza* in Greece, *Podemos* in Spain – with a somewhat uneasy relationship to the trade unions.

In Britain, where – exceptionally – most main unions (though not the TUC itself) retain a collective affiliation to the Labour Party, strains intensified with the re-branding of the party as ‘New’ Labour in the 1990s. Party leaders viewed the formal links with the unions as an electoral handicap and attempted both to reduce their financial dependence (unsuccessfully, because of the collapse in individual party membership) and to demonstrate their readiness to adopt policies which provoked union opposition. The role of trade unions in party decision-making and in the selection of parliamentary candidates was substantially reduced; while the enthusiasm of the ‘New’ Labour government elected in 1997 for privatisation and public sector budgetary constraints provoked conflict with most trade unions. In Ireland, politics remains shaped by the struggle for independence in the early 20th century: nationalism has overridden class politics. Labour is thus a minority party, though occasionally (as at present) it has been junior partner in coalition governments. Some unions, notably the largest – SIPTU – are affiliated to the party but with less influence than their British counterparts. In practice, most Irish unions seek to work with whatever government is in office, hence the two decades of social partnership agreements.

The picture in CEE is evidently distinctive. Under the previous regime, unions did not act as autonomous organisations but were dominated by communist parties. By and large, their role was to discipline workers at state-owned enterprises and familiarise them with party decisions and policy plans; they also performed certain social functions. Hence, in contrast to west European countries, there was no tradition of mutual interdependence and beneficial exchanges between unions and political parties. After the system

collapsed, links between political groupings and organised labour emerged, but involving much less mutual loyalty than in the West (Avdagić 2004). Political parties, which in most CEE countries were stronger than their union partners, would default on their promises and pursue policies that went against workers' interests. They would also include union leaders in party structures and decision-making processes, which not only hindered unions' mobilising capacity but also stirred considerable controversy among rank-and-file members, especially when the policies that followed involved painful restructuring measures. All in all, rather than boosting the employee position, party-union links forged in the transition period have weakened labour.

Examples abound. In Poland, *Solidarność* activists assumed important positions in the early centre-right governments and created their own party before the 1997 elections, while OPZZ sided with the social democrats. However, this did not prevent the 'shock therapy' policy measures. In the mid-2000s, Hungary's reformed unions were excluded from discussions on major liberalisation reforms despite their formal alliance with the socialist party. Even if labour-friendly regulations were enacted, there was no guarantee that they would be preserved. Slovak labour laws, for instance, would reflect union preferences whenever left-wing parties were in power, just to be reversed by centre-right cabinets. On the other hand, the Slovenian example shows that party-union links can be effective if power resources of the two actors are roughly equal. Unions in the former Yugoslav republic constituted sizeable interest groups with large pools of voters, thus could not easily be ignored by politicians. As a result, they co-shaped policy-making through tripartite agreements and social pacts.

Political exchange and social partnership in crisis

Many West European countries have traditions of 'social dialogue' or 'social partnership' at macro level. In Austria, the Netherlands and Belgium, formal institutions of peak-level tripartite concertation date back to the years of postwar reconstruction; in the Nordic countries, bipartite peak-level dialogue seemed firmly established (though in Sweden it broke down); a series of pacts was agreed in Spain after the restoration of democracy; while in Germany it was long accepted that changes in social and labour market policy should be based on consensus among the 'social partners'. Italy and Ireland have more adversarial traditions, but peak-level social pacts were agreed in more recent decades. The dynamics of such macro-bargaining altered with changed economic conditions. In the early post-war decades, 'political exchange' (Pizzorno 1978) could be regarded as a positive-sum game: unions possessed the power resources to achieve inflationary wage increases, but (in those countries where they also possessed strong central authority) endorsed explicit or implicit wage restraint in return for enhanced social welfare and the promise of a share in future growth.

The social pacts of the 1980s and 1990s, by contrast, were responses to twin crises: the erosion of national competitiveness, and the effort to reduce public

deficits in line with the restrictive convergence criteria for EU economic and monetary union (EMU). In return for their assent, union signatories sought job creation strategies (or much more modestly, limitations on job loss). Under harder economic conditions, and with trade union power resources diminished, political exchange became a process of 'competitive corporatism' (Rhodes 2001), with unions seeking 'least-worst' outcomes rather than positive gains. Even on this defensive agenda, their bargaining power was limited unless governments themselves were contingently weak. Even more than at company level, concession bargaining at the level of the state created tensions and dilemmas for trade unions.

Both conventional collective bargaining and peak-level dialogue faced a particularly harsh climate after financial and economic crisis hit Europe in 2008. Economic and political difficulties can make bipartite agreements (union-employer) and tripartite deals (also involving government) more difficult though perhaps more necessary. While traditional mechanisms of peak-level dialogue in many countries moderated the labour market impact of the crisis, where governments subsequently pursued severe austerity programmes, unions have usually seen little option but to resist, often leading to the breakdown of tripartite relationships.

In CEE, the record of social dialogue has been much less impressive than in the West; even so, its role should not be completely dismissed. Tripartite negotiations in the newly democratised CEE countries ensured social peace by involving union and business representatives (at least to some extent) in policy discussions. In effect, it made it possible to establish 'a new capitalist order with a minimum of social unrest' (Iankova and Turner 2004: 85). In the initial years, unions managed to bring important social issues to government attention. In Poland, for instance, negotiations after the 1992 strike wave led to the Pact on State Enterprise in Transformation that addressed social aspects of the privatisation process. In 1991, the Bulgarian social partners and the state signed the Political Agreement for Peaceful Transition towards Democracy; in addition, they participated in drafting the country's laws on collective bargaining and dispute settlement. In the second decade of transformation, tripartite negotiations rarely resulted in formal social pacts. As Gardawski and Meardi (2010) claim, however, even such failed 'pacting' attempts gave social partners an opportunity to exchange views and fostered social learning.

The recent crisis brought an increase in tripartite activity. In Slovakia, the government set up a special negotiating body, the Economic Crisis Council, to discuss future policy directions; while in Slovenia austerity measures in the public sector were debated with the social partners within the Economic and Social Council and announced in the form of tripartite agreements. In Poland and Bulgaria, unions and employers' associations initiated bipartite talks and subsequently presented a joint list of policy proposals. This growing incidence of tripartite talks led some observers to proclaim 'the revival of social dialogue' in the region (Czarzasty 2009): in the majority of CEE countries, it was indeed the first time when governments and social partners thoroughly discussed issues not related to the systemic transition (Hyman 2010). Despite

the promising start, however, cabinets often ignored hard-won tripartite compromises. In the Baltic states, early agreements on a progressive approach to wage cuts gave way to an across-the-board austerity drive (Gonser, 2010). In Poland and Bulgaria, the governments defaulted on their initial promises and only partially addressed social partners' proposals. In view of the selective implementation, it seems that by temporarily extending the scope for tripartite negotiations, CEE governments sought merely to demonstrate their responsiveness to societal initiatives. The resulting 'PR corporatism' helped them generate societal support at difficult times, but failed to improve the quality of social dialogue (Bernaciak 2013).

Increasingly aware of the pitfalls of direct political involvement and the limited effectiveness of tripartite negotiations, CEE unions have recently tried to increase their visibility in the public space by similar means. The most widely used strategies in this regard have been public campaigns on pertinent social issues. In Poland, campaigns for minimum wage increases and public protests against certain atypical employment forms brought together all three union confederations, irrespective of their traditional political allegiances. Unions have also tried to mobilise around broader societal interests. In April 2012, for instance, Czech unions staged the biggest demonstration since 1989, gathering around 100,000 people in protest against the austerity agenda. All in all, it seems that labour organisations increasingly seek to distance themselves from political parties, demonstrating instead their readiness to defend workers' economic interests. Hungary's firefighters and law-enforcement unions have tried yet another strategy: disappointed with the political establishment, they have launched an independent opinion exchange platform to stimulate political and economic debates (Neumann 2012).

The search for alliances and new approaches to mobilisation

The weakening of trade unions' influence over their traditional 'fraternal' parties can be interpreted as part of a more general decline of their own representativeness and mobilising capacity. Unions have lost elements of their former structural and organisational power (economic strength and membership cohesion); while the diminished effectiveness of long-established political channels can be regarded as one index of the erosion of their institutional power. In many countries, this has encouraged a search for alliances and coalition-building.

There are many reasons why this has seemed an attractive option. It can increase access to new constituencies: this is particularly important for efforts to recruit previously unorganised (or weakly organised) groups of workers. Coalitions may also be a source of added legitimacy for union campaigns: working with community or religious organisations may help unions recruit ethnic minority members, and a common campaign with relevant NGOs (non-governmental organisations) may strengthen union claims to represent a broad public interest. Finally, alliances can strengthen unions' mobilisation

capacity, particularly when working with NGOs that possess a vibrant activist base.

Relations with external organisations and groups often involve tensions. Union officials often stress that their organisations possess a substantial paying membership and established procedures of internal democracy, unlike many other ‘civil society organisations’. Conversely, some NGOs regard unions as part of the establishment, reluctant to engage in radical action which might threaten their institutional status. Certainly there is some basis for the latter view. In particular, most unions are very hesitant in associating with groups engaged in extra-legal (even if non-violent) direct action, partly because their own material resources might be exposed to sanctions, but more fundamentally because their own ideology and identity are often centred around their role as ‘social partners’. Frictions can also arise from jurisdictional conflicts: for example, do unions or women’s groups have the primary right to represent the distinctive interests of women workers?

There is a long history of unions seeking allies in organising consumer boycotts of employers with which they are in dispute (the *ver.di* campaign against Lidl is an obvious recent example), such collaboration has become a vital element in the defence of public services in the face of privatisation and budget cuts. Perhaps the most notable example is the initiative of the British TUC, together with a number of its public sector affiliates, which in 2010 funded the launch of False Economy: a web-based campaign bringing together trade unions and a range of national and local groups and social media campaigners to develop anti-cuts activities. Similarly in France, the CGT helped launch the *Convergence Nationale des Collectifs de Défense et de Développement des Services Publics*, which coordinates a range of local and service-specific campaigns.

Another focus concerns issues of equality and identity, which have become part of the union agenda in most countries. In general, unions have been relatively late to embrace the rights of women, migrants and ethnic minorities, workers with disabilities and the LGBT community; in all these cases, advocacy groups and organisations pre-existed trade union engagement. Moreover, in many cases those campaigning *within* trade unions for the rights of such groups are also active as part of external collectivities, hence bridging the different components of emergent alliances. Particularly in the case of representation of the interests of minority ethnic workers, collaboration with other groups fighting discrimination may lead directly to broader anti-racist and anti-fascist campaigns. For example the British TUC, and many of its affiliates, have from the 1990s engaged with anti-racist and community groups to combat right-wing extremism and xenophobia, including the organisation of an annual ‘Respect’ music festival.

The need to collaborate with established issue-specific NGOs is even more evident in the case of wider, more overtly political issues with which unions increasingly engage. One of these concerns the environment, and more specifically proposals for sustainable development in industries where

unions organise. Germany is a pioneer in this respect. On the one hand, environmental groupings and NGOs apply pressure both within trade unions and from without in order to shift their policies; on the other, once unions have embraced a commitment to sustainability, they often collaborate with specialist NGOs in order to formulate concrete strategies. For instance, British unions have worked with NGOs such as Friends of the Earth and Greenpeace in the development of 'green workplaces' projects. In Italy, FIOM-CGIL has cooperated with more radical social movements on environmental issues.

Finally, an important theme for alliances is union engagement in issues of international solidarity (including ethical trading), resistance to neoliberal attacks at EU and global level and anti-war struggles. Public sector unions in many countries have been particularly involved, given the threat from global and EU liberalisation policies to established public services, most notably the directive on service liberalisation in 2004-6 (see also section 6).

6. The international dimension

Trade unions are primarily national organisations and became consolidated in the 20th century as interlocutors of nationally-based employers and national governments; but they act within an economy which is increasingly integrated internationally, and in Europe within a polity – the EU – which increasingly affects national labour markets. Hence one theme in the ‘revitalisation’ debate has been the need to strengthen international trade union linkages.

In this section we concentrate on European level, where most unions increasingly focus their attention, though we make brief reference to their global involvements. We discuss the institutional framework of the EU, the impact of its policies on national trade unions, and the role of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the associated European Trade Union Federations (ETUFs), previously known as European Industry Federations. We also consider other initiatives, including the development of European Works Councils (EWCs) and the negotiation of transnational company agreements. We discuss the tensions which can occur (in a time of scarce resources) between national, European and global activities, and the degree to which international commitments actually engage with the day-to-day work (and members) at home. We end by relating our account to the theme of power resources.

The international level of trade union action

International trade union organisations emerged at the end of the 19th century, at roughly the same time as the major national confederations themselves. The earliest internationals were industry-based, becoming what are now the Global Union Federations (GUFs). The first cross-sectoral body was founded in 1901, became the International Federation of Trade Unions (IFTU) in 1913 but split along ideological lines, with the foundation of the *Confédération internationale des syndicats chrétiens* (CISC) in 1920 and the Red International of Labour Unions (RILU) in 1921.

A new global organisation, the World Federation of Trade Unions (WFTU), was founded in 1945, but never included the christian unions. In 1949, most non-communist affiliates broke away to form the International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (ICFTU). In 1968 the CISC ‘deconfessionalised’ and became the World Confederation of Labour (WCL) (Pasture 1994). Meanwhile WFTU, consisting mainly of national centres from communist and/or developing

countries, lost membership rapidly with the rise of 'Eurocommunism' followed by the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989. From 1974, most European affiliates of both the ICFTU and the WCL were members of the newly created ETUC, which was formally autonomous of both international confederations. This was a precedent for the creation, in 2006, a new unitary organisation at global level, the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), bringing together ICFTU and WCL affiliates together with a number of independent centres, some of which had formerly belonged to WFTU.

European trade unions played a key role in constructing international trade union organisations; indeed in the early years these were almost exclusively European in membership (Gumbrell-McCormick 2008). They were dominant within both the ICFTU and the WCL, and were particularly influential in the formation of the ITUC. But how do national unions in our groups of countries engage at international level? The degree of involvement varies considerably. Further, most national confederations also engage in bilateral links with other unions in the industrialised countries; some also maintain bilateral solidarity or assistance links with unions in the developing world, post-Soviet countries and CEE. The degree to which the membership is interested, and actively involved, in international work also varies; but in most countries, international trade union action is the concern of a tiny minority.

Trade unions face particular difficulties at the international level. National union capacity is ultimately determined by members' willingness to act, the internal cohesion of the organisation and its responsiveness to members' concerns. This cannot apply in the same way to the international level, which involves *organisations of organisations*. National rivalries proved a major obstacle to international action in the Cold War period, particularly between unions affiliated to WFTU and those affiliated to the ICFTU and WCL, as well as between the latter two. These rivalries have not fully disappeared even within Europe, and there are often different positions between union confederations of northern and southern Europe within the ETUC. Nonetheless, the European affiliates continue to play a dominant role within the ITUC and the GUFs; while within Europe, certain national centres and a few individual national unions wield considerable influence.

National approaches to internationalism

Nordic trade unions have long punched above their weight at international level and are noted for their commitment to international work, through involvement in the ITUC and its predecessor, and especially through funding international solidarity work with unions in the developing countries. Union leaders have served as top officials of the ICFTU/ITUC and the GUFs, and more recently of the ETUC and the ETUFs. Nordic unions are also known for a relatively high involvement of the membership in international and European affairs; though attention to European affairs has increased in recent years and perhaps now overshadows global involvement. Another important area of international action for unions in both countries is the Nordic region, through

the Council of Nordic Unions (*Nordens Fackliga Samorganisation*, NFS), as well as the wider Baltic region, through the Baltic Sea Trade Union Network (BASTUN).

In the Nordic countries, the strength and legitimacy of the large confederations contribute to an effective articulation of interests between levels – local, sectoral, national and international – and international policy and action are coordinated between the confederal and sectoral levels. Interest in international affairs is not necessarily shared by all workers, however. In Denmark, a union-sponsored Gallup survey of over 2,000 employee representatives showed a lack of basic knowledge about European and international issues (*Danish Labour News*, 2011), although interestingly, manual workers tended to be better informed than white-collar workers.

Unions in all the Central countries have long traditions of international involvement, though patterns differ considerably. German unions were largely responsible for the creation of the first international trade union organisations over a century ago, exerting a decisive influence. Understandably, history has created some sensitivities about their role in modern international trade unionism; one official told us that unions in other countries expect the Germans to take initiatives, but if they do so are likely to complain of German domineering. The then DGB president, Michael Sommer, was the first president of the ITUC, where he played a significant and often conservative role. While most of its international work is focused on European issues, *IG Metall* has traditionally played a significant role in key international issues, such as the struggle against apartheid, where it gave crucial support to black South African unions organising at Volkswagen (Gumbrell-McCormick 2000: 408). It is important to note that *IG Metall* and *ver.di* are each far larger than most national confederations; hence they can develop independent international policies which do not always coincide with those of the DGB.

An important channel of German influence at global level is the Friedrich Ebert Foundation (FES), a foundation linked to the SPD which, like all main political parties, receives public funding in proportion to its parliamentary representation. Many of its officials have close trade union links; its activities include education programmes in Latin America, Africa and Asia and CEE, and its influence and global reach exceed those of any European trade unions. The FES is reported to have organised most of the seminars and conferences in Latin America around the creation of the ITUC, helping reconcile the differences between the ICFTU and WCL regional organisations (Collombat 2011).

The primary focus of the Austrian ÖGB is on Europe, including with neighbouring CEE countries, but it also carries out other international work, much of it multilaterally through the ITUC International Solidarity Fund (Prausmüller and Sauer 2007). Much of the focus of this work is on child labour, and involves work with unions in Africa, and Asia. Some affiliates also carry out international work: GPA works closely with UNI Global and UNI-Europa, and carries out dedicated training on international issues.

Unions in the Netherlands and Belgium, like their Nordic counterparts, have traditionally played a disproportionate role in international activities. The FNV (and the CNV to a lesser degree) is a major sponsor of international development assistance in developing countries, often with the backing of government funds. The Belgian unions also have international solidarity projects, especially in Africa (in part reflecting the country's colonial past). Dutch and Belgian trade unionists have long held officer and executive positions at international level, providing four out of seven ICFTU general secretaries and dominating the key positions in the WCL. Belgian unions, especially the ACV/CSC, played a key role in negotiations between the WCL and ICFTU and were instrumental in the formation of the ITUC.

In the Netherlands, international and European affairs are the responsibility of the top leaders of both the FNV and CNV. In FNV, European affairs have received growing attention in recent years and are now handled separately, increasingly 'mainstreamed' through sectoral unions. Some of these carry out their own international work, in particular *Bondgenoten* and *Abvakabo*. A separate body, *FNV Mondiaal*, was set up to channel government and other external funds to international projects, of which there are between 100 and 200 in any given year. Many of these have to do with child labour and the informal economy, both top priorities for the confederation, along with CSR. FNV works closely with a number of NGOs, and has a long association with the Clean Clothes Campaign. With its affiliates it has often sought to involve the membership in international issues. It remains to be seen, however, whether and to what extent international work will remain a priority for the 'new' FNV, which has paid little attention to international affairs in its various proposals and reports beyond proposing that international work be carried out 'in house' by the confederation rather than by the sectoral unions. The CNV, for its part, has fewer resources and much less focus on European work. It continues to work closely with the Belgian ACV/CSC in international solidarity projects with former WCL affiliates in developing countries.

As the major funder of the WCL, the ACV/CSC played a vital role in the process leading to the creation of the ITUC, convincing other affiliates (including the CNV) to wind down their separate world body (Gumbrell-McCormick 2013). The confederation's strong focus on international affairs, based on its christian-inspired conception of solidarity, can be seen in its attention to the plight of the poorest workers such as child workers and those in the informal economy and domestic workers. It has relatively less involvement in forms of solidarity such as International Framework Agreements (IFAs), although it is committed to CSR and has traditionally had very close links to NGOs. The ABVV/FGTB has a much stronger focus on Europe, but has a department for international affairs, under the responsibility of the president, who is a member of the Executives of the ITUC and ETUC. The federation has many international projects, often with additional government funding. Increasingly, the confederation is seeking to integrate international work with that of other departments, but there is little involvement of the wider membership on international, as opposed to European, issues.

Trade unions in the Southern countries, as we have seen, are strongly divided along ideological lines; and while the three main confederations in Italy tend to cooperate on European and international affairs, the same cannot be said of France. This has had a rather paradoxical effect: the division and enmity between the French confederations weakens their presence and effectiveness in international work, but the competition between them has also encouraged all to become involved at the international level. For decades, FO effectively vetoed the participation of the CGT and, to a lesser degree, the CFDT in the ICFTU and ETUC, but all three confederations were free to pursue European and international links outside the official bodies, through development projects and bilateral contacts with unions in other countries. The end of the cold war led eventually to a thaw in the attitude of FO towards the admission of the CGT to the ETUC, which finally took place in 1999, and the CGT was a founding member of the ITUC in 2006. The CGT has emerged as a leader of the 'left' unions within both the ETUC and the ITUC. It has a long tradition of cooperation with NGOs in its international work and takes part alongside a wide spectrum of civil society organisations in a national forum on CSR, along with the CFDT. The latter confederation has played an important role in European affairs for a much longer period, through the ETUC and the ETUFs, and it has also developed a strong involvement in CSR and transnational company agreements. Both confederations carry out solidarity work in developing countries, in particular in former French colonies in Africa as well as in Asia and Latin America.

CGIL, CISL and UIL have long worked together on the international stage, for example by agreeing common positions and lists of candidates for office; and indeed the then CISL president, Bruno Storti, a former ICFTU president, was a strong advocate of the admission of CGIL to the ETUC in 1974 (a move opposed by FO) (Gumbrell-McCormick 2000, 356-7). This does not mean that there is no difference between their positions. Like the CGT in France, the CGIL adopts a more radical position within the ETUC and ITUC, and has pushed for a stronger common stance on globalisation within both bodies. The two main Spanish confederations have also developed a joint international policy, alternating their representation in key posts on international trade union bodies.

Of our two Anglophone countries, the UK has a long tradition of international work, and was a major player in the creation of the WFTU as well as the ICFTU. In recent years, EU issues have assumed increasing centrality; as part of the 'relaunch' of the TUC, its international department was renamed the European Union and International Relations Department, perhaps an indication of the relative priority of the two aspects.

Widely regarded as an agent of British government foreign policy, the TUC for a time lost influence within international trade unionism. In more recent years, it has regained an important role in the ITUC and the GUFs, as well as the ETUC. Indeed despite the traditional principle that trade unionists from the largest affiliates should not hold top posts in the international and European trade union bodies, British trade unionists have occupied key

positions, notably John Monks as general secretary of the ETUC from 2003-11 and Guy Ryder at the ICFTU/ITUC from 2002-10. As the then TUC general secretary quipped at the time of the ITUC founding congress, ‘there is one area where Britain excels, and that is the export of trade unionists.’

Unions in CEE have had a particularly strong incentive to ‘go international’. As we saw in the opening section, since the beginning of the transition process their countries followed an export-led growth model marked by a high degree of openness to overseas trade and to FDI. The role of foreign actors, in particular the EU and large MNCs, in shaping the region’s socioeconomic structures was so substantial that Bohle and Greskovits (2007) referred to these countries as ‘transnational capitalisms’. Given the depth of internationalisation that ensued, key decisions affecting labour in the CEE countries were taken either at the EU level, or at the company headquarters located abroad. The only option for unions was to become involved in international activities and organisations, if they wished to influence future policy decisions or obtain information on their firms’ plans.

On the other hand, it was no easy task for unions in the enlarged EU to establish and maintain cooperative links. It proved challenging, first of all, to uphold international solidarity at times when sites located in different countries were competing over the same investments. Such zero-sum conflicts could be particularly dramatic in the case of production relocations. Second, on the eve of eastern EU enlargement, West European unions grew increasingly concerned about the potential impact of migration and posting from new EU member states on wages and working conditions in their countries, which we discuss below. Such fears sometimes led to accusations of social dumping and to measures which unions in the East regarded as protectionism. Third, the weakness of trade unions in most of CEE often prevented them from getting involved in cross-border projects, or considerably limited their active participation in joint initiatives. The lack of mutual language skills on the part of union officials, as well as divergent understandings of the notions of cooperation and solidarity, were additional impediments to good East-West trade union relations (Klemm *et al.* 2011; Kotthoff 2005).

Yet despite these obstacles, unions from new and old member states established cross-border links that were not limited to symbolic declarations of support. Joint initiatives took place at all levels of trade union activity, involving exchange of information, joint negotiations with company management, and cross-border collective action.

The first contacts between the ICFTU, WCL and ETUC on the one hand, and labour organisations in CEE on the other, took place already during the communist period. Relationships with ‘transmission belt’ unions were contentious, but *Solidarność* attained a privileged position. In 1986 it was allowed to affiliate to both international bodies, an almost unprecedented status (Gumbrell-McCormick 2000). Throughout the 1980s, *Solidarność* also managed to establish close ties with West European labour organisations. The latter staged solidarity strikes in the aftermath of Polish worker protests in

1980 and after the introduction of martial law in 1981. *Solidarność* applied for ETUC membership already in the mid-1980s, but at that point the confederation did not accept affiliates coming from outside the European Economic Community (EEC). Following the fall of the Berlin Wall, however, the ETUC gradually opened up to CEE unions, first within the framework of the so-called European Trade Union Forum, created in 1991 to bring together trade unions from East and West. Initially it was unclear whether the ETUC would liaise only with the newly established organisations, or also with the 'old' reformed ones. In the end, the second, universal approach prevailed, and the organisation has been accepting CEE unions as affiliates since 1996 (Degryse and Tilly 2013). CEE unions have come to view the ETUC and ETUFs as the main representatives of their interests at the EU level, even though they cannot actively participate in the workings of all their committees given their limited human and financial resources. They also support social campaigns and take part in Europe-wide protests staged by the confederation. CEE union officers have been integrated into ETUC's organisational structures; notably, Józef Niemiec from the Polish *Solidarność* became an ETUC Confederal Secretary in 2003 and Deputy General Secretary in 2011.

At the sectoral level, CEE unions have often participated in training activities initiated by their West European counterparts. Nordic and German trade unions were particularly active in this respect, assisting their CEE colleagues in recruitment and providing advice on collective bargaining techniques. One of the most recent initiatives of this kind was the establishment of the Baltic Organising Academy (BOA), run jointly by Scandinavian and Baltic unions, which has launched recruitment campaigns in the transport, industry and construction sectors in the Baltic states. All in all, ties with foreign labour organisations and pan-European union structures gave CEE unions an opportunity to enrich their strategic repertoires and rebuild their power resources. Through participation in EU-level campaigns and mobilisation drives, CEE unions became acquainted with new forms of protest and gained new arguments for national-level debates on minimum wages, precarious work and the extent of social and employment rights.

Despite the many differences between the countries of our study with regard to the focus and extent of international work, we can draw some preliminary conclusions. First, trade unions in Europe, despite their pronouncements on the need for international action, are still mainly focused on their own national issues, and what attention they do give to international questions has increasingly focused on Europe, as we discuss below. Second, international issues remain distant from the average member and even the average activist, with a few notable exceptions. Yet the need for greater knowledge about international affairs and greater coordination, at least among European national centres, is a common complaint. 'We don't know enough about what other countries are doing well', said one French official. Clearly, trade unions have much more to do with this elementary form of international action: communication and information. Third, much international work is bilateral, devoted to various forms of 'charity' rather than more practical and egalitarian forms of solidarity, and in many countries much of this work is at

least partially funded by national governments and by the EU. Finally, as we see below, there are important differences between the way unions handle global and European issues. While it is possible for EU-related issues to be functionally integrated into national work, and while national (and sometimes local or regional) officials are often able to handle European questions, strictly international issues such as dealing with the ITUC or ILO generally require specialist knowledge.

The European dimension

As we have noted, for most of its history trade union internationalism has been primarily European in composition and focus: all formal organisations of global unionism have been located in Europe, headed by Europeans and largely funded by European affiliates. If one source of tensions in international trade unionism has been a belief that the movement was dominated by ‘a powerful European club’ (Gumbrell-McCormick 2000: 336), a reverse concern has existed ever since the creation of the (then) European Economic Community (EEC) in 1957. What was initially a common market between six Western countries now possesses 28 member states, encompassing virtually the whole of Western Europe and the majority of countries in CEE. Three additional countries (Iceland, Liechtenstein and Norway) form part of the European Economic Area (EEA) and are bound by the rules of the internal market. Increasingly, European economic integration has set the parameters of trade union action, encouraging ‘an extension to the European level of the role unions had sought for themselves in national planning’ (Cox 1971: 562). As one union official responsible for international affairs told us, what is discussed today in Brussels may shape national legislation in three years’ time, so it is essential to be involved. Hence for unions in Europe today, ‘international’ is often understood primarily to mean ‘European’.

The formation of the ETUC in 1973, as a body autonomous of existing global union structures, was widely viewed as a signal of a shift of interests and resources. It was founded with 17 affiliates in 15 countries. Today it has 85 member organizations in 36 countries. Creating a coherent common programme with a growing diversity of interests, experiences and traditions is a daunting task. At the same time, the challenges facing trade unions have magnified radically; yet in a period of straitened union finances, income from affiliates has not kept pace in real terms with membership, particularly since the unions from CEE pay pro rata only a quarter of the fees of those in the West. For much of its work, the ETUC depends on subsidies from the European Commission. The ETUFs likewise receive significant Commission support.

Gläser (2009) has suggested that the ETUC faces two dilemmas which are a source of inescapable weakness. The first is between broad representativeness and homogeneity (Braud 2000). The second is between political independence and financial dependence on the European institutions; or in the words of Martin and Ross (2001), ‘the dilemma of borrowed resources’. The resulting

contradictions have provoked intense debates among unions at national level, sometimes overt but often implicit.

The European Union: a complex and contested political space

A key question for trade unions is the character of European integration. Initially, most observers assumed that as the importance of the European level increased, this would entail a growing body of European rules regulating employment and the labour market. But subsequently a more sceptical position argued that integration occurred primarily through weakening or eliminating national rules which constrained cross-national economic activity – ‘negative integration’ (Scharpf 1999) – without necessarily establishing supranational rules in their place. A common market can be understood primarily in terms of freedom *from* regulations which inhibit cross-national exchange, whereas the creation of a social community depends on *rights* which are entrenched in new regulatory institutions. For example, central to the single European market are the ‘four freedoms’ of movement (for goods, services, capital and labour). Freedom of movement means eliminating national barriers; but for neoliberals and advocates of flexibility, it is neither necessary nor desirable to create positive regulation at European level.

This question overlaps with the relationship between economic and social integration. The 1957 Treaty of Rome established the EEC, and market integration was in the eyes of many observers (both supporters and opponents) the be-all and end-all. However, there were fears that producers in countries with inferior employment conditions would gain a competitive advantage in the common market (what would later be described as ‘social dumping’). For this reason, the original Treaty of Rome included a clause enabling the Commission to propose measures aimed at the harmonization of working conditions, and another prescribing equal pay for women.

In the 1970s (when centre-left governments were in power in many member states) there were more ambitious efforts to adopt directives which would ensure upwards harmonisation of employment regulations. But this was halted with a shift to the right in European politics and growing enthusiasm for labour market deregulation. A new phase began when Jacques Delors became Commission President in 1985; he helped drive the ‘single market’ project, but also insisted that greater integration must possess a ‘social dimension’. Hence the ‘social chapter’ agreed at Maastricht in December 1991 enlarged the EU competence in the employment field, and extended the range of issues on which directives could be adopted by qualified majority voting.

A key element in the Delors initiative was the ‘social dialogue’ between unions and employers at European level. By cultivating authoritative interlocutors from the two sides of industry, the Commission might strengthen its own supranational authority and acquire greater room for manoeuvre within the complex politics of EU decision-making. The Maastricht Treaty gave the ‘social partners’ at European level the right to negotiate agreements which

could be implemented as directives by a ‘Council decision’. After Maastricht there was a considerable acceleration in employment legislation, but from the late 1990s the pace slowed again. Right-wing governments now dominated Western Europe, while enlargement to CEE created a large bloc without the traditions of ‘social Europe’ and with a competitive interest in preventing new employment regulation.

There is the familiar imbalance within the institutions of the EU itself: the Parliament, the most ‘popular’ (directly elected) element in the decision-making architecture, and the most reliable supporter of an effective social dimension to European integration, is also the most limited in its powers. The Commission, while dependent for its own status on the extent of EU regulatory capacity, is at best an ambiguous ally: the Directorate-General for Employment and Social Affairs may be sympathetic to many trade union aspirations, but its influence is subordinate to that of the many others with a primarily market-making mission. In recent years, the Commission has been heavily dominated by extreme neoliberals. The Council, comprising representatives of each member state government, reflects the dominant political coloration of Europe; and given the limited scope for qualified majority voting (QMV) on industrial relations issues, contains multiple veto points against an extended social dimension. Finally, the ECJ, comprising judges from all the member states, has since EU enlargement in 2004 given market ‘freedoms’ primacy over social protection, as we discuss below.

Unions and ‘free movement’

The EU Treaties provide for the ‘free movement’ of goods, capital, services and people, and also for the ‘freedom of establishment’ of economic activities, throughout the EEA. While these principles were contained in the original Treaty of Rome, it was assumed for almost half a century that governments could impose nationally specific regulations on the exercise of these freedoms as long as these did not discriminate against citizens of other member states. Hence, for example, collectively bargained employment rules could be applied to workers exercising the right to freedom of movement from another member state. Such assumptions have been challenged in two key respects. The first involved the labour market implications of eastwards EU enlargement in 2004. There have always existed cross-national disparities in wage levels in the member states, in particular after the accession of Greece, Portugal and Spain in the 1980s, but the West-East differences vastly exceeded those between North and South, and this was even more the case when Bulgaria and Romania joined in 2007. In order to cushion the effect on Western labour markets, it was agreed that free movement of workers could be restricted for up to seven years, and we discuss national trade union policies below. The second challenge, to which we have already alluded, stems from the forceful assertion of the primacy of market freedoms by the ECJ, itself transformed in character by the addition of judges from the new member states. We will explore a number of aspects of the new legal regime and trade union responses.

Writing on the eve of enlargement, Meardi (2002) documented reservations among West European trade unions, not least because most post-communist countries had embraced policies of market liberalism which conflicted with the presuppositions of the 'European social model'. He noted that the German unions, in an attempt to cultivate good relations with their Polish counterparts, agreed not to demand transitional periods in respect of free movement of labour, but did not object when the German government imposed limitations. The most restrictive position was adopted by the Austrian ÖGB, which argued that free entry should be permitted only when wage levels in the country of origin had reached 80% of those in Austria. A leading ÖGB official told us that it had caused a certain embarrassment when the far-right ÖVP declared that it endorsed the union's policy. Both Germany and Austria are on the borders of the old iron curtain, and fears of the effects of a sudden opening of their labour markets are not surprising. We should note that in both countries, efforts have been made to cooperate with unions in the East; in Germany in particular there have been efforts to develop unionisation among CEE migrant workers.

Austria and Germany were the only countries to apply a seven-year transitional period in 2004; all others enforced restrictions of up to five years except Ireland, Sweden and the UK, where no restrictions were imposed. The impact of the immediate opening of the labour market in Ireland – which has the smallest population of any of the receiving countries – was particularly marked. Union officials complained that they had not been consulted by the government, and that the low levels of labour market regulation made 'social dumping' a serious threat. In Britain there was also a substantial inflow, particularly from Poland. The TUC, and most of its affiliates, strongly supported immediate free movement, fearing that workers from the accession countries would otherwise be forced to take on irregular work (Clark and Hardy 2011: 4). A similar position was adopted by LO in Sweden, though a senior official told us that it was difficult to convince some affiliates that the entry of CEE workers would be easier to regulate if they were allowed to work legally. Indeed, in a statement in 2005 the ETUC reported claims by affiliates in some countries that had imposed restrictions that these had caused adverse effects, such as an increase in undeclared work and false self employment and exploitation and discriminatory treatment; while Meardi (2012: 93) notes 'a pathologically high rate of self-employment' among migrant workers in Germany. Both Britain and Ireland imposed restrictions on the entry of workers from Bulgaria and Romania after 2007. This was condemned by the British TUC, which pressed for a relaxation of the rules. By contrast, the ICTU gave qualified support to the limitations, arguing in particular that it would be dangerous to allow unrestricted access to the Irish labour market if the UK acted differently.

In the countries which adopted some transitional restrictions but not for the full seven years, patterns varied. The typical Nordic approach, adopted in Denmark, was to allow work permits for any worker who obtained a job in accordance with collectively agreed conditions. This might also have been the position in Sweden, but the terms were not agreed before the deadline. In the Netherlands, the unions were divided: the FNV opposed transitional restrictions, arguing that these would encourage illegal working; but the CNV supported such measures

to cushion the impact of labour migration. The latter view was endorsed by most right-wing parties, and also by the SP on the left, and restrictions were imposed. In Belgium, by contrast, there was broad consensus on the need for restrictions, and these remained in place for five years. For example, the ABVV/FGTB accepted free movement in principle, but insisted on conditions, including strengthening the labour inspectorate to prevent abuses, and supported the maintenance of restrictions in sectors where there were obvious problems of migrants being used to undercut standards. In both France and Italy, restrictions were imposed by right-wing governments, to some extent pandering to xenophobic pressure. In France, all the main unions called in 2006 for the lifting of restrictions; a CGT official declared that ‘we cannot have first- and second-grade workers and citizens’. The rules were eventually abolished in mid-2008. In Italy, the unions had not called for controls, and when the centre-left Prodi government was elected in 2006 it did not extend the restrictions, as the defeated Berlusconi government intended to do.

While unions in Western Europe focused on the risk of social dumping, their counterparts in the East welcomed unrestricted access to Western labour markets. This is not to say, however, that the latter supported cost-based competition. In relation to the free movement of workers, they insisted that the nationals of new member states should work in EU15 for the same wages as domestic employees. In the mid-2000s, they manifested their anti-social dumping position by joining an EU-level mobilisation drive against the draft Services directive (also known as the Bolkestein directive). Unions in CEE contested the measure, even though its original version offered a short-term advantage to companies and self-employed individuals from CEE wishing to offer their services in old EU member states at lower prices. Justifying their stance, they argued that they did not want to be the cause of ‘unfair’ competition with fellow workers in the West; they also claimed that the lowering of West European standards would reduce the prospects for the upward convergence of working conditions in CEE (Bernaciak 2007). In addition to the anti-Bolkestein drive, CEE unions became involved in cross-border projects targeting migrant workers, and signed cooperation agreements with receiving countries’ unions to fight social dumping and employee exploitation jointly.

The ECJ: liberalisation versus employment regulation

‘Expanded judicial review in the European Union simultaneously has empowered judges, shifted agenda-setting powers away from the member states toward the European Commission, altered the character of discourse over policy reform, transformed the kinds of policy instruments that decision makers prefer to use, and dramatically changed the value of political resources traditionally employed by interest groups’ (Pierson 2004: 109). If in the past the ECJ used its discretionary competence to enhance employment protections (notably in the field of equal opportunities), it is increasingly interpreting the Treaty commitment to market freedoms as overriding national employment protection rules. Its landmark decisions in the Viking and Laval cases in 2007 insisted that, although there was a ‘fundamental’ right to strike, this was less

fundamental than the right of businesses to supply cross-border services. Irrespective of national law, industrial action which interfered with market freedoms was legitimate only if it satisfied strict tests: it must be justified by overriding reasons of public interest, must be undertaken as a last resort and must be 'proportionate' to the union objectives. Such an assessment was ultimately for the courts to make, under clear guidance from the ECJ (Bücker and Warneck 2010).

The Ruffert and Luxembourg cases in 2008 raised somewhat different issues, both severely limiting the capacity of public authorities to prescribe employment standards if these interfered with the freedom to provide services. In Ruffert, the ECJ ruled that a German local authority was not entitled to require a contractor to enforce on subcontractors an obligation to observe collectively agreed conditions of employment, since these conditions were not universally binding. The Luxembourg case was brought by the Commission against the national government, arguing that its implementation of the 1996 Posted Workers directive (PWD) breached market freedoms. The directive was intended to prevent a service provider – particularly in the construction industry – from 'posting' workers from a lower- to a higher-wage country and paying only their home country wage rates, by defining 'a hard core of minimum prescriptions' where the law or collective agreements of the host country should prevail (Cremers 2010: 298). The ECJ (as in the preceding Laval judgment) treated the terms of the Posted Workers directive as the maximum permissible employment protection compatible with market freedoms, rather than a minimum as originally intended. This was particularly serious because, in general, there was no provision for transitional restrictions regarding posted workers, and the use of posting expanded rapidly in countries which imposed limitations on free entry of workers (as the ETUC had warned).

In their discussion of some of the implications, Dølvik and Visser point to a 'trilemma' in EU policies: these rest on three 'fundamental principles' – market freedoms, equal treatment and collective employee rights – which 'cannot be realised in equal measure' (2009: 493). But the severity of the contradictions varies cross-nationally. The priority assigned to market freedoms is most evidently a challenge to 'voluntarist' industrial relations systems, as in the Nordic countries where both the Viking and Laval cases arose (in Finland and Sweden respectively) and where unions rely on the threat of industrial action to sustain high bargaining coverage. Germany, with (until 2015) no statutory minimum wage and with collective agreements rarely made generally binding, faces similar problems. By contrast, countries with a tradition of statutory regulation (or the legal extension of collective agreements) can argue that labour market rules are applied in a universal and hence non-discriminatory fashion.

The ETUC called in 2008, in the aftermath of the ECJ judgments, for a 'social progress protocol' to be incorporated in the EU Treaties, specifying that 'neither economic freedoms nor competition rules shall have priority over fundamental social rights and social progress'. This hardly seems to be feasible within the current EU political conjuncture, but is strongly supported by affiliates in many countries, including LO Sweden and the DGB. The

combination of ECJ attacks on trade union rights and EU-driven austerity has certainly helped shift the ETUC from an ‘insider’ role within institutionalized social dialogue procedures to a more ‘outsider’ stance in an effort to mobilise popular opinion, with frequent protests and mass demonstrations. At national level, too, union pronouncements in most of our countries are today marked by much sharper criticisms of the nature of European integration, with calls for a fundamental re-orientation of union policies.

A very different form of mobilising response is industrial action to combat social dumping, regardless of court decisions. The most notable example was the unofficial strike by British construction workers at the Lindsey oil refinery in 2009, against the use by an Italian contractor of workers on inferior wages and conditions. Though widely depicted as a xenophobic incident, the strike is better regarded as a (largely successful) effort to defend collectively agreed conditions against an attempt by a foreign service provider to undercut these.

Another response is to strengthen cooperation with unions in the new member states. In the Laval case, the contractor colluded with a Latvian union to agree wage levels far below those collectively agreed in Sweden; but critics suggested that the Swedish union *Byggnads* should have done more to seek a common position with its Latvian counterpart (Gajewska 2009: 68-70). Subsequent attempts have been made to repair the damage, both bilaterally and through BASTUN and BOA. Similarly, there has been an increase in bilateral cooperation between German and Polish unions; much more generally, the ETUC’s Interregional Trade Union Councils, ten of which bridge unions in East and West, serve to regulate cross-border movements of workers and the conditions under which they work. In the 2000s, the Bavarian district of *IG Metall* forged close links with its Czech, Hungarian, Slovenian and Slovak counterparts. Since the conclusion of the ‘Vienna Memorandum’ in 1999, the five organisations have been exchanging information on collective bargaining outcomes in their countries and addressing common labour market concerns.

Transnational organisation and action at company and sectoral level

The increasing openness of the European economy, and the global economy more generally, creates the potential for the competitive undercutting or evading of employment standards (‘social dumping’; Bernaciak 2014). This is most commonly discussed in the context of the shift of production by MNCs from high-wage to low-wage countries, or the movement of workers in the reverse direction. However, competitive pressures between countries with high employment standards can also have serious effects: most notably, wage restraint in Germany has constrained pay bargaining in neighbouring countries. In this section we briefly discuss attempts to coordinate pay bargaining cross-nationally, before turning to a more detailed discussion of EWCs and framework agreements.

Bargaining coordination

As we discussed above, ‘competitive corporatism’ has involved sustained wage moderation, which in turn has been one of the causes of the declining wage share in national income. This has stimulated a range of union attempts to limit such downwards competitive pressures.

At its congress in 1999, the ETUC adopted the principle of a ‘European solidaristic pay policy’ which would ‘guarantee workers a fair share of income; counter the danger of social dumping; counter the growing income inequality in some countries; contribute to a reduction in disparities in living conditions; and contribute to an effective implementation of the principle of equal treatment of the sexes’. This was followed in 2000 by the formulation of a ‘European guideline’ for national bargaining: ‘nominal wage increases should at least exceed inflation, whilst maximising the proportion of productivity allocated to the rise in gross wages in order to secure a better balance between profits and wages; any remaining part of productivity increases should be used for other elements in the collective bargaining agenda, such as qualitative aspects of work where these are quantifiable and calculable in terms of cost’. Affiliates were asked to report annually on the application of this guideline. However, there were limitations in the extent of such reporting (Mermet 2002), and all the evidence shows that affiliates failed to achieve the targets – which themselves were an attempt to stabilise the existing wage share rather than recover the losses of previous decades (Erne 2008). This lack of success was perhaps unsurprising, given that many of the parameters of the guideline were virtually impossible to measure, that the decentralisation of collective bargaining reduces the authority of national unions, and that bargaining outcomes depend more on employers and governments than on the unions themselves.

In any event, the ETUC delegated the main responsibility for coordination to the ETUFs. Indeed the policy of bargaining coordination stemmed from the 1997 initiative of the ‘Doorn group’ of metalworking unions from Germany and the Benelux countries. The European Metalworkers’ Federation (EMF, now IndustriALL) adopted a ‘European coordination rule’ in 1998, prescribing a pay target of inflation plus productivity, and established an information network, Eucob@n.

A key problem with all such initiatives is their voluntaristic nature: ETUFs possess few sanctions over their affiliates, and enthusiasm for coordination differs considerably across countries (Schulten 2004: 307). Busemeyer *et al.* (2008: 443) note that ‘trade union leaders in the Scandinavian countries fear that collective wage bargaining on the EU level undermines their ability and power in national level wage bargaining’ while ‘union leaders in Mediterranean countries supported stronger coordination of wage agreements. Some unions who have sceptical views on coordination were at least in favour of stronger consultation and exchange of information.’ Erne (2008: 88) reports that interviewees in Germany, Italy, France and Belgium all ‘accepted that national

wage bargaining is losing much of its autonomy in the eurozone': but acceptance of cross-national coordination was greatest in Belgium and least in Italy.

Yet in the absence of hierarchy, networks can achieve some effects. For Erne (2008: 103) it is important 'that national union leaders feel a moral obligation to explain their policies within a European framework'. The introduction of the euro reinforced such pressures. Traxler *et al.* (2008) find evidence of the development of de facto 'cross-border pattern bargaining' in the metal industries in Germany and Austria; while Traxler and Brandl (2009: 186) argue that even Nordic unions (and despite non-membership of the eurozone) participate in coordination: 'the northern network, bringing together IGM district *Küste*, the Danish *CO-Industri* and Sweden's *Svenska Metall*, holds regular meetings to exchange information and discuss strategies for the coming bargaining rounds.... Longer-established cooperation exists among the Nordic metal unions.... Compared with other macro regions, this cooperation by the Nordic unions is the most advanced in Europe, together with the most developed IGM networks.'

European Works Councils

From its inception, the ETUC pressed for European legislation prescribing transnational works councils or similar bodies in MNCs, arguing that nationally-based rights of employee participation were being outflanked. The long campaign culminated in the 1994 EWC directive, which provided for information and consultation mechanisms in larger companies with employment in at least two EEA countries. The limited powers of EWCs were somewhat enhanced by the 'recast' directive adopted in 2009. The complexity of the procedure for establishing an EWC (and the scope for hostile managements to obstruct the process) means that only just over a third of the companies that meet the size threshold actually possess an EWC – though coverage of larger multinationals is far greater; just under a thousand exist, the majority in the metal and chemicals sectors, and in companies with headquarters in Germany, the USA, the UK, France and Sweden (in numerical order).

What do EWCs mean in practice? Streeck (1997) argued that they were 'neither European nor works councils' but mere token mechanisms, lacking the powers of national representative institutions and typically ancillary to national procedures in the companies' home country. Subsequent research has revealed a slightly more nuanced picture. Lecher *et al.* (1999) distinguish four types: many are purely symbolic; others provide a servicing function, primarily through information exchange; some develop their own autonomous projects; a few exert a significant influence on company policy. It seems that problems of language and of different national industrial relations backgrounds inhibit cross-national unity among employee representatives, and in times of restructuring and redundancy these are often preoccupied with protecting their own 'national interests'. Nevertheless, in a minority of cases, EWCs have developed into genuine transnational actors with a quasi-

bargaining role. A few have also extended their focus and composition beyond the EEA, developing into a form of World Council.

There are important organisational issues for unions: for example, do they assign responsibility to a European or international department, or to officials responsible for negotiating with the company at national level? This can be a major source of intra-union friction: for example, leading *IG Metall* in 1995 to create a special cross-departmental EWC Team (Rüb 2009: 253). Given the extensive literature that now exists on EWCs, we will not discuss their operation in detail, but rather focus on trade union policies. First, it must be stressed that EWCs – indeed like most national works councils – are not formally trade union bodies, and in many cases at least some of their elected members are non-unionists. Hence an EWC may be a ‘central ally’ for trade unions but also a potential rival (Müller *et al.* 2011: 221). Most were established in the 1990s, and the ETUFs took an active role in identifying target MNCs and coordinating negotiations for creating the new structures. For example, the EMF created a special Task Force in 1996 which prescribed a privileged role for unions in the process. EMCEF (now also part of IndustriALL) adopted a similar approach in the chemicals sector. There are significant differences between (and also within) countries in the extent to which unions are involved in EWC activities, and indeed the degree to which these are regarded as a key issue for union policy. But most ETUFs were ‘initially overwhelmed by the scale of EWC activities’ (Waddington 2011: 52).

Telljohann concluded (2005: 34-42) that there was a positive and fairly close relationship with trade unions in most cases. Some unions delegated support to the international department, others to sectoral specialists. In some EWCs, full-time officials were full members, in others they acted as external experts. There was a tendency for unions to focus on home-country companies – where, Telljohann comments, the value added is least; and indeed, the EMF policy from 2000 was to assign each EWC a national representative, usually from the home country (Rüb 2009). In general, an EWC appeared to be ‘a structure disconnected from the shop-floor and reserved to an elite of pioneers’. How it functions then depends on the existence of ‘political entrepreneurs’ at company level, and the strategic choices which they make (Greer and Hauptmeier 2008).

Whittall and Kotthoff (2012) find that full-time officials in most countries are too overloaded to give detailed attention to individual EWCs, once these have been established. In Germany, the headquarters of the largest single number of EWCs, trade unions are relatively well resourced but so are national works councils. Typically the (full-time) president of the national (group) works council will also chair the EWC, and will often seek autonomy from the external union (Müller *et al.* 2011). By contrast, in Britain, with no national tradition of works councils, unions are often suspicious of EWCs because of participation of non-unionists, and seek to maintain a ‘strong and clearly defined role’ in almost all cases (Fulton 2005: 61). In France, Rehfeldt (2009: 178) reports ‘a degree of EWC-monitoring fatigue’, and this is almost certainly true of other countries with limited union resources.

Among CEE unions, cross-border cooperation at the company level has been particularly important in the Visegrád countries. These renewed their industrial base thanks to FDI inflows, unlike the Baltic states that underwent large-scale deindustrialisation. On the other hand, in contrast to Slovenia where national ownership was preserved, manufacturing in the 'Visegrád Four' is controlled mainly by foreign investors, leading often to a high degree of structural interdependence between Visegrád and West European locations. Despite the high potential for distributional conflicts, on numerous occasions unions from the two settings have managed to move beyond their short-term particularistic interests and to stage mutually beneficial exchanges. In the car industry, for instance, CEE unions have refrained from underbidding their West European counterparts in exchange for organisational assistance (Bernaciak 2010). Socialisation between union representatives from old and new member states was greatly enhanced by the presence of EWCs, which gave CEE unions an opportunity to obtain information on company affairs that could be used in local negotiations, or even to circumvent the local management and achieve improvements in work organisation and working conditions through direct intervention at company headquarters (Meardi 2004). Some EWCs, like that of IKEA, negotiated pan-European agreements addressing workers' representation rights or health and safety issues; others, like the one at General Motors, managed at least temporarily to counter the management's efforts to play off individual sites against each other by staging joint negotiations on investment distribution.

Transnational company agreements

More complex issues of conflicting competences arise in the case of transnational company agreements, in which EWCs often play a key role despite their lack of formal collective bargaining capacity. 'By early 2012, 224 such agreements were known in 144 companies employing over 10 million people' (European Commission 2012: 4). These are typically 'framework' agreements, less binding or detailed than international collective bargaining agreements but more formal than any agreements that preceded them. The first was between the IUF and the French multinational BSN-Danone in 1988, but most have been agreed since 2000.

It is common to distinguish between international and European framework agreements (IFAs and EFAs): the former with global scope, the latter covering only Europe (Telljohann *et al.* 2009). On this basis, it is estimated that roughly equal numbers of each type exist. However, the distinction is far from clear-cut. All but a small minority of companies signing IFAs have European headquarters, primarily in France or Germany, and the extent to which they can be regarded as more global than European in scope is a matter of degree. Perhaps the most important difference concerns the content of agreements. IFAs 'typically focus on fundamental rights or address the different aspects of corporate social responsibility' whereas EFAs 'tend to have as their core aim the establishment of partnerships to deal with restructuring' and also 'address specific subjects such

as health and safety at work, equality in employment, training and mobility, planning of employment and skills needs' (European Commission 2012: 4).

Early IFAs stemmed from efforts by the ICFTU and the GUFs to regulate the overseas practices of MNCs based in industrialised countries, with the aim of establishing more mandatory norms than purely voluntary exercises in 'corporate social responsibility'. They almost always include references to ILO core labour standards, and often provide for independent monitoring by NGOs or by the trade unions themselves. Hence in their origins, IFAs were top-down initiatives. But 'second-generation' IFAs, and almost all EFAs, can be seen as bottom-up initiatives by well-established EWCs. Both processes can result in tensions. Top-down agreements can cause 'resentment among... workers' representatives at lower levels about... perceived interference with national systems of industrial relations and norms, resulting from the absence of mandating procedures and mechanisms to link the levels' (European Commission 2012: 6). Conversely, the GUFs (and some ETUFs) became increasingly alarmed that EWCs – not formally trade union bodies – were encroaching on their own sphere of competence without any representative mandate. As a result, clearer rules have been developed prescribing closer consultation between EWCs, ETUFs and GUFs, and often requiring that one of the latter should be at least co-signatory of any agreement (Schömann *et al.* 2012: 198-201).

Internationalism and trade union power resources

Globalisation clearly threatens the power resources of trade unions as national institutions: this is the main motive for international collaboration. Yet it would be wrong to regard unions as victims of overwhelming external forces. For example, MNCs with elaborate global supply chains may often be able to outflank national unions, but can be vulnerable to action which targets weak points in the chain.

International union organisation clearly represents a potential alternative form of power, though national unions' willingness to pay is circumscribed. We have seen that at European level, organisation has access to 'borrowed resources'; but as some critics insist, this may be a Faustian bargain. Moreover, if internationalism is primarily an issue for 'international experts', it cannot engage the members; this would require sustained membership education and involvement. There have indeed been moves in this direction; but this is typically technical in nature and oriented to immediate bargaining issues. Membership engagement may be easier, though still precarious, at a transnational company level, as the experience of some EWCs indicates (Bernaciak 2010; Whittall *et al.* 2007). With the growing use of web-based communication, however, there is scope for more systematic membership engagement, as some unions have recognised.

In general, institutional power resources are far more limited than at national level. Given the relative weakness of the ILO, this is obvious at global level. At European level the position is somewhat different, though with

the dominance of neoliberalism, unions' status as social partners has been seriously weakened. Despite the limited formal powers of EWCs, some have been able to accumulate significant institutional power, as the development of transnational agreements demonstrates.

This leaves a substantial need for alternative power resources. Unions have certainly attempted to cultivate moral legitimacy in the international field: notions of solidarity remain resonant, though their meanings differ according to national and ideological traditions. The search for moral legitimacy is one reason why unions have embraced the ILO's somewhat anaemic notion of 'decent work', and for the emphasis placed on the idea of 'social Europe' – or as Swedish LO puts it in an educational textbook, 'a just Europe' (*Ett rättvist Europa*). These are powerful slogans: there are few explicit advocates of indecent work or an unjust Europe. By the same token, they must be translated into a concrete and plausible vision of an alternative globalisation and an alternative Europe: re-envisioning an international identity, democracy and economy (Schmidt 2009). This is a task in which unions in many of our countries have now become actively engaged. This process also requires coalitional power resources; and as we showed in the previous section, international work is one important area in which unions have formed alliances with other progressive movements. Perhaps the most challenging task is to develop strategic or logistical power: international union action remains an arena of diverse forms of organisation and multiple levels of initiative; their integration and coordination remain underdeveloped.

National trade unions have long recognised the need to act beyond national boundaries, and most appreciate the growing urgency of effective international organisation. There is however a fundamental tension in international policy: is this a specialist issue which should be left to 'international experts', or a mainstream concern for all members and activists? This dilemma forms part of a broader tension between the needs of effective strategy and vigorous democracy.

Conclusion: regaining the initiative?

‘What are we here for?’, a former British union leader used to ask. There is a paradox at the heart of trade union identity: at one and the same time, unions are social movements with the goal of social betterment, but also often conservative bureaucracies which opponents can depict as defending the vested interests of the relatively protected. Unions require stable organisation if they are to be effective, and established procedures if they are to be democratic; and they cannot ignore the core membership who pay their contributions. But unions require power resources of a normative character: they are not mere insurance companies, and can survive only if they express a social ideal and a social mission. Managing this paradox demands great strategic imagination. In this final section we do not attempt to provide a systematic survey of national experience, but offer some illustrative examples of attempts to transcend the paradox.

The development of moral power resources requires first a normative content or set of values in order to demonstrate ‘what we are here for’. Any live and democratic movement will contain areas of debate and division over the answer to this question. The different ideological traditions discussed earlier have embodied very different conceptions of a better socio-economic order and the means to attain this. The erosion of these traditional identities may make it easier to pursue an overarching common vision, but may also lead towards convergence on a form of ‘business unionism’ bereft of broader normative content.

A normative vision becomes a power resource only when effectively communicated: ‘collective strength comes from communication, or it withers away,’ is the title of an article by a former DGB official (Arlt 1994). Communication has both an internal and an external dimension. Arlt focuses primarily on the first: for a union to create a genuine collective identity, a lively exchange of information and opinion is essential, with critical debate over arguments and positions in order to develop an enlightened commonality. External communication is no less important, especially in an era when the mainstream media are anything but sympathetic to trade unionism. In most countries, unions have in recent decades become far more professional in the public presentation of their policies and positions, with large unions in many countries appointing specialist communications officers. This is one area where cross-national exchange of union practice and experience can be particularly valuable.

This links closely to another issue: the ‘framing’ of the unions’ case. Everyone possesses a world-view, however inchoate, a set of beliefs and assumptions which make sense of a complex social environment and act as selective filters for what is heard. Today, such world-views are predominantly shaped by the ‘commonsense’ of neoliberalism: the notion that acquisitiveness is an unquestionable virtue, that money is the measure of all things, that ‘free’ markets are unquestionably efficient and virtuous. Hence the key issue is how to subvert the dominant frames by ‘amplifying’ and ‘extending’ those elements which can be aligned to the movement’s own objectives, thus transforming and reshaping their master narratives. So, for example, the central purpose of trade union action can be presented as the pursuit of social justice, the struggle for economic and industrial democracy, the defence of humanity and autonomy against precariousness and stress at work, the search for opportunities for self-development in employment. All share a master narrative: trade unions are collective means for workers to defend their human rights against the dehumanising imperatives of profit. Framed in these terms, union policies and actions can resonate with deeply held, if often subsidiary elements in everyday understanding of economy and society.

An example of such an endeavour is the statement of fundamental values (*Værdigrundlag*) adopted by Danish LO at a special congress in 2003, when it severed formal party links. The overarching argument is that ‘solidarity creates opportunities’, with five specific themes. First, while we can achieve some of our goals as individuals, together we can do more: an argument which challenges the simple dichotomy between individualism and collectivism. Second, all humans are different but they all have equal value and must have equal rights and opportunities. The labour market must be open and inclusive; and the trade union movement itself must be an inclusive community with space for diversity. Third, all workers have the right to a job where employee participation and skills development go hand in hand with decent wages and decent working conditions; unions must help promote workplaces that treat employees as the most valuable resource and that make room for marginalised groups of workers. Fourth, unions work for a welfare state that is inclusive and redistributive, providing equal access to fundamental social resources. Fifth, solidarity is global: LO contributes to developing workers’ rights across the world, and accepts a responsibility for rich countries to help those who live in poverty and destitution. The document presents a positive statement of union objectives, both for members and the broader public, in plain language and covering many of the key themes that trade unionists in any country would emphasise.

A second example provides an interesting parallel but from a very different ideological tradition, the analysis presented by the Belgian ACV/CSC for its congress in 2010 and disseminated almost a year in advance for discussion, under the title ‘Let’s build tomorrow together’. The aim was to provide a long-term understanding of the key challenges – but also opportunities – facing trade unions and to develop responses, with the argument that ‘another future is possible’. Three ‘mega-trends’ discussed were demographic ageing, youth unemployment and growing labour force diversity; the rapid increase

in economic and financial globalisation without matching forms of social regulation; and the impact of climate change. The central policy implications derived from this analysis were: a struggle to make the economy serve society, and finance serve the economy, not the reverse as at present; the need to relate a vigorous response to the current crisis to a longer-term strategy; the pursuit of sustainable development; and the key task of developing innovative trade union ideas while also seeking to collaborate with others who shared the same objectives. Produced as the economic crisis unfolded, this effort to define a union strategy for the longer term is particularly impressive as an attempt to propagate a positive trade union vision.

In CEE, innovative trade union initiatives face particular difficulty. The austerity drive and direct political intervention in the collective bargaining process have put considerable strain on weak industrial relations institutions. In most cases, however, societies have not remained passive when faced with the harsh policy course. Across the region, there has been growing discontent with elite-driven cost-cutting measures, and mounting opposition to political attacks on social entitlements and labour market protections. Perhaps somewhat paradoxically, this presents trade unions with a strategic opportunity to reassert themselves as representatives of the broad sections of the population that are disillusioned with the neoliberal policy prescriptions.

There is mounting evidence that unions in the new member states are taking up the challenge and lead a struggle against neoliberal restructuring. They have staged protests against austerity measures, labour market deregulation and social exclusion; they have also actively opposed to the privatisation of health care and other services of general interest. Already before the crisis, they made considerable efforts to modernise their communication strategies and experimented with new communication tools, including the social media, and new forms of interaction with their current and future constituency, such as internet campaigns and signature-gathering. They have also proved ready to take on board the specific concerns of marginalised or underrepresented groups, such as 'atypical' employees or those working in the shadow economy. The fact that such actions enjoy high levels of societal support shows that despite enduring weakness, unions are not merely 'the creatures of the past'. Just the opposite, they have a crucial role to play in the new capitalist systems insofar as they highlight the contradictions of the economic 'catching-up' process and stand up for workers' rights 'in hard times'.

The broadening of union discourse would prepare the ground for more vigorous membership recruitment. There is no doubt that organising is a costly endeavour that requires a shift of union resources away from other fields of activity. Nevertheless, it needs to become a priority in CEE in view of the substantial membership losses that unions have experienced since the beginning of the transition process. Even in countries like Slovenia, where unions assume an active role in shaping the country's socioeconomic policy course, high membership figures are needed to legitimise their institutional position; recent government attempts to sideline the social partners indicate that unions cannot rely solely on tripartism but need to invest in boosting

and empowering their members. The specific approach to organising might differ depending on the type of sector. In services, which are generally difficult to organise, top-down campaigns drafted and implemented by central or regional union development offices may give an impulse for shop floor actions. In manufacturing, bottom-up organising efforts will be more effective thanks to greater concentration and homogeneity of the workforce but even there, higher-level union structures should provide newly created workplace organisations with logistic assistance, legal advice and further training possibilities (Mrozowicki 2014).

CEE unions are not unique in their struggle for recognition and their efforts to extend their membership base. Western labour organisations face similar dilemmas, even though their density rates tend to be higher, and their institutional position is somewhat stronger. In view of this commonality of challenges and interests, it is important to continue assistance programmes and organising support granted by more experienced and more powerful Western organisations to their CEE counterparts, and to stimulate cross-border experience-sharing in relation to collective bargaining and recruitment techniques. The recent austerity measures and liberalisation measures likewise call for a coordinated union response. So far, even though the policy prescriptions formulated by the Troika and the IMF have been very similar in western and eastern countries, union discontent has largely been manifested at the national level. As demonstrated by the anti-Bolkestein directive mobilisation, however, pan-European resistance can be successful in countering the deregulatory agenda.

What general conclusions can we draw? First and foremost, there are no ‘quick fixes’ through which unions can regain the initiative: revitalisation requires strategy, not just tactics. So, for example, the ‘organising model’ which unions in many countries claim to have embraced is not just a set of techniques. A serious ‘turn to organising’ means rethinking the aims and objectives of trade unionism, the constituencies that unions attempt to represent, the forms of action which they adopt and the nature of their internal democratic processes. Or to take a very different example, union mergers – which in many countries have been seen as a route to revival – can be as disastrous as many business mergers, partly because they are commonly perceived as an organisational short cut without adequate attention to the need, and the opportunity, to redesign trade unionism along innovative lines and to embrace the interests and aspirations of a wider constituency.

One reason for the relative infrequency of strategic innovation is that this raises difficult ‘political’ questions. Trade unions possess strong organisational inertia, because strategic change threatens established internal power relationships, while any reallocation of resources to reflect new priorities creates losers as well as winners. There are usually many veto points which can block contentious change.

Strategic innovation cannot simply be a matter of blueprints designed at head office level. They must be translated into action, which means engaging

the ‘willingness to act’ of grassroots members and representatives. Effective innovation is most likely where unions maintain a permanent and active internal dialogue, cultivate the ‘social capital’ of their members, and use their mechanisms of internal education to develop and replenish ‘organic intellectuals’ who can provide a reflective bridge between leadership and rank and file.

Revitalisation also entails rethinking the meaning of solidarity. The old slogan, ‘solidarity forever’, retains its resonance but must be redefined for the twenty-first century. Unions have to come to terms with the diversity of interests within the working class, nationally and internationally; collective identity is not given, it must be constructed. And this construction cannot be mechanically imposed: it must be negotiated; unions have begun to learn how to integrate diversity.

The material challenges to unions are obvious; but above all else, in most countries they are ideologically on the defensive. Hence they need to recreate *moral* power resources. This is partly a question of vocabulary, partly of channels of communication, but crucially also of ideas. Many unions have lost a mobilising belief in their own capacity to achieve a better economy and a better society. What is needed is a new, imaginative, perhaps utopian counter-offensive. Unions have to believe, and demonstrate, that a better future is possible.

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