

European Trade Union Confederation at the Crossroad: New Challenges and New Roles

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Abstract

The paper discusses the role of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) in political processes at the European Union (EU) level. The author presents historical development of the ETUC and its present structure. A detailed account on the evolution in the strategy of the ETUC, shifting from the 'logic of membership' (as an umbrella organisation for only a part of the labour movement across Europe) to the 'logic of influence' (as a powerful actor with monopoly in the interest representation of labour building its capacity to impact decision-making mechanism at the EU level) is delivered. The strategic change has not been a smooth process, as it entails structural adjustments and contributes to identity crisis within the ETUC. The author claims that currently the ETUC attempts to reconcile those two contradicting logics by combining strategy of effective interest representation with the strategy of mass social mobilisation.

Key words: ETUC, trade unions, interest representation, EU, logic of influence, logic of membership

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1. The ETUC as a Primary Representative of Interests of the Labour World at the European Union Level

The largest and the most important organisation representing the interests of trade unions at the level of EU is the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) established in 1973. Currently comprises 85 national trade union confederations in 36 countries and 10 European trade union federations. ETUC acts on behalf of over 60 s trade unionists. It is a confederation with extensive organisational structure, numerous membership, with quite slow and democratic decision process.

The main aim of the ETUC is promotion of the European Social Model and efforts towards the creation of a united Europe of peace and stability where working people and their families enjoy full human, civil, social and employment rights and high living standards. The ETUC assumes, that it is possible to combine sustainable economic growth with ever-improving living and working conditions, including social protection, full employment, equal opportunities, good quality jobs and social inclusion.

Similarly to many other labour interest groups the ETUC has three primary functions: information services for members and coordination of their works within the scope of lobbying – it represents unionists' interests in front of EU institutions, in the area of joint tenders – it actively participates in negotiations and working out compromises with employers' organisations (Weltz 2008: 142).

The ETUC influences the policies and legal system of the EU through interest representation within the framework of: annual Tripartite Social Summit, participation in the European Social and Economic Committee, quite frequent direct contacts with the European Commission, close cooperation with European Parliament deputies, regular consultations regarding employment, social issues and macroeconomic policies within the framework of comitology procedure. It has a status of social partner and is involved in the process of shaping industrial relations with European employers' organisations. This European supra-sectorial dialogue is complemented by 36 branch dialogues.

The ETUC is the most important labour world representative at the EU level, but it is not the only one. Besides the ETUC the interests of trade unions are represented by the European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CESI) as well as 14

European branch federations, as well as a small number of domestic trade union federations with agencies in Brussels. The CESI represents supra-sectoral interests of 35 organisations from European countries. It is a small confederation acting for the increase of pluralism and independence of trade unions at the EU level.

Interests of trade unions in individual sectors are represented by European branch federations, the majority of which is affiliated to the ETUC. Branch federations were not established to conduct independent advocacy activity, but as an additional structure within the framework of the ETUC. However, they have retained their independence and self-reliance in decision making.

2. Complex Structure and Internal Divisions in the ETUC

Since the beginning of its functioning the ETUC assumed the role of inclusiveness and openness to various types of union groups which is why it is heterogenic in character. The members are both national trade union confederations as well as the European Trade Union Federations. Besides, there are Interregional TUCs, European Works Councils (EWCs), the Council of European Professional and Managerial Staff (EUROCADRES) and the European Federation of Retired and Elderly Persons (EFREP/FERPA). As well as its organisation for retired workers, a women's committee and a youth group have existed since the creation of the ETUC. Such complex and inclusive structure of the ETUC enables it to take a role of a single and strong voice of European workers.

Organisational structure of the ETUC and the decision making process are democratic in character. The most important organ is the Congress, which decides on the policies of confederation. The Congress convenes every four years and meetings are attended by delegates from national confederations and European trade union federations. It elects the members of all organs. The Executive Committee is made up of representatives of the ETUC's members and can adopt joint positions and agree on actions to take in support of its demands. Decisions may be taken by a qualified majority of two-thirds of the votes. The Executive Committee also has the power to decide on the mandate and composition of the delegations that negotiate with the European organisations of employers. The Secretariat manages the ETUC's day-to-day activities. It suggests and plans European trade union actions and is in charge of the ETUC's internal operations.

Table 1. Two-pillar structure of the ETUC membership

National trade union confederations	European Trade Union Federations
Andorra USDA Austria ÖGB Belgium CSC – FGFB – CGSLB Bulgaria CITUB – PODKREPA Croatia SSSH Cyprus SEK – TURK, SEN, DEOK Czech Republic CMKOS Denmark AC – FTF – LO Estonia EAKL – TALO Finland AKAVA – SAK – STTK France CFTD, CGT, CGT-FO, CFTC, UNSA Germany DGB Greece ADEDY, GSEE Hungary ASZSZ; ESZT, LIGA, MOSz, MSzOSz, SZEF Iceland ASI – BSRB Ireland ICTU Italy CGIL – CISL – UIL Latvia LBAS Liechtenstein LANV Lithuania LDF – LDS – LTUC Luxembourg CGT – LCGB Malta CMTU, GWU, FORUM Monaco USM Netherlands CNV – FNV – MHP Norway LO, UNIO, YS Poland NSZZ Solidarnosc, OPZZ, FZZ Trade Union Forum Portugal CGTP-IN, UGT Romania BNS, CARTEL ALFA, CNSLRFRATIA, CSDR San Marino CDLS – CSdL Slovakia KOZ–SR Slovenia ZSSS Spain CC.OO – ELA – UGT – USO Sweden LO – SACO – TCO Switzerland TRAVAIL SUISSE – SGB/USS Turkey DISK – HAK–IS – KESK – TÜRK-İS United Kingdom TUC	EAEA European Arts and Entertainment Alliance EFFAT European Federation of Food Agricultural and Tourism EFBWW European Federation of Building and Wood Workers EPSU European Federation of Public Service Unions ETF European Transport Federation ETUCE European Trade Union Committee of Education UNI-EUROPA European Federation of Services and Communication EFJ European Federation of Journalists EURO COP European Confederation of Police IndustrialAll European Federation of Industry and Manufacturing workers

Source: Own work based on information from the ETUC website: <http://www.etuc.org/composition-and-organisation>.

Permanent Committees, operating groups and Interregional Trade Union Councils deal with various areas of ETUC politics, including issues related to

employment relationships, social policies, democratisation of economy, environment, industrial policies as well as education and trainings. The ETUC Women's Committee focuses on gender equality, the ETUC Youth Committee was created to take account of the specific problems faced by young workers. FERPA focus on improving social protection, especially pensions and healthcare, and fighting social exclusion and poverty. The European Trade Union Institute is the independent research and training centre which places its expertise in the service of workers' interests at European level¹.

Similarly to other confederations, numerous membership and considerable variety of interests result in internal divisions and dissensions. The deepest division are related to ideologies and political programmes, but organisations also differ from each other when it comes to: size (e.g. DGB or TUC represent 6.5 works each, and LANV barely over one thousand), level of union density in their country (75% versus 10%), type of industrial relations' system in a given country, geographical scope, character of relations with other domestic union federations (rivaling versus cooperating organisations) etc (Abbot 1997: 467). Internal divisions and two-pillar organisational structure further complicate an already complex internal decision mechanism. That is why decisions are usually made according to the rule of smallest common denominator, which means they are quite general and not very satisfactory (Kirches 2007: 11). This leads to usually reactive actions, responding only to initiatives of other interest groups e.g. business organisations, or ecology groups.

Differences and conflicts within the ETUC are conditioned historically. In the 70's when the ETUC was being established, there appeared conflicts in worker interest representation in Europe. Both at the international and the domestic levels trade unions were competing among themselves, particularly those with a Christian-democratic, social-democratic and communist profiles (Greenwood 2003: 108). These divisions and competition have been apparent in many countries until today. It affects the structure and functioning of the ETUC. For instance, the ETUC comprises six domestic federations from Hungary, five French trade unions, four Spanish ones, etc.

In the early period the ETUC served only coordinative functions for domestic trade unions' federations and provided support for cooperation with foreign unions. Despite its limited functions, it encountered numerous difficulties. The problems were related to its internal divisions and differences between its members, inability to use the resources of member organisations, excessive dependence on members and their unwillingness to cede powers to the ETUC central. However the establishment of the ETUC and development of its activity contributed to the process of Europeanization

¹ <http://www.etuc.org/composition-and-organisation>

of domestic trade unions, to gathering knowledge on integrating Europe and opportunities for co-shaping European social policies (Greenwood 2007: 110).

3. The ETUC – from ‘Logic of Membership’ to ‘Logic of Influence’

Analysing business organisations with confederation structure, Schmitter and Streek determined two kinds of logic, which are applied in the functioning thereof. On one hand the aim of the organisation is to fulfil the needs and match expectations of the members, thus following the ‘logic of membership’, on the other hand – it has to possess the ability to influence political processes, which is defined as the ‘logic of influence’ (Schmitter and Streeck 1999: 20). There is a conflict between these logics, which according to Schmitter and Streeck is intrinsic in functioning of all interest groups, but in confederation structures it is particularly severe. The ‘logic of membership’ forces the organisation to create a structure, that will reflect the fragmentary and specific expectations of the members. The ‘logic of influence’ leads to creation of more uniform and inclusive structures, because such are the preferences of public institutions. If an association makes too significant concessions to the decision makers, it may lose its members. On the other hand, an association risks the loss of credibility, if it becomes apparent, that it cannot reach compromise with decision makers or discipline its members, so that they respect the negotiated arrangements.

Similarly to many other organisations with confederation structure, also the ETUC finds itself in a very uncomfortable position, balancing between two differing logics. Analysing the process of development of the ETUC, we may formulate a thesis, that it is an evolution from strategy assuming the ‘logic of membership’ towards a strategy dominated by the ‘logic of influence’.

4. Difficult Beginnings of the ETUC and Dominance of the ‘Logic of Membership’

In the 70’s when the ETUC was being established the trade union movement in Europe was clearly divided. There existed three international federations rivalling

with each other: World Confederation of Labour (previous International Federation of Christian Trade Unions), communist World Federation of Trade Unions and socialist International Confederation of Free Trade Unions (Kirches 2007: 3). That division of trade unions was the effect of the division between the East and West during the Cold War. However both international organisations and national confederations realised, that in the face of unifying of employers' and business organisations (establishment of UNICE and UEAPME) and their active participation in creation of the European Communities also the trade unions have to initiate cooperation for organising common European representation.

The beginnings were difficult, because national delegations of trade unions could not reach agreement on political and geographical scope of functioning of the confederation that was being created. The largest controversies were raised by the political programme – German DGB was forcing limiting actions to the minimum ('small solution'), whereas the British confederation TUC was defending the project of establishing an organisation with broad competences and decision-making role ('large solution') (Kirches 2007: 5). Minimalistic approach assumed conducting limited, but effective lobbying in Brussels as well as including members only from the WE countries. Whereas the concept of establishing a strong open organisation assumed, that the ETUC has to have broad powers. Eventually, the approach promoting geographical and political openness was chosen, which is why the ETUC already in its initial stages was perceived as a new type of confederation with supra-national characteristics, broad spectrum of represented interests and numerous membership, which clearly indicates following the 'logic of membership' (Kirches 2007: 4).

In the 80's there was the process of institutionalisation of the ETUC, but encountering difficulties arising from internal rivalries and conflicts. Large variety of members and interests thereof led to internal struggles and inability to determine common position. Many analysts of European trade union movement (e.g. Welz 2008; Greenwood 2011) stress, that despite the ETUC since the very beginning has had extraordinarily large organisational and political resources, its strength of influence in the process of shaping European policies was disproportionately small (Welz 2008: 141). Even though the ETUC had a status of social partner, its representative branch in Brussels was established, it participated in tenders and social consultations, it was not able to counteract the influence and strength of employers' organisations. Even its members treated it only as a forum for exchange of information and coordination of actions of domestic organisations (Welz 2008: 141).

It wasn't until the early 90's when along with creation of uniform European market and announcement of the programme of the Economic and Monetary Union, there came a significant change in the activity of the ETUC. Introduction of free movement of people, goods, capital and services as well as abolishment of internal administrative borders, technical and fiscal barriers created new challenges to trade unions in Europe. Trade union organisations started perceiving the necessity of conducting effective interest representation at the EU level. The Member States passed their competences within the scope of economic and social policies to the EU institutions, so if domestic trade union federations wanted to participate in shaping of those policies, they had to aim their postulates thereto. They expected the ETUC to extend and strengthen relations with the main EU institutions. Another mobilising factor was the strategy of promoting 'Euro-unionism' adopted by the European Commission" (Ramsay 1995: 94) aimed at protection and reinforcing the ETUC as the primary European representation of 'world of labour'. Commission strove at balancing the positions of social partners in European Social Dialogue, because hitherto the employers' side had been disproportionately stronger. The factor enhancing internal differences and disagreements and adding new responsibilities was the accession in 1995 of ten trade union federations from Western European countries, that were very different in character (among others, the post-communist associations from Spain and Portugal, trade union organisations from Denmark, Sweden, Netherlands and Germany) (Kirches 2007: 6).

5. Turn of the ETUC Towards the 'Logic of Influence'

The next stage in the development of European confederation started with the establishment of the Economic and Monetary Union, development of European social policy, addition of the Social Protocol to the Maastricht Treaty, establishing the European Social Dialog and political system transformation in Central and Eastern Europe.

These new challenges forced the authorities of the ETUC to introduce reforms aimed at increasing effectiveness, flexibility and strength of European confederation. Changes to the political programme and decision-making procedures were introduced, the leadership of the ETUC was strengthened, additional powers were granted to the secretarial staff in Brussels and membership was enabled to trade unions from Central and Eastern Europe. In 1995 the Confederation changed its

Constitution in order to introduce the new mandate procedure in order to render the bargaining capacity of the ETUC more effective. This reform is regarded by some scholars as an important impetus towards the Europeanisation of national trade-union policy (Welz 2008: 145).

These reforms improved the status of confederation, its representativeness and to some extent modified its profile. However the majority of member federations still opposed transforming the ETUC into structures truly supra-national (Kirches 2007: 6).

These changes, as well as the determination of the chairman of the European Commission of the time, Jacques Delors, in forming European Social Dialogue resulted in transformation of the ETUC from a relatively weak trade union organisation into a strong and determined social partner (Greenwood 2011: 107). Even though the scope of issues regulated within the framework of European Social Dialogue is still not very broad, and thus the related functions are not particularly expanded, the ETUC reaches beyond them and strives to play the role of political leader on the European arena. It was very important stage of the institutionalisation process of introducing industrial relations at European level. An example of the rising role as political leader are its campaigns for the enactment of European constitution including an extended part devoted to social issues, as well as campaign against the enactment of directive on the freedom of provision of services on uniform market (the so called Bolkestein directive)².

ETUC aspires to become an active representative of trade unions in Europe, which successfully achieves the far-reaching aims of the labour market development. Every year it publishes several dozen documents analysing the most important challenges of the EU, organises conventions and conferences devoted thereto, participates in social consultations and public debates, maintains very good relations with the European Parliament and the European Commission. However the goals that it sets itself seem excessively ambitious and exceed the confederation's means and resources. It has a tendency to set too far-reaching and not very realistic goals, in the pursuit of which the member organisations are not interested (Kirches 2007: 10).

² EurActiv, *Bolkestein directive' to stay, but will be watered down*, 23 March 2005 <http://www.euractiv.com/en/innovation/bolkestein-directive-stay-watered/article-137160>. It must be mentioned that the ETUC's campaign against the enactment of Bolkestein directive was the first case when the alliance of trade unions from new and old member states of the EU was created. It is perceived as a remarkable success of the ETUC in reconciliation of opposite interests of its members.

Trying to hasten the process of institutionalisation of its role in shaping EU policies the ETUC tightens cooperation with the European Commission and the European Parliament. In its activity ever more prominent is the 'logic of influence', that is expanding relations with EU institution. However the turn towards the 'logic of influence' hides a trap. Strategic decision of confederation on non-conflict relations with the DG Employment and Social Affairs, overly conciliatory approach towards decisions of the European Commission lead to dependence on EU institutions. That is why this potential 'giant' remains harnessed, this time by close relations with the EU institutions (Kirches 2007: 14).

Richard Hyman formulates a thesis, that ETUC by oscillating between the 'logic of membership' and the 'logic of influence' becomes 'absorbed into elite environment' of the European Commission and adopts strategy of open and non-conflict cooperation with the EU administration (Hyman 2005: 28). In this respect it significantly differs from national trade unions, which are mostly confrontational and rivalling in character. This 'absorption' ETUC arises from material limitations of confederation, because as stressed by Andrew Martin and George Ross, it is dependent on *borrowed resources* (Martin and Ross 2001: 53–76). Member organisations reluctantly pass financial resources to the ETUC, which is why the confederation has to seek financial support at EU institutions (Martin and Ross 2001: 53–76). Even though formally the primary source of ETUC revenues are membership fees³, the costs of its activity are covered from the European Commission subsidies. Every year the ETUC accomplishes a dozen projects and programmes, for which it receives grants from the European Commission.

Close cooperation with the Commission and participation in the European Social Dialogue established its position as the most important representative of the 'labour world' in Europe. According to Hyman 'seductive charm of social partnership rhetoric strengthened the legitimisation of the ETUC and confirmed its key role in influencing EU policies' (Hyman 2005: 21). However this resulted in criticism from the members and public opinion of the overly conforming position of the ETUC towards the European Commission (Welz 2008: 143). The ETUC strategy based on bargaining and its dependency on the European Commission (particularly DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equality of Chances) bear a certain risk for the Confederation. To a certain extent 'getting involved in the environment of European elites' is also indicated by the working language of the ETUC and way of formulating official positions of organisations (Hyman 2005: 22). It appears that it is a language

³ <http://www.etuc.org/r/13>

with ‘euro-newspeak’ features, and when vocabulary and style borrowed from EU institution’s personnel. This means, that confederation uses language different than those who it represents, which is clearly contradicting the ‘logic of membership’.

The consequence of this ‘absorption into environment of elites’ and following the ‘logic of influence’ is suppressing potential objections of the European confederation against initiatives of the European Commission. The ETUC has never clearly opposed the plans of the EU administration. An example is almost enthusiastic position of confederation towards the EU programme ‘Europe 2020’, which is a neoliberal programme of accelerating economic development in the EU. Even though the programme includes solutions radically increasing competitiveness of European economy as well as plans of limiting public expense, the ETUC regarded them as non-dangerous to European social model (Hyman 2005: 23). Also the previous positions and opinions of the ETUC about reforms being introduced in EU were not confrontational in character. For instance a conciliatory position of the ETUC towards the J. Delors programme of implementation of uniform market in the EU. Social policy was to guarantee ‘human face of uniform market’ (Hyman 2005: 22), and thereby neutralise and weaken opposition of trade unions. Consideration of social dimension in the programme of uniform market transformed trade union movements in Europe from ‘potential opponents into reasonable allies’ (Hyman 2005: 23). Another example is reaction of the ETUC to creation of the Economic and Monetary Union. Despite critical evaluation of the EMU programme, confederation supported it convincing, that there is a political need to further deepen the European integration process (Martin and Ross 2001: 53–76). Conciliatory position of the ETUC resulted in the lack of opposition against clearly liberal policy of the European Commission.

6. ETUC in Search of New Identity

The EU enlargement in 2004 and in 2007 was significant for the development of the ETUC. It not only enabled increase in the number of member organisations, but also created a new role for the confederation. The ETUC gained representativeness, as it doubled its membership and increased by 50% the number of workers being represented. The table below presents the data on the number of members, scale of represented workers, as well as the number of countries, wherefrom the federations

are. Quantitative difference that occurred as a result of accession of new Member States is prominent.

Table 2. Number of ETUC members in particular years

Year	Number of domestic federation	Number of represented workers (mln)	Number of countries	Number of European branch federations
1973	17	36	14	6
1975	29	44	16	6
1983	34	41	20	10
1990	38	41	22	14
1992	46	45	22	15
1998	68	50	29	15
2007	82+3	60	36+3	12
2010	82+4	60	36+4	12

Source: Own work based on information from the ETUC website: <http://www.etuc.org/r/13> and C. Kirches, *The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) Development and role of a Bound Giant, as above* p.10.

Accepting new members from the countries of Central and Eastern Europe was conditioned by several factors (Kirches 2007: 11). First of all the ETUC aspired to the role of primary representative of ‘all workers at the European level’⁴, therefore it strove to nearly monopolise interest representation. Second, its hitherto experiences from the previous EU expansions were very good. Early association of future members prepares them, and the ETUC itself for further cooperation. In case of federations from post-communist countries early affiliation with the European Confederation had a positive influence also on the process of integration of those countries with the EU (e.g. during accession negotiations in chapters concerning social issues). The ETUC wanted to reinforce and stabilise new trade union organisations preventing the revival of the old communist structures. For this purpose it initiated cooperation with them and conducted trainings on participation in social dialogue, joint tenders and general social politics⁵. In fact the first contacts with these groups were initiated already in 1989 (although cooperation with NSZZ Solidarność had already been initiated in 1980), and in subsequent years it intensively expanded them. It granted

⁴ ‘ETUC’s vision of Europe’, adopted by the 10th Congress in Prague 26–29 May 2003.

⁵ *European Union Enlargement: Involving social partners – protecting the welfare state*, Resolution enacted by the Executive Committee, Brussels 15–16 December 1998 <http://www.etuc.org/a/1311>: 1

the status of observer first to nine organisations from six countries then candidates to the EU, and then subsequent organisations.

The table below presents the numbers and diversity of supra-sectoral trade union confederations of the region, the large majority of which became the ETUC members. The second table enumerates trade union organisations from the countries of former Yugoslavia, which received at the ETUC the status of observers.

Table 3. Trade Union Organisations from the Countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Their Membership in the ETUC

Country	ETUC members	Other trade union organisations in the given country
CZ	ČMKOS	ASO, KUK, KOK, OS CMS
EE	EAKL, TALO	
HR	SSSH	NHS, HUS, URSH, Matica
HU	ASZSZ, ESZT, LIGA, MOSZ, MSZOSZ, SZEF	
LT	LPSK, Solidarumas, LDF	
LV	LBAS	
PL	Solidarność, OPZZ, FZZ Forum	
SLO	ZSSS	Pergam, K'0, KNSS, Alternativa, Solidarity
SK	KOZ SR	
BG	CITUB, Podkrepa	Promiana
RO	BNS, Cartel Alfa, CSDR, CNSLR Fratia	Meridian, Sed Lex

Source: Kohl 2009: 81.

Table 4. Trade union federations from the Western Balkans with the status of observer at the ETUC

BiH	Confederation of Trade Unions of Bosnia and Herzegovina (CTUBiH)
MK	SSM Federation of Trade Unions of Macedonia
SRB	NEZAVISNOST – 'Independence' Trade Union Confederation, CATUS

Source: Kohl 2009: 109.

Process of EU expansion was treated by the ETUC as a chance to strengthen its unstable position. The prestige of some trade unions (primarily NSZZ Solidarność) was used as an element of the ETUC's new role – moderniser and defender of new order in this region. Currently the European Confederation continues policy of openness by granting observer status to trade unions from Serbia, Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina and enabling them to participate in works of confederation,

and also expanding contacts with trade unions in Russia and in Ukraine⁶. This expansion of the ETUC to the East Europe has its consequences, and in particular it changes the role and character of the confederation. Most of all the increase in the number of members leads to deepening of internal divisions and fragmentation in organisational structure.

ETUC strategy evolved from the 'logic of membership' towards the 'logic of influence', which increases its opportunities of influencing decision and legislation processes in the EU, but at the same time limits its legitimisation and makes it dependent on resources of and access to European Commission. However this is changing as well and the 'logic of influence' is subject to modifications. In the recent years there has been a shift from focusing on relations with EU institutions towards creating a trade union movement and mass social mobilisation. By means of organisation of mass demonstrations and rank-and-file protests, it wants to pressure the centres of authority and force them to take social interests into consideration. By conducting widespread campaigns and social demonstrations, it changes its identity and ways of operating. An example of that are numerous actions organised in various countries, among others: ETUC Euro-demonstration 'Fighting for: Investments, Quality jobs, Equality' (Brussels 2014 – 50 thousand people) that is a part of campaign 'A new path for Europe', picket for counteracting unemployment of young people (Brussels 2013 – 15 thousand unionists), numerous solidarity actions and demonstrations against austerity plans (Brussels and many European countries: Spain, Germany, France, Greece etc. 2012), demonstration against plans of budget cuts and anti-social changes in European politics (Brussels 2010 – 100 thousand unionists from 30 countries), demonstrations in four European capitals concerning the programme of countering the crisis – European Action Days (2009 – several dozen thousands protesters), two manifestations in Strasbourg concerning the quality of services (2006) as well as employee rights and working time (2008), demonstration in Brussels under the slogan 'More better jobs' (2005), manifestation under the slogan 'For social Europe' in Rome (2003), demonstration concerning 'Europe democratic and civil' in Brussels (2003), campaign for European Card of Basic Rights, active participation in the works of the Convention on the future of Europe. This increased political activity of the ETUC suggests, that there emerges a new identity of the organisation as a broad trade union movement (Taylor, Mathers 2004: 267–285; Gajewska 2008: 106; Hyman 2013: 173). But as Hyman suggests the Confederation has still maintained a distance from more radical forms of protest and there is no

⁶ <http://www.etuc.org/r/13>

indication of a strategic integration of contestatory approach to the EU institutions (Hyman 2013: 174).

ETUC search for new identity is also evident by broadening of the scope of represented interests, namely civil and ecologic issues, including climate and energy policy, global warming, eco-efficiency and renewable energy⁷ were included in the program. Cooperation with NGOs and creation of broad coalitions in order of promoting ‘civil dialogue’ was to contribute to revival of ‘social dialogue’. Mentioned as an example of this is ‘Spring Alliance’ created in 2010 within the framework of which organisations including the ETUC strive to ‘establish an economic and governance strategy that serves people and planet, restore ecosystem, establish inclusive societies, promote Green and quality jobs, assume global responsibility and improve democracy’⁸. Inclusion of ecological and democratic problems allowed the organisation to go outside the core liberal discourse and classical conflict between employers and employees. It enabled assuming the role of defender of interests of not only the labour world, but all citizens and creation of broad coalitions (Greenwood 2011: 117). It may thus be concluded, that this “harnessed giant” despite the limitations and barriers tries to build a new identity, allowing it to go outside its hitherto roles. But in opinion of Le Queux while the anti-globalisation movement does indeed offer a potential source and impetus for a revitalisation of labour politics, this is no tame option but one requiring a carefully thought out strategy on the part of the trade unions and the social movements. Le Queux stresses the risk that the trade unions could find themselves between a rock and a hard place (Le Queux 2005: 582).

However there are also sceptical opinions, according to which the position and strength of influence of the ETUC in the nearest future shall not undergo significant changes, because many external factors do not favour the ambitions of the European Confederation of becoming the leader on the European scene (Greenwood 2011: 112). First of all, the trade unions in the entire Europe are losing their significance and strength of influence, and the level of union density is rapidly decreasing. The main causes of this process are globalisation processes, moving away from the policy of interventionism and progressing privatisation, changes on the labour market, development of new technologies, international competition, increase in employment in services sector, deconcentration of employees, appearance of temporary workers,

⁷ <http://www.eeb.org/EEB/?LinkServID=762BF1FB-5056-B741-DB55BCB1A31A4850&showMeta=0>

⁸ <http://springalliance.eu/node/4>

new employee management techniques etc (Gardawski 2010: 112). It is an all-European, or even global trend.

Second, there is a large diversity in systems of interest representation among the European countries, which may block ETUC's ambitions of creating a coherent model. We may highlight different traditions and types of industrial relations and kinds of social dialogue, as well as the lack of tendencies as to the harmonisation thereof, or even closing the gap between them (European Commission 2009: 49). The trade unions themselves are different when we consider the structure, scope of concluded joint arrangements, participation in management, forms of participation in social dialogue, relations with organisations of employers, governments and parliaments (Gardawski 2010: 420). Taking this into consideration it is difficult to expect the ETUC to be able to significantly achieve closer cooperation of member organisations and promoting one, coherent European model of employee interest representation.

Third, the financial, economic and fiscal crisis (since 2008) have showed how little influence the ETUC has on the EU decision making process. Its calls for an expansionary macroeconomic response to minimalise job losses were disregarded, as EU institutions and national governments insisted on austerity measures to reduce public debt as the most important priority (Hyman 2013: 173). In 2012, in spite of numerous of the ETUC and national trade unions protests and demonstrations against austerity policy, the European Council (the 17 Euro and six non-Euro member countries) endorsed Euro Plus Pact, resulting in a reinforcement of fiscal austerity policies and an increase in competitive wage pressures.

The ETUC has campaigned for a European New Deal, rejecting excessive cuts in social benefits, public services and pay. The Confederation insists wages are the motor of the economy, and rejects growing income inequality. The key to unlocking competitiveness is quality and innovation rather than driving down wages. The ETUC favours robust social safety nets to absorb economic shocks and promote solidarity. The Confederation advocates a longer-term approach to correcting public finance deficits, requiring significant change and greater coordination of tax affairs (ETUC 2012). A new proposition of the Confederation for recovery in Europe is a new plan for investment, sustainable growth and quality jobs. The ETUC recommends to invest 2% of EU GDP per year over a 10-year period in energy efficiency – decrease in energy consumption to lower energy dependency and in greenhouse gas emissions – in sustainable industries through a massive support of research and development,

and in public services – whose function must not be forgotten in the completion of the ecological transition and whose quality must be improved (ETUC 2011).

Conclusion

Despite the large diversity of domestic trade union federations and non-favourable external factors, the ETUC manages to maintain and consolidate the entire trade union movement at the EU level. The strength of the Confederation is its integrating function, ability to consolidate many organisations while maintaining continuity and stability. It can adapt to new, often non-favourable conditions and include new ideas to its programme. The scope of its competences evolved from informative function and loose coordination to creation of a common programme of employee interest representation.

In the initial stage of its operation, the ‘logic of membership’ was dominant, however there has been a shift of strategy towards the ‘logic of influence’ and acceleration of institutionalisation of relations with the European Commission. The ETUC aspires to the role of political leader on the European scene, but involvement in two different logics paralyses its actions. Despite large potential the Confederation is not an equal partner for European business associations (e.g. BusinessEurope, ERT). Moreover, the ‘logic of influence’ forces the Confederation to overly conciliatory responses to initiatives of the European Commission and leads to dependence of the ETUC on the resources provided by EU institutions. In order to free itself from this inconvenient situation the Confederation seeks new opportunities and roles for itself, among others it is headed towards transformation into a mass trade union movement.

It may be assumed that the ETUC tries to reconcile two contradicting logics by combining strategy of effective interest representation with the strategy of mass social mobilisation. It strives to increase its legitimisation by representing as many members as possible, not only employees, but also NGOs, active citizens and ecologically sensitive people. It forges coalitions with NGOs and projects the image of active conciliatory partner open to various forms of cooperation, which allows it to go outside the classic scheme of conflict in industrial relations.

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