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European Labor and Transnational Solidarity:  
Challenges, Pathways, and Barriers

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### **Introduction**

"Workers of the World Unite!" Nearly a century and a half have passed since the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848 called workers to international solidarity. Beginning in Europe and North America, workers organized world-wide in *national* unions. International solidarity has been, and is, an elusive, idealistic goal. Today, global economic interdependence and political integration challenge the existence and effectiveness of national labor unions. While capital and political power go international, labor seems to fall behind. In this paper we will survey the challenges, pathways, and barriers to European labor solidarity. We will look at the pathways that European labor unions have used thus far to counter the double challenges of economic and political integration. We argue that labor's transnational endeavor is so difficult, precisely because European political integration in the social and labor domain lags behind economic integration. But we will also identify other barriers to a European labor unity that are internal to the labor movements of Western Europe.

For organized labor in Europe, transnational class action has become crucial for a number of reasons. Firstly, because the *Social Dimension* of the European Union depends on whether labor unions succeed in mounting solidaristic action in defense of Euro-wide labor standards and social policies. Secondly, without a strategy of internationalization, national labor unions may be caught in a downward spiral of clinging on to their declining national power base and protectionist domestic struggles against factors outside their own realm. Without a transnational strategy, European labor might never be again in the driving seat of European politics and set solidaristic values against the prevailing dogma of market integration.

More and more, the study of transnational solidarity becomes an important task for modern sociology (Bamyeh 1993). People and organizations are increasingly connected across national borders, directly through travel, products, work, friendship and communication, or indirectly, through governmental and transnational organizations to which they belong. As the early sociologists inquired the rise of the modern national states and societies, today sociology should study whether transnationalization transcends, rather than reinforces collective identities, social ties, and solidarity within the "concentric circles" of one's own group (Simmel 1908).

This brings us to the question of why it is so difficult for European labor to achieve transnational solidarity in the light of the ongoing pressures of internationalization and

European integration. Why are there no truly international unions that follow the example of transnational corporations and operate beyond national borders? Business has been able to create "transnationally centralized decision systems, staffed by cosmopolitan "technocrats" responding to criteria of economic rationality in their choices of industry, employment or earning'; they are the "private sector incarnations of the old functional dream, tying the world together along global lines of economic rationality" (Nye 1972: 52). Are there no countervailing transnational labor organizations that foster "borderless" solidarity?

In principle, there are three ways to advance transnational labor solidarity and coordinate European union action. Using Powell's (1990) typology, we will call these the "market", "hierarchy" and "network" options. The market option is based upon the expectation that unions and employers will eventually decide to bargain internationally. Transnational union action is to result from mutual benefits across borders and will develop in a "voluntaristic" framework of international industrial relations in which states and supranational authorities play a secondary role, if any. The hierarchy option assumes that national unions will be able to centralize decisions and resources supranationally. This option presupposes a political dynamic not unlike the upward spiral in the centralization from local unions to national union movements. The network option backs cross-border contacts without the aim to pool resources and transfer authority to a higher level organization. These cross-border networks of unionists and works councilors allow the exchange of information and coordination of activities in a relative ad hoc and flexible, albeit fragmented, form of cooperation.

We shall begin with a brief exposé of the "challenges" which compel labor unions to seek transnational rather than national solutions. However, there exist several possible strategies as responses to these challenges. Next, we will consider the various "pathways" to transnational solidarity organized labor has thus far taken. Most major union confederations in Europe are members of the *European Trade Union Confederation* (ETUC), an encompassing organization of European labor but is a "nest with many different birds". ETUC has only limited competences and little authority over its affiliates. Transnational sector organizations (such as the European Metalworkers' Federations) are in a similar position, and, furthermore are only incompletely coordinated within ETUC. Other efforts to organize unionists and works councilors across borders have shown only limited success, partly due to the lack of support by the national governments, employers, and even labor unions.

Organized labor at the European level falls behind the unity, centralization, resources and power that national union movements have enjoyed within the welfare states. We argue that there are four "barriers" on the pathway to transnational solidarity for organized labor. The first two are "internal" barriers and must be understood in the context of labor's own history and organization. Nationally entrenched union diversity and country-specific patterns of industrial relations across Europe stand in the way of transnational co-ordination and interest intermediation. There are also "external" barriers that derive from the limits of European interest intermediation, between unions and employers, and between unions and the state. We argue that the weak stateness of the European Union (EU) and

the "empty seat" politics of European employers act as brakes on the "Europeanization" of labor organization and class action.

Our approach will combine insights from cross-national comparative analysis with European integration theory since we believe that both perspectives are needed in order to understand the full complexity of Europeanization (Hix 1994, Olsen 1995, Ebbinghaus 1996). A "top down" analysis, focusing exclusively on the EU policy process and institutions in Brussels, cannot tell, in our view, the whole story. Comparative analysis helps identifying the conflicts of interests which result from European diversity. Our analysis combines therefore the cross-national comparison of the diversity of labor organization and the multi-level analysis of the interaction between national interest intermediation and supranational coordination.

## **1. The Challenge of Internationalization**

Since the 1980s the intensity of global economic competition, persistent high unemployment, the ascendancy of neo-liberalism, and new steps towards European integration, have tended to undermine the effectiveness of organized labor at the national level. From a European perspective, "globalization" refers to three interrelated processes: 1) the rise of transnational corporations as the dominant producers of goods and services, combined with important changes in international finance, research and marketing; 2) the partial loss of economic and political autonomy and sovereignty of national states; and 3) the global shift in economic power from Europe (and North-America) to Pacific Asia and low wage economies in general (Barnet and Cavanagh 1994; Chesnais 1993).

A few facts may serve to bring home the increasing importance of the transnational company (TNC) in the world economy. Between 1983 and 1990 corporate investment across national borders grew four times faster than world output and three times faster than world trade. By the early 1990s, the cross-border intra-company movements of goods and services within the world's largest 350 TNCs accounted for about two-fifths of world trade (Wilks 1993). The United Nations counted 37,500 TNCs with over 200,000 subsidiary firms, owning one-third of the world's productive resources in the private sector; half of which is owned by the top 100 corporations (UN 1994). TNCs are increasingly interrelated through investment, swapped shares, mergers, joint ventures, alliances, co-partnerships, licensing and joint research programs. New information technologies have also changed the modes of production, marketing and finance. The miniaturization of goods and falling transport and communication costs allows for world-wide sales and global production. This has augmented the TNCs' power to pursue a strategy of "locational arbitrage" based on the possibility to shift production from country to country. Yet, the greatest impact of globalization is probably on financial markets, where now large sums of capital can be moved around the world in a matter of seconds. The currency crises of the European Monetary System in 1992 and 1993 have shown that no national economy can insulate itself from external shocks.

The rise of the transnational corporation and the globalization of the economy have changed the balance of power between firms, states and unions. The capacity of national

governments to control the movement of international capital is more and more limited. Governments can no longer shape national industrial policies by forging an alliance with major national "industrial champions", since even the largest among them are increasingly dependent upon access to international sources of finance, markets, research and technology (Hayward 1995). According to some observers interdependence will lead to convergence, in the sense that individual countries are being "squeezed" (Wright 1995) into adopting similar neo-liberal policies. "The influence of global corporate culture on nation-state politicians moves parallel to, and reinforces, the influence of the liberal trade environment and the twenty-four-hour-a-day financial markets: it rewards states which follow orthodox liberal economies (...) and it penalizes states which don't" (Marr 1995).

Confronted with world-wide economic pressures, national states have but one alternative: to transform themselves into "attractive" locations for business, production, and investment by offering the best possible mix of infrastructure, communication facilities, education and research institutions, skilled labor force, low wage costs and favorable taxation policies. Others have rejected this thesis and argue that the "push" of world-wide economic change has different implications in different countries. Moreover, the "best possible mix" of industrial and labor policies is not dictated by a simple universal logic, prescribed by the forces of new technologies, international economic competition and global finance markets. Companies, unions and politicians may learn from what people in other countries do better and they will probably continue to disagree about what they value most (Strange 1988).<sup>1</sup>

Early analysts of European integration have suggested that the increased powers of transnational corporations could be subordinated to the political will of a European "would-be" polity (Lindberg and Scheingold 1970). The hope that closer political integration might reconcile a century old European tradition of social citizenship with economic globalization was expressed once again during the negotiations of the Maastricht Treaty, but was soon disappointed. The "1992" project, which was initiated in 1985, and the reform of the EC political structure, was first and foremost concerned with advancing economic integration. The EC Member States thought to create a Single European Market by reducing or eliminating national barriers to cross-border flows of goods, services, capital, and labor (Pelkmans and Winters 1988). Yet, the "promise of recapturing political control through a new system of supranational governance" and "an added social dimension" was never realized (Streeck 1993: 88).

Internationalization highlights the conditional viability of social institutions like national states and labor unions. J.R. Commons (1909) classical analysis of the history of the American shoemakers had shown that any labor union which wants to influence market outcomes must have an organizational domain that is co-extensive with the particular area of market competition (Reder and Ulman 1993). In union history this meant a nation-wide centralization of resources and decisions once product markets expanded in order "to take wages out of competition" between employers. Unions which failed to do this disappeared

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<sup>1</sup> Whether the long-term impact of globalization and European economic integration will lead to a shift in investment is at the heart of the debate over European economic and social policies (cf. Mayes 1995).

unless they had the rare chance to retreat to a protected niche, as did some craft unions. Unions which control only part of a labor market are subject to cost competition from market participants beyond their reach. Labor unions ought to cooperate, if not centralize, across national borders when markets become international.

Yet the challenge of internationalization does also entail a dilemma for labor unions. As in the past when unions centralized in response to the national integration of product and labor markets, the centralization of decision-making across national borders appears to be the logical response to the challenge of internationalization which tends to erode the power of unions within national labor markets. However, if political integration lags behind market integration and if national states are still focal in policy-making on social and labor issues, national unions have good reasons to remain "locked" into their national institutions and domestic strategies. This may hold particularly where labor unions have a strong position to lose, once they give up the national arena. They may believe that national alliances with employers and states at home can cushion the hard facts of international competition. This expectation may be reinforced by the uncertainty involved in betting on the international strategy, while successful precedents have been rare.

This brings us to the question what are the common interests shared by all labor unions willing to join in a European alliance. There are substantial differences in the prosperity of Europe's national economies and thus labor interests may vary considerably across Europe. Workers and unions in the poorer countries tend to perceive Europe-wide labor standards as devices to protect workers in richer countries against the transfer of investment and jobs towards the weaker economies. High labor standards draw only half-hearted support and are often undermined if necessary; especially, when common social minimal standards are not backed up by a redistributive (structural) policy paid by the richer countries in favor of the poorer regions in order to enhance their productivity. However, it is difficult to come to an agreement on redistributive policies of this kind in an intergovernmental decision-making system (Lange 1992; Streeck 1995).

Since the beginning, the main economic rationale of European integration was to enhance factor mobility and efficiency rather than promoting redistribution and equity (Addison and Siebert 1991; Lepsius 1991). Initially, it was assumed that economic interdependence should, or would, produce convergence. However, when no such tendency was observable, European politicians abandoned the "harmonization" policy target in favor of the principle of "mutual recognition". Despite the regional policies and cohesion measures assisting the peripheral economies and regions, the EU is no genuine welfare state committed to redistributing opportunities through the establishment of social rights against the vagaries of markets.<sup>2</sup> Labor markets and social security arrangements in Europe have still a high "national" content (Esping-Andersen 1990), in spite of market forces and European integration. In many European countries, organized labor's influence in labor and social policy making is still institutionally enshrined within, and dependent on, the national welfare state, albeit with differences from one country to the next.

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<sup>2</sup> The literature on European social and regional policy has grown considerably in the last years. For "state of the art" examples see the reader by Leibfried and Pierson (1995); see also Lange (1992); Leibfried and Pierson (1992); Majone (1993); Marks (1992); Rhodes (1991); Streeck (1994).

## 2. Alternative Responses to the Challenges

Over a decade ago, in his essay about what might take European labor unions beyond Keynesianism, George Ross noted that in the face of the decline of national sovereignty over economic policy "any steps in the direction of internationalizing union action would be progressive", but what he observed was that "none of the union movements (...) is sufficiently aware of the new problems (Ross 1981: 641)" and that a nationalist (in his words "corporatist") response was more likely with the inherent danger of a downward spiral of protectionism. Like many politicians, union leaders in Europe are torn between national and transnational strategies. In some countries and sectors they are capable of co-managing labor markets, mitigating economic restructuring and influencing social policy decisions. It would be naive to expect national unions to forego the use of these considerable power resources in the domestic arena. However, foresighted union leaders know that the time of the three traditional types of "bordered" solidarity - between fellow workers, between workers and management, and between workers and the national state - is running out. De-collectivization of industrial relations, reorganization of work and production, and globalization will continue to undermine the existing forms in which unions have organized labor solidarity. Unions cannot wait and sit it out. Enclosed in their national arena they find their past strongholds shrinking and a less reliable base for engaging in international solidarity. The leap forward may be an adventurous one, since past securities must be given up for uncertain future benefits.

The step from the national to the transnational union is an important strategic decision: Where to draw its boundaries? With whom to share resources and rewards? We recall Max Weber's (1922) analysis of the importance of social closure, through which status groups and interest organizations try to control and protect their identity, solidarity and rewards. Opening the boundaries is among the most difficult decisions in the history of any social group and usually only taken after a crisis or when other alternatives are ruled out. In our view, three alternative responses to increased international interdependence can be distinguished for organized labor.

(1) The *adverse nationalist* response is built on, and reinforces, national closure and protectionism. European integration was rejected by the communist unions in the 1950s (and still remains opposed by the French CGT). There are less doubts about the possibilities of international union action, but in principle national action is preferred. The national state is seen as the most appropriate target and channel for defending worker interests. In this view, unions should come to its defense against the forces of international capital. Rose (1987) has given many examples of this Jacobin attitude of the CGT, for instance, its support for the protection of French industry, or its demand that immigrants should pledge their identification with the French nation-state.

(2) The *opportunist international* strategy is adopted by national interest organizations which expect positive returns from international cooperation, but are reluctant to commit themselves to supranational governance structures. In this case, "cross-border" solidarity is only mobilized where international action promotes the so-called "national interests". This comes close to the concentric model of solidarity and integration that is

also inherent in the subsidiarity principle, which is more popular among unions than they might be willing to admit in public. As Simmel (1908) observed, medieval society was based on such a concentric conception of group identity and solidarity, moving from one's own local occupational community to wider social circles of a more remote affinity. A typical opportunistic international response was also the European employers' campaign towards the Single Market Project and the Maastricht Treaty. In the case of European labor unions, it is fair to say that many have expressed a preference for common action on principle, but actual support is given only in so far as it serves national interests.<sup>3</sup> In recent years a manifestation of internationalism for domestic reasons was presented by the British unions. After years of opposing Britain's entry to the Common Market, the TUC decided to endorse the European Commission's campaign for the Social Dimension and take a pro-European stance. Teague and Grahl (1992: 208) drily observe that for the TUC "to be pro-EC was virtually synonymous with being anti-Thatcher".

(3) The *solidaristic supranational* response is the third, the most open and inclusive response, and at the same time the most utopian one at present. Such a strategy would rely on a transnational union which organizes beyond national borders and relies on mobilizing international solidarity. This alternative places its eggs entirely in the basket of a supranational governing body. It prefers functional interests ("class") to territorial allegiance ("nation") as the base of the organization, mobilization and representation of labor interests. Identity and solidarity would no longer be based on concentric circles from local to national to European membership, but on cross-cutting social ties that reinforces multiple non-territorial allegiances (Simmel 1908). Such a transnational union structure would not rely anymore on the national state for guaranteeing social rights but would have to invent new international strategies to counter globalization (Tilly 1995).

There are no examples that come close to this ideal-type, although a transnational union would not be unrealistic in the case of "footlose" workers that are highly mobile across national borders, have a strong occupational or professional identity and depend on rewards decided upon by supranational or international organizations. European air pilots or traffic controllers, but perhaps also technicians or managers in transnational corporations might be the first groups to profit from this strategy. It may seem paradoxical, indeed, that the very groups that are most prone to adopt the most far-fledged strategy of international solidarity, are privileged in terms of position, skills and benefits, and organize often in narrowly defined sectionist unions. In the light of the history of labor unions and of collective action theory in general (Olson 1965), the finding that transnational unions are more available to the journeymen of our time - internationally mobile managers and skilled professionals - should not surprise us. We will now turn to the different modes of organizing transnational collective action: the market, hierarchy and network options.

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<sup>3</sup> Ernest Haas (1958), studying the European Coal and Steel Community, found that the socialist and christian-democratic union leaders of the post-1945 era were among the most enthusiastic early supporters of the European idea. He did not fail to note that each wanted to bring benefits home and drew a line when supranationality conflicted with national interests.



### 3. The Pathway to Transnational "Bargaining": The Market Option

Based on his analysis of the history of collective bargaining and union organization in North-America, Lloyd Ulman (1975) specified three major market processes that force unions to switch from lower level to higher level bargaining: (1) downward pressures on wages through increased market integration; (2) an increase in factor mobility of capital and labor; and (3) the use of whipsaw tactics by employers. These market processes do occur in Europe: real wages have made a standstill in the 1980s in many countries and for many groups of workers; the factor mobility of capital and, to a lesser extent, of labor has increased; and examples of "divide and rule" by transnational companies do occur, for instance, in the notorious Hoover case, in which Scottish workers saw their "lowest bid" rewarded whereas French workers lost their jobs. The European integration of producer markets has led to a rise in cross-border trade, and in some sectors it has added to growing world market competition.<sup>4</sup>

Whether the Single Market project and further deregulations of financial markets will in fact spur a reallocation of investments away from high-wage countries on a substantial scale remains contested (Pelkmans 1990; Mayes 1995). The fragmentation of European labor markets, cultural and linguistic obstacles, and the reluctance of workers to move across borders, are among the factors explaining the low factor mobility of labor and the persistence of cross-national disparities. The decline of the Fordist mass-employment factory and thus the lack of employment opportunities to unskilled workers is an additional factor. Finally, the rise of the global firm and the restructuring of its internal labor market could make whipsaw tactics, playing off workers in different plants against each others, a permanent feature of employer strategies.

Yet these processes were already discussed in the 1960s when the first American TNCs invested in Western Europe. Union leaders and intellectuals saw them as the "make or break" of regions and the emerging World Company Councils as the "seedbeds" for transnational collective bargaining (Günther 1972; Levinson 1972; Piehl 1974). From the point of view of workers in TNCs, it is clearly not optimal that "each union bargains with one tentacle of the multinational corporate octopus" (Litvak and Maule 1972: 62). Among an elite of trade union leaders there was a strong perception of interdependence or, as Haas (1975: 863) defined it, "a feeling that autonomous action is inefficient, costly and uncertain". Such World Company Councils were set up with the help of national and international unions since the 1960s. A decade later the verdict was that nothing much had happened (Enderwick 1987; Northrup and Rowan 1979).<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Over 70 percent of EC trade is within the internal market as compared to trade with the external world market, that is, still below 15 percent of GDP for the three major trading blocs: USA, Japan, and EC (Hirst and Thompson 1992: 376-8).

<sup>5</sup> Rose (1987: 194) is particularly sanguine: "we must now send to the archives those scenarios for growth of trade unions collaboration canvassed by radical intellectuals in the seventies which portrayed multinational business as a corporate capital adversary that would provoke an equally transnational class conscious response from labor."

Why was transnational collective bargaining never successful? A literature overview yields a harvest of arguments (cf. Günther 1972; Levinson 1972; Northrup and Rowan 1979; Piehl 1972): 1) national differences in labor law, union organization, power of labor, bargaining methods, and concertation practices; 2) resistance by national unions due to ideological differences, reluctance to give up authority, and competition for investment relocation; 3) management opposition in principle, and more recently the decentralization into divisional, rather than regional subsidiaries (Marginson and Sisson 1994); 4) indifference by employees due to the lack of knowledge, cross-border conflicts of interests, and mere chauvinism; 5) lacking support from national governments and major political parties, because they want to retain control over major industries and companies ('national champions') as well as retain the political control over (allied) trade unions; and 6) weak support by international agencies (EU, OECD, ILO) for international codes of conduct, recognition rules, or legal bargaining frameworks, not to speak of the legal hurdles to international sympathy strikes and enactment of collective bargaining results by governments.

The fact that many companies operate on a global rather than the European scale, and that even within Europe wages and productivity levels vary widely, are further obstacles to Euro-wide collective bargaining. Moreover, a common perception of mutual benefit is not easily established within the European union movements. Unions which represent workers in northern and southern Europe would have to engage in extensive rounds of inter-union bargaining in which they must decide how much the common norm should be in favour of advanced labor standards and how much subsidy should go to the weaker members of the alliance. It would also entail the delicate question to what degree the alliance should turn a blind eye to a lax application of the norm by members who stand to lose most in the short term (cf. Reder and Ulman 1993).

Nevertheless, some collective bargaining efforts have occurred on an international scale in Europe. Almost without exception, this has taken place "in the shadow of the law" (Bercusson 1992), within the new procedures of the Maastricht Treaty and as a last resort for employers to prevent or forestall pending EU legislation. We will discuss these developments below. As a "voluntaristic" process, entirely based on a perception of mutual gains of employers and unions, and forced upon employers by the mere combined labor market power of unions, international collective bargaining has so far proved to be a non-starter. Given the dependency from government regulation and the need to balance the wide differences in power and interests across Europe, labor unions have turned instead to the hierarchy option as a remedy.

#### **4. The Pathway to a European Union Confederation: The Hierarchy Option**

Labor unions have tried, again and again, to repeat the national success stories of union centralization on an international scale, that is, relying on the *hierarchy* option. Over a century, labor unions have evolved from locally fragmented worker coalitions into nationwide organizations. In this process, local or regional union federations lost most of their

powers and functions; they were subordinated to national union bureaucracies with control over administration and finances. Furthermore, functional interests have become the main pillar of national peak associations and the most powerful level of union activities in most northern European countries. In these countries, union centralization was also promoted through political conflicts and alliances. National unions in Europe predated universal suffrage, though they were amongst the main driving forces in advancing the political rights of workers. In these struggles they forged close alliances with socialist (and in some cases, christian) parties, which in turn reinforced the tendencies to centralize (Fulcher 1991; Ebbinghaus 1993). As a consequence, national union confederations emerged in all countries and became the "centers" of national labor movements, though their power and prestige varied widely (Windmuller 1975; Visser 1990). Simultaneous efforts to achieve the same goal by an "International" proved less successful and soon faced the problem of political schisms and the crisis of internationalism that led to reorganizations in the aftermath of both world wars.

In order to evaluate the chances of the hierarchy option in transnational union action in Europe today, it is important to recall that timing, speed, and synchronization of economic and political development have been extremely important in national union development. Where political and economic struggles coincided in a relatively brief period in time, the centralizing influence on unions and labor relations was strong, but when they arrived at different times, or with a low intensity, earlier organizational solutions had settled and could not easily be displaced (Ebbinghaus 1993, Visser 1990). There seems to be a feedback process between the organization of labor and capital: the more labor became a credible centralizing force, the more capital (i.e. qua employer) was compelled to organize in response. The upward centralization spiral created a pattern of industrial relations typical of national welfare states, it "is an example of a figuration in which opponents compel one another to evolve to higher levels of integration (Swaan 1988: 175)".

A comparable centralizing dynamic, however, seems to be absent in today's European industrial relations. The current industrial relations in most countries and sectors are, in fact, showing a tendency towards decentralization. Rather than a return to national income policies, we witness a shift towards the company as the major arena and actor in industrial relations in Europe (Baglioni and Crouch 1990; Ferner and Hyman 1992; Visser and Ruysseveldt 1996). The underlying processes are decentralization of production, a search for flexible employment relations, and the withdrawal of the state from industrial relations wherever possible. The prospect that a European "would-be" state will recoup the terrain abandoned by national states is extremely dim. Moreover, unlike the development of welfare states in most European countries, there is no compelling dynamic of a European socialist party that seeks to unite labor and - in alliance with it - fights for the extension of the power of the European Parliament and the establishment of social citizenship rights in Europe.

Nevertheless, European organized labor has found ways to cooperate across borders and to centralize some of their scarce resources. In recent decades, some "tripartite" consultation and even some bargaining has taken place between European unions, employers, governments and the Commission. The *European Trade Union Confederation* (ETUC) is

a central player in Brussels; its 47 national affiliates organize some 45 million workers in 22 European countries - all EU and EFTA members plus San Marino, Turkey, Malta and Cyprus (see Table 1). ETUC organizes about 30% of all workers in Western Europe, that is, the majority (90%) of all unionized workers (Visser and Ebbinghaus 1992). While organized labor in Europe is better organized than its global competitors (34% in Europe, as compared to 24% in Japan and 14% in USA), there are large cross-national differences in the level of unionization and the severeness of the current membership crisis. Within Europe the highest density levels are found in Scandinavia (Sweden with over 80%), whereas the lowest levels in Southern Europe (France with less than 10%) (Visser 1991; OECD 1994).

ETUC undisputable is Europe's main union organization; its "associational monopoly" is assured in all 22 countries. Today, there is only one major omission within the European Union - the French Communist CGT. Other (ex-)communist unions have been admitted one by one, starting with the Italian CGIL in the mid-1970s, the Spanish CC.OO followed in 1990, and the Portuguese CGT-P only recently. ETUC today is present in all sectors and occupations, though it faces two smaller Euro-wide peak federations among managerial staff and senior civil servants.<sup>6</sup>

ETUC's aims are, according to its statutes, "the common representation and promotion of social, economic and cultural interests of workers at the European level and, in particular, in the European institutions" (ETUC Statutes). The organization was created in 1973 but its predecessors date back to the 1950s (cf. Barnounin 1986). We can distinguish three major stages in the formation of European labor unions with turning points in 1973 and 1991. Until the early 1970s the international union organizations were divided by ideology (social-democratic, christian, communist) and territorial groupings (European Community vs. European Free Trade Association) (Visser and Ebbinghaus 1992). In 1973, after difficult negotiations, it was decided that the new European organization should be open to union confederations from countries outside the EC and to those that were not members of the *International Confederation of Free Trade Unions* (ICFTU), in which non-communist unions had cooperated world-wide since 1948. Most European members of the *Christian World Federation of Labor* (WFL) joined the new ETUC after its first year. By overcoming the religious split, ETUC enhanced its representativeness, especially in the Benelux countries and in Switzerland.<sup>7</sup> The decision to admit the Italian Euro-communist confederation CGIL was the wedge through which other (ex-)communist unions could later enter the ETUC, provided they relinquished their relations with the (now defunct) communist *World Federation of Trade Unions* (WFTU).

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<sup>6</sup> The European Confederation of Independent Unions (*Confédération européenne des syndicats indépendants*, CESI) combines 14 small minority confederations from 11 countries, an independent European union of train drivers, and the European Federation of Senior Civil Servants (CIF) which itself has 12 members in 8 EU members states. The European Confederations of Managerial and Professional Organizations (*Confédération européenne des cadres*, CEC) has 11 members.

<sup>7</sup> A dispute between French unions delayed the affiliation of the catholic CFTC until 1991. The German DGB kept the tiny CGB out; the small Christian-Democratic union confederation in Spain, a very small protestant union center in Denmark, and a Vatican worker association have also remained outside ETUC.

Table 1: *National Union Confederations affiliated to ETUC*

Abbrev.	Name	Country	Year	Domain	Orientation	Members
DGB	Deutscher Gewerkschaftsbund	GE	1969*	all	unitary	11,015,612
TUC	Trades Union Congress	GB	1973	all	labor	7,684,462
CGIL	Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro	IT	1974	all	communist	5,231,325
CISL	Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori	IT	1969	all	catholic	4,033,400
LO	Landesorganisationen i Sverige	SW	1973	manual	socialist	1,972,261
ÖGB	Österreichischer Gewerkschaftsbund	AU	1973	all	socialist	1,633,480
TÜRK-İS	Türkije İsci sendikaları konfederasyonu	TU	1988	all		~1,500,000
LO i D	Landsorganisationen i Danmark	DE	1973	manual	socialist	1,471,064
UIL	Unione Italiana del Lavoro	IT	1969*	all	socialist	1,571,844
CSC	Confédération des Syndicats Chrétiens	BE	1974	all	catholic	1,274,029
CGTP-IN	Confederação Geral dos Trabalhadores Portugueses	PO	1995	all	communist	1,186,000
TCO	Tjänstemännens Centralorganisation	SW	1973	non-manual		1,157,659
SAK	Suomen Ammattiliittojen Keskusjärjestö	FI	1974	manual	socialist	1,112,900
FNV	Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging	NE	1981	all	unitary	1,083,900
CCOO	Confederacion Sindical de Comisiones Obreras	SP	1990	all	communist	988,615
UGT-P	Uniao Geral dos Trabalhadores	PO	1979	all	socialist	942,325
FGTB	Fédération Générale du Travail de Belgique	BE	1969*	all	socialist	937,668
LO i N	Landsorganisasjonen i Norge	NO	1973	all	socialist	723,278
UGT	Unión General de Trabajadores de España	SP	1973	all	socialist	700,000
ICTU	Irish Congress of Trade Unions	IR	1974	all	labor	~672,600
GSEE	Geniki Synomospondia Ergaton Ellados	GR	1976	all		600,000
DAG	Deutsche Angestellten Gewerkschaft	GE	1990	non-manual		578,352
CFDT	Confédération Française Démocratique du Travail	FR	1974	all	socialist	~428,000
CGT-FO	CGT - Force Ouvrière	FR	1969*	all	socialist	~400,000
SGB	Schweizerischer Gewerkschaftsbund	SZ	1973	manual	socialist	436,548
FTF	Funktionæremes og Tjenestemændenes Fællesråd	DE	1973	non-manual		335,306
CNV	Christelijk-Nationaal Vakverbond	NE	1974	all	christian	319,800
VSA	Vereinigung Schweizerischer Angestelltenverbände	SZ	1991	non-manual		133,739
MHP	Vakcentrale voor Middelbaar en Hoger Personeel	NE	1991	staff		133,500
AC	Akademikernes Centralorganisation	DE	1991	public		116,592
CNG	Christlichnationaler Gewerkschaftsbund der Schweiz	SZ	1974	manual	christian	111,759
CFTC	Confédération Française des Travailleurs Chrétiens	FR	1990	all	christian	~110,000
ELA-STV	Ezuko Langilleen Alkartasuna	SP	1974	regional		~110,000
ADEDY	Anotati Diikisis Enoseos Demosion Ypallilon	GR	1990	public		~100,000
ASI	Althydusamband Island	IC	1973	all	socialist	70,000
CGT-L	Confédération Générale du Travail du Luxembourg	LU	1969*	all	socialist	45,000
SEK	Synomospondia ergaton kypron	CY	1982			~41,000
GWU	General Workers Union	MA	1975	manual	socialist	39,391
CMTU	Confederation of Maltese Trade Unions	MA	1980		christian	28,018
LCGB	Lëtzebuenger Chrëschtliche Gewerkschafts-Bond	LU	1974	all	christian	23,000
BSRB	Bandalag Starfsmanna Ríkis of Baeja	IC	1980	public		16,855
KTS	Kıbrıs türk işci sendikaları i federasyonu	CY	1982			~10,000
CSdL	Confederazione Sanmarinese del Lavoro	SM	1991	all	communist	2,500
CDLS	Confederazione Democratica dei Lavoratori Sanmarinesi	SM	1991	all	christian	1,800
DISK	Türkiye devrimci işci sendikaları konfederasyonu	TU	1985		socialist	n.a.

SOURCE: Visser and Ebbinghaus 1992: Table 7.4, pp. 216-7; updates for 1992: Ebbinghaus and Visser 1996

NOTE: (\*) affiliation year to EFTUC, refounded as ETUC in 1973. (~) estimated membership; membership in 1992, except for FR: 1990; BE, IR, MA: 1991.

ETUC's encompassiveness is not only based on the inclusion of the main political union movement. It is also due to the integration of functional interest groupings that were not part of the traditional political blue-collar labor movement. From its start, ETUC embraced the white-collar organizations of Scandinavia, and in later years ETUC's organizational domain was widened to other countries as well, some had been already indirectly represented through transnational sector organizations.

Following the perceived challenge of the Single European Market project, ETUC congress strengthened the executive committee. The ETUC reform in 1991 changed also the decision-making rules and introduced a qualified majority of two-thirds instead of requiring unanimity in all cases. Despite this move towards supranational decision-making, ETUC is still a rather weak organization with feeble resources that encompasses a stunning diversity of organizations, ideologies and politics. The organization has no bargaining mandate and cannot take decisions without consulting its major affiliates. Given the diversity of ETUC's affiliates, the adoption of a rather symbolic "lowest common denominator" policy is often unavoidable. Furthermore, ETUC suffers from the fact that its two largest affiliates (DGB and TUC) have no bargaining mandate themselves, otherwise they have hardly anything in common. They are opposites in nearly all other aspects: in union structure, organization, resources, as well as interest intermediation and the traditions of industrial relations. Until recently they were deeply divided over European integration and held different views regarding ETUC's role in Europe. On the other hand, a Franco-German alliance - similar to the Bonn-Paris axis in European politics - could not bear fruit either, given the political schism and the related weakness of French unions.

The formation of ETUC was indeed a marriage of diverse strategic conceptions about the future of Europe. Unions from the original six Common Market countries wanted a strong Brussels-based lobby organization that targets primarily the Community institutions. Representatives from Britain and Scandinavia emphasized the international solidarity with non-EC unions. They maintained that a "small" EC solution would weaken the fight against multinationals and add fuel to the fears of European unions becoming the junior partners in a "Rich Men's Club".<sup>1</sup>

With the early inclusion of non-EC countries the ETUC, for once, proved to be ahead of its time. Little adjustment was needed when Greece, Spain and Portugal and later a group of former EFTA countries acceded to the European Union. After the fall of Communism, ETUC has granted "observer status" to a dozen union movements from central and eastern Europe, countries which are also at the doorsteps of the European Union. Their accession, however, will increase ETUC's diversity and further strain efforts to aggregate and represent disparate labor interests in a meaningful way. The price for inclusiveness has always been organizational frailty, lack of effective supranational authority

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<sup>1</sup> Moreover, the Scandinavians feared a split in the Nordic Council of Trade Unions with Denmark's entry in the Common Market. TUC was against U.K. membership of the Common Market and was opposed to supranational power for the new Brussels-based union organization.

and low membership involvement. In the past, the "widening" has slowed down the "deepening" of the ETUC.

As a transnational peak association of national union confederations and now also European sector committees, the ETUC is an organizational species of far greater complexity than the national affiliates. Quite similar to Brussels technocracy, ETUC remains by and large the affair of national union leaders meeting sporadically, and of some union officials serving permanently in Brussels. Everything is far removed from the ordinary member or even national union. It is not quite conceivable how the ETUC can negotiate binding agreements or call an international strike. Indeed, it does not hold such a mandate, and it is therefore called rightly "a head without a body" (Dolvik 1992). The Nordic unions have criticized the "democratic deficit" of ETUC, since union leaders do take decisions in Brussels which they need not defend at home. On the other hand, there is a "decision deficit", since national union leaders and delegates are constrained by various complex and time consuming decision making procedures which they can invoke whenever expedient. ETUC thus resembles more its weaker and under-resourced affiliates than the stronger ones (Visser and Ebbinghaus 1992).<sup>2</sup> In short, indirect membership relations, a restricted and twice filtered mandate, organizational diversity, scarce and unequal resources, decentralization in the national arena, as well as the absence of a state interlocutor and a political dynamic are among the factors that restrict the "hierarchy" path in the European international union movement.

## **5. The Pathway to European Sector Organizations: The Problem of Hierarchical Ordering**

The formation of a transnational peak association of national union confederations, however, is not the only form of centralizing labor unions in Europe. Parallel to the efforts of the relatively politicized international alliances of socialist, christian or communist union confederations, national unions within the same organizational domain be it sector or profession have aimed at transnational cooperation. In fact, national unions that organize workers in particular occupations or sectors are generally of earlier origin and hold more power than the peak associations of which they are members. Collective bargaining is almost always an activity of labor unions, with confederations in a coordinating role at most (Windmuller 1975; Visser 1990). Transnational cooperation of occupational or sectorial unions, in many cases, even predated the coming-together of the Free union confederations (first congress in 1901). Numerous *International Trade Secretariats* (ITS) were founded between 1873 and 1913 on the European continent, often sponsored by the rapidly growing German unions of that time (Leich and Kruse 1991). Later, especially after 1945, they expanded their territorial domain world-wide, yet they were caught in the ideological and political conflicts which plagued international unionism (Windmuller 1980).

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<sup>2</sup> The ETUC has only a small staff of 32, as well as 7 paid officials in Brussels, a small research institute, technical bureau, and union training school which partly depends on EU subsidies.

Table 2: *European Industry Committees affiliated to ETUC*

Abbrev.	European Industry Committee (EIC)	Founda- tion	Reor- ganized	ETUC entry	N of unions	Members (1000s)
EPSC	European Public Services Committee	1974	1981	1979	100	7,000
EMF	European Metalworkers' Federation	1963	1971	1973*	43	6,000
EURO- FIET	International Federation of Commercial, Clerical, Professional and Technical Employees - European Regional Organization	1964	1973	1973*	129	6,000
EFBWW	European Federation of Building and Woodworkers	1958	1974	1984	51	3,100
ETTUC	European Teachers Trade Union Committee	1956	1975	1981	67	2,800
CTWUE	Committee of Transport and Workers' Unions in the EC	1958	1979	1979	89	2,500
EFCGU	European Federation of Chemical and General Workers Union	1958	1988	1988	51	2,000
EFA	European Federation of Agricultural Workers' Unions	1958	1971	1973*	26	2,000
EPTT	Postal, Telegraph and Telephone International - European Committee	1967	1973	1973*	67	1,900
ECF-IUF	European Committee of Food, Catering and Allied Workers' Union within the IUF	1958	1975	1978	70	1,400
ETUC-TCL	European Trade Union Committee for Textiles, Clothing and Leather	1964	1975	1988	43	1,300
EGF	European Graphical Federation	1973	1985	1987	44	700
ITUCMM	Contact Office ITUCMM (ECSC)	1952	1958	1973*	15	400
EGJ	European Group of Journalists	1988		1989	45	180
ECTUEA	European Committee of Arts, Mass Media and Entertainment	1973		1973*	24	100
MEF	Miners' European Federation	1991		1991	28	..

SOURCE: Visser and Ebbinghaus 1992: Table 7.6, pp. 226; updates: informations from ETUC and Martin and Ross 1995.

NOTE: (\*) unions recognized at foundation of ETUC in 1973; membership in thousands, most recent figure.

In Europe, two sets of European sector organizations developed over the past decades: 1) Brussels-based pressure groups, specializing in technical expertise and advice in highly integrated sectors, in particular in coal, steel, agriculture, and food; and 2) offsprings of the regionalization of existing ITs. Consequently, the existing European sector organizations differ widely in structure, membership, representation, resources, and strategy (cf. Stöckl 1986; Rütters and Tudyka 1990). Their importance varies greatly across sectors and their impact on national collective bargaining is still very limited. For instance, attempts to co-ordinate bargaining for shorter working hours in the 1980s showed little success.

The problem of 'hierarchical ordering', that is, integrating these sector organizations within ETUC's structure, has for long been disregarded in the public and academic debate. Before ETUC's foundation, the development of European sector organizations was not co-ordinated with, and sometimes in fact frustrated, the attempts to build political alliances of national union centers. After its foundation, ETUC started to recognize some sector alliances as *European Industrial Committees* (EICs), though it took considerable time before they fell in line with ETUC policy of encompassing not only socialist, but also christian and (ex)-communist unions. Currently, the ETUC recognizes 16 EIC's of very different size, scope and composition (see Table 2).



Until the recent ETUC statute reform, the influence of EICs was rather limited and cooperation was rather underdeveloped. Since 1991 the EICs send one-third of the delegates to ETUC conventions that have voting rights, except on financial and statute matters.<sup>3</sup> Although the latest ETUC reform acknowledges the need to integrate the functional interests directly rather than through the national circuit, the problem of hierarchical ordering in a transnational peak association remains. Indeed, the dominance of the "political" (territorial) pillar over the second, "functional" (sectoral) pillar, continues. The resulting dual structure of representation is in contrast with the national development of union confederations in northern Europe, where territorial interests became subordinated to functional interests. In the ETUC, however, both territorial and functional interests will have to be accommodated as long as national capitals, and thus also national union centers, are focal in EU politics. On the other hand, for future transnational collective bargaining the sector organizations will be of prime importance, as the national sector unions play the leading role in national bargaining structures. Yet given the slow advances in social concertation between ETUC (or its EICs) and the employers, rank-and-file unionists have tried to achieve transnational solidarity from below by using the network option.

## **6. The Pathways to Transnational Links: The Network Option**

The network strategy may be the default option on the road towards international labor solidarity. Here the focus is on building horizontal, transnational links between workers and unionists from different countries in order to exchange information, coordinate action, and enhance collective solidarity. These cross-border connections might be established at different levels, with different degrees of formality, and involvement of others. In contrast to the hierarchy option, there is no intention to establish a hierarchical peak organization to which resources and competences would be transferred. Instead, the idea is to build a network of workers or unionists with common interests. The building of transnational networks between unionists is a first step to counter the information advantages and whip-saw tactics of employers. Furthermore, these networks enhance common perceptions of problems and possibilities for joint action. These networks may also gradually form closer ties and foster trust, a precondition for effective joint bargaining.

The promotion of a solidaristic logic of collective action between workers from different countries is essential for the achievement of "international solidarity". The company and regional level may be crucial in this context. Such developments make it also necessary to go beyond a "top-down" analysis of European interest groups and look at what unions actually do in the regions and firms. For organized labor, building rank-and-file support is an important stepping stone on the road to international solidarity. The place to start is the region or company; coordination may take place, territorially, in cross-border regional union networks as a response to cross-border regional integration, or, function-

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<sup>3</sup> In ETUC congresses national representatives in EICs are nominated as delegates, but EIC officials have only a consultative role in the ETUC executive (Platzer 1991: 92-92).

ally, in transnational works councils in response to the rise of multinational (Euro-) companies.

In some regions with considerable cross-border movements of labor and economic integration, *Interregional Trade Union Councils* (ITUCs) of regional or local union bodies were formed. By the end of 1992, ETUC claimed the existence of 16 ITUCs and had 3 more in preparation. Their activities are limited to regional matters and assistance to cross-border commuters and foreign workers. The ITUCs often run against language problems, a lack of information, meagre resources, and finally a weak lobby in Brussels, in the national capitals, and in the regions. Moreover, ETUC's financial and political support to ITUCs is rather limited. In the years ahead, regional coordination will probably gain in importance to the extent that cohesion measures and regional policies become more momentous in the European Union (Marks 1992). The ITUCs may be elevated in status through EU attempts to devolve power to the regions under subsidiarity arrangements, in particular, as a result of the augmented regional funds and the new consultative European Regional Committees.

A network strategy that has shown more momentum and received more attention due to EU regulative efforts are the cross-border contacts between works councilors and unionists within multinational companies. The *European Works Councils* (EWCs), first initiated here and there on unions pressure, now also mandated by a EU-directive under the Social Protocol (excluding UK), is another form of transnational "rank-and-file" coordination. Worker participation in the enterprise has always been a controversial issue since its forms and content directly touches upon fundamental issues of union strategy, management prerogatives and state intervention (cf. Sorge 1976; Turner 1992; Windolf 1992). Some unions fear the undermining of sector bargaining, others fear communist rank-and-file influence, yet others the opening of a "second channel" of representation, independent from unions as in the case of German works councils. Thus it is no surprise that unions did not mobilize much enthusiasm for a common legal project of worker participation in Europe. In the 1970s, ETUC tried to gain EC support for a German-Dutch model of co-determination, but found not much support among governments, employers or even within their own ranks. Later attempts of the Commission to legislate information and consultation rights in Europe-wide companies (*European Company Statute, Vredeling Directive*) foundered in the 1980s.

Only recently, shortly after all countries had ratified the Maastricht Treaty in November 1993, the deadlock was finally resolved. The Commission was now able to circumvent the predictable British veto by using the new procedure under the Social Protocol (that allows the United Kingdom to opt-out of EU regulation in certain areas of social policy). The directive on consultation and information of employees in large multinational firms, however, was watered down considerably in successive but inconclusive negotiations with employers and unions. The EU directive covers an estimated 1,500-2000 companies with at least 1,000 employees within the EU, and at least 100 employees in two or more countries. Since it was approved under the Social Protocol, the directive does not apply to the United Kingdom, albeit to British firms operating on the continent. Moreover,

many European firms based in Britain have decided to create information and consultation procedures for their employees on a voluntary basis (Hall 1995).

The directive invites management and labor (unions and employee representatives) to negotiate the establishment of a European Works Council (EWC). If negotiations do not produce an agreement, a minimum statute applies by law. The EWC cannot be compared with the works councils in Germany or in other countries with strong legislation on worker participation in firms; they have hardly any of the rights and sanctions available to these councils (Rogers and Streeck 1995). EWCs are best characterized as "clearing houses" for information between works councils, employee representatives and union officials from national subsidiaries. It is still an open question whether they become the "seedbeds" for transnational collective bargaining. Presently and in the near future the importance of EWCs may lay in the fact that they create some thousand small networks with up to 30 employees and union representatives involved in transnational industrial relations. They might add a valuable dimension of "learning" and of developing "best practices" to the emergent transnational labor relations of Europe.

## **7. Barriers to Transnational Union Cooperation**

Having discussed the pathways to transnational solidarity of European organized labor, we have to account for the rather belated but meagre advances on those roads. Thus we will now turn to the barriers that hamper transnational union cooperation, first to the barriers deriving from the national conditions and later we will discuss the barriers at the European level. We will argue that the first barrier to transnational cooperation is the entrenched national union diversity across Europe which hampers European unity.

Comparative studies have shown time and again that Europe is a continent of peoples with different histories and languages, whatever the forces of markets and politics. But on this continent of entrenched diversity, unity is a necessary objective in order to prevent warfare and secure welfare in a more competitive world. However, European unity can only be achieved by accommodating diversity rather than by suppressing it. "Making the most of diversity" is also a challenge for organized labor (Visser and Ebbinghaus 1992). Across Europe, labor interests are organized, mobilized and represented in patterns which reflect variations in persistent and deeply rooted national cleavages and institutions (Ebbinghaus 1993). European labor unity poses the same problem as political unity: how to encompass and manage national diversity?

The sources of European union diversity are rooted in the national histories of labor movements in Europe. Certainly, the social and political conflicts emerging from rapid industrialization and the pressures for democratization by the working class shaped the labor-capital cleavage in all European countries (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). However, the particular form of party-union relations within the labor movements varied widely across countries (Ebbinghaus 1993). Though labor movements emerged everywhere out of the class cleavage, other political and religious cleavages intersected in a number of countries and gave rise to deep schisms in working-class organization, leading to a split into socialist, communist and christian labor movements. Conflicts in the labor market and social

differentiation engendered further class fragmentation. These "functional" cleavages led to competing principles of organization within and between union movements: craft or industry, exclusion or integration of non-manual employees, and private vs. public sector. Union diversity became institutionalized in the fragmentation of interest aggregation across and within national union movements.<sup>4</sup>

Union diversity is part of the social, cultural and political heterogeneity of Europe and a corollary of the successful national integration of labor into polity and society. As Adolf Sturmthal observed four decades ago: "In the process of growing from small sectarian groups into large mass organizations, the labor movements were inevitably 'nationalized'. They took on the characteristics and, with them, the diversities of the nations in which they developed" (Sturmthal 1953: 16). The history of union movements resembles the "freezing" of cleavage structures into political party systems (Lipset and Rokkan 1967). Enduring conflicts in the national arena have left their marks on how unions define and organize the collective interests of workers and how they represent and defend interests in confrontation with employers and in the public domain (Crouch 1993).

The nationalization of organized labor has deep and lasting organizational roots far beyond national interests, values and symbols. Since nationally distinct patterns of representation and collective action are still strongly institutionalized, these are obstacles to international solidarity. Historically, international cooperation in the labor movement has also been divided by political (and sometimes functional) cleavages: The "Internationals" based on different *Weltanschauung* and separate international organizations for white collar workers and public servants emerged on a world-wide scale (Windmuller 1980).

How can European unity be organized from such disparate fragments across Europe? How can labor unity be achieved at the European level, if it was, and is, not realized within each society? Union movements of a particular political or organizational type find themselves confronted with rival organizations abroad to which they are antagonistic at home. Moreover, the functional cleavages add to these difficulties of organizing transnational union action, especially with respect to collective bargaining. What should be the organizing principle along which the various general, craft, or industrial unions as well as the professional, white-collar, or civil service associations can be grouped together in the transnational arena?

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<sup>4</sup> Today, divisions between socialist, christian, and communist union movements are still significant in Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, and Switzerland. The craft-cum-general unionism left a lasting mark on British, Danish, and Irish union structure. Separate white collar unions are typical in Scandinavia, Germany and Switzerland, and also, albeit mainly within the main union confederation(s), in Austria, Belgium, Britain, and Ireland. Separate peak associations of public servants exist in Scandinavia, France, Germany, Greece, and the Netherlands. Regional splits are most notably found in Spain (cf. Ebbinghaus 1993; Visser 1990).

Table 3: *National Union Movements and ETUC Affiliates*

Country	Density	N of confederations	of which in ETUC			Share in membership
			N of unions	N of confederations	N of unions	
Sweden	82.5	4	71	2	43	91.7
Finland	72.0	4	99	2	39	75.6
Denmark	75.2	4	+115	2	76	85.3
Norway	56.0	3	156	1	29	59.8
Ireland	50.8	1	81	1	58	90.9
Belgium	50.1	3	+37	2	36	91.1
Austria	46.2	1	15	1	15	100.0
G.B.	39.1	1	287	1	74	82.4
Italy	38.8	3	+72	3	72	100.0
Greece	34.1	2	..	2	..	100.0
Portugal	31.8	2	..	2	..	90.0
Germany	32.9	5	+140	2	17	82.9
Netherlands	25.5	4	232	3	116	89.0
Spain	16.1	5	..	3	..	90.0
France	10.8	5	..	3	..	44.3

SOURCE: Ebbinghaus and Visser 1996.

NOTE: (+) number understated; union density and affiliation to ETUC as of 1992.

The differences in union organization across Europe also entail consequences for the common mobilization (see Table 3). The crucial question is whether unions are capable of mobilizing their potential clientele to join, share costs, and engage in collective action. A cursory look at indicators of membership, resources, and collective action by national unions reveals a deep and enduring diversity in mobilization patterns across Europe (Shalev 1992; Visser 1990, 1992). The dependence of unions on employers, public authorities, and political allies has inevitably consequences for the role of unions in each society (Rosanvallon 1988). Given such differences, the ability of unions to mobilize and represent workers varies across countries. There appears to be little convergence in union mobilization patterns across Europe (Visser 1991).

Union diversity thus creates a number of problems for transnational union action: "exploitation of the strong by the weak"; jurisdictions and domains which do not fit; different definitions of what unions "ought to do" and "how to do it". The current downward trend in unionization, the financial crisis and in some cases the dependence upon state or party support create further obstacles. National unions are often under pressure to spend more of their meagre resources on "visible" membership services, European activities are certainly not among those. Budgets and staff of national confederations have been downsized, also in response to the decentralization of collective bargaining. Expenditure on international commitments is under severe scrutiny in many unions and confederations, since it is the farthest removed from rank-and-file concerns. Hence, transnational union organizations tend to be under-resourced (Visser and Ebbinghaus 1992).

Even if problems of diversity and unequal strength were resolved, the pronounced cross-national variations in interest representation would create a third, to some extent exogenous barrier to transnational union action. Across Europe, union movements maintain different linkages to the political system. In the past, union movements have drawn

strength from their partisan linkages, especially when the allied party was holding government office (Korpi 1983). On the other hand, partisan involvement has caused deep divisions within and large variations across European countries. Union movements in some countries or sectors are deeply embedded in established practices of bi- and tripartite concertation, others have rejected such practices. There is still a considerable variation in the impact of interest group politics on national policy-making in Western Europe (cf. Mazey and Richardson 1993; Schendelen 1993). Expectations of convergence and cross-fertilization of interest group systems have proved unwarranted. If anything, interest representation and political class alliances have been further fragmented (Thomas 1993: 223-227), reducing the primacy of organized capital and labor in national and EU lobbying.

Cross-national diversity in industrial relations has been described in numerous studies with regard to employer associations, collective bargaining, state regulation, and institutionalized forms of worker participation (Crouch 1993; Ferner and Hyman 1992; Rogers and Streeck 1995; Slomp 1991; Visser and Ruysseveldt 1996). Despite the expectations of convergence theory, political, legal, and cultural contexts bear heavily on industrial relations (Poole 1986) and there is no universal dynamic which transforms industrial relations from a national into an international game (Cox 1972: 5). Unions remain locked into national patterns of interest intermediation.

Moreover, the Brussels power play does not appeal to each national union movement on equal footing, it depends largely on the national settings. Some union movements have reasons to fear the loss of "quasi-public" status (Offe 1981) at home, others hold so little status in the domestic public arena that they can only gain from going to Brussels. One has often the impression that the unions which benefit most from cooperation are least able to promote it and achieve domestic endorsement, whereas those unions which would be able to put pressure on Brussels are reluctant to give up their home base. This conundrum of diversity in interest intermediation tends to obstruct the formulation of a European union strategy. Unions in Germany, Scandinavia, and the Netherlands are skeptical towards European collective bargaining and prefer to take on the legislative route. They believe that political decisions and regulations from Brussels are needed as a protection against "social dumping" and they distrust the feeble democratic base and efficacy of collective agreements or self-regulation in countries with weak union representation. Unions in France, Spain, Portugal or Greece expect more of the self-regulation route which was opened under the Maastricht Treaty, partly because of a national tradition of "bargaining in the shadow of the law" (Dolvik 1992; Groux, Morinaux, and Pernot 1993).

## **8. Barriers to European Social Policy Regulation**

Even if unions were "pushed" enough by market and political developments and overcame the many internal barriers on the road to international solidarity, they would still meet formidable exogenous barriers residing in the nature of the supranational EU regime. Our main argument is that the European Union is far removed from the "stateness" of the national welfare states which hold strong regulatory powers in the social policy and labor domain. The "pull" factors that have promoted nation-wide coordination and centraliza-

tion in the domestic industrial relations arena seem to be lacking at the European level. As a intergovernmental institution, the European Union lacks many competences and means of even the weakest of its member states.

From the very beginning of the Common Market the social and labor policy domain was of secondary concern. Its social provisions mainly dealt with measures to improve labor mobility and avoid distortions of competition by different health and safety standards. With the exception of equal rights and some employment protection measures, social policy debates remained dormant until the late 1980s, when the debate on the Social Dimension led to the signing of the non-binding Social Charter (from which Britain abstained) (Teague and Grahl 1992).

With few significant exceptions for which qualified majority voting has been introduced through the Maastricht Treaty and the Social Protocol in 1991, EU social and labor policies remains by and large subject to unanimity and thus intergovernmental bargaining, with ample space for the threat and use of national vetoes. Moreover, the European Union must rely on the apparatus and instruments of the member states for the legal enactment and implementation which may give rise to further back-tracking by reluctant or malcontent governments. The fuzzy principle of subsidiarity that was introduced in the Maastricht Treaty is readily invoked to set further limits on supranational competences and EU regulatory intervention.

Labor unions engaged in lobbying encounter a complex set of supranational and intergovernmental institutions with restricted regulatory competences, underdeveloped executive powers, and a multiplicity of dispersed and often elusive actors. Many of the most important industrial relations issues are explicitly excluded by the EU Treaty from supranational policy-making, including the main "rules of the game" for collective bargaining, strike action, and worker representation. European supranational institutions, however, constitute a number of points of access for labor interest representation and lobbying, in particular, the Commission, the European Parliament (EP), the Economic and Social Committee (ECOSOC), possibly also the Regional Committees in the future. Yet, powerful but remote governmental committees (the European Council, the Council of Ministers and COREPER), composed of representatives from Member States, elude labor unions, and can be reached only, if at all, through the national circuits (Visser and Ebbinghaus 1992).

Crucial for interest representation at the European level is whether a policy measure is within the transferred authority of the European Union, whether decisions can be taken by a qualified majority vote, and whether cooperation of other EU institutions, in particular, the European Parliament, is required. If these conditions are fulfilled, the "pull" for transnational cooperation is greater. However, given the intergovernmental nature of the European Union in the social and labor domain, national governments can easily adopt a reactive strategy. Employers still can hide behind governments ready to use their veto powers and count on the competitive deregulatory agenda of "mutual adjustment" which penetrates indirectly the social and labor policy domain. Unions have more to fear from the "regulation gap" between the EU's inability to re-regulate and the Member States' desire (and the EU Treaty's objectives) to deregulate. Unlike employers, they cannot win

with "negative" policies and reactive strategies directed towards national capitals and their veto powers (Streeck 1995). Moreover, proactive efforts by organized labor to re-regulate at the European level what has been undermined by deregulation at the national level come to naught in the polymorphous EU decision-making structures given the veto powers of national governments and the leverage for the employers' blockage strategy.

Of the supranational EU institutions, the European Commission, with its right to draft legislation and take policy initiatives, remains the prime target for proactive pressures from labor unions. The Commission has its own vested interest in entertaining good and stable relations with major organized interests, for reasons of enhancing its own legitimacy, expertise and power. It has in fact promoted a relatively open and unstructured, "clientelist" and "pluralist" system for pressure group politics (Averyt 1975; Sargent 1985; Streeck and Schmitter 1991). After failed attempts in the 1970s (Grote 1987), the Commission under Delors relaunched an informal tripartite "Social Dialogue" to balance the deregulatory thrust of the 1992 project, but its results have disappointed. Neither the "Val Duchesse" meetings nor other Social Dialogue consultations led to an institutionalized forum for political exchange and interest intermediation, largely due to the unwillingness of national governments and European employers.

Since Maastricht, the Commission prefers to deal with transnational and comprehensive rather than national and sectional interest groups, but these attempts towards reorganizing its outside contacts are still weak and inconsistent. The Commission has spent considerable resources in subsidizing the research, training and coordination activities of European organized labor. This sponsoring role has certainly helped labor to present itself at the European level and overcome some of the transaction and organizing costs of transnational action (Martin and Ross 1995). Yet the Commission's preferential treatment of ETUC and the two main employer organizations UNICE (private sector) and CEEP (public sector) has provoked protest from the smaller rival organizations.

Nevertheless, the Commission is unable to bestow a measure of "quasi-public status" on major transnational organizations of labor and capital, like governments did in the national arena. For instance, it is the national governments that nominate labor's representatives in the advisory committees not the Commission. The compartmentalization of the Commission into over twenty Directorate Generals and a proliferating network of supporting working groups, committees, and consultants furthermore operates to the disadvantage of organized labor. Union access is mainly confined to institutions dealing with the social and labor domain (particularly in the orbit of DG V), while labor issues are deliberately kept out of the many non-political technical, advisory or regulatory committees. This division of labor reinforces the decoupling of the economic Single European Market project from its Social Dimension and relegates labor issues to a secondary (often politically blocked) policy debate.

Other supranational points of access are even less promising to organized labor. The Economic and Social Committee (ECOSOC), which was founded under the Rome Treaty (1957), may be seen as a step towards "Euro-corporatism" from afar, but it is generally acknowledged that it plays only a minor role in EU decision-making (cf. Visser and Ebbinghaus 1992). The potential for bi- or tripartite interest intermediation is impaired by



ECOSOC's mixed composition (with one-third labor and one third employer representatives besides a mixed third group of interests).<sup>5</sup> The rulings of the European Court of Justice, though remote from union pressures, have tended to expand the scope of initially restricted social regulations under the EU Treaty. Under the revised Treaty the role of the European Parliament (EP) has increased; the EP will influence about each second EU legislative project in the future. In the labor and social policy domain its legal control remains limited, in spite of the new co-decision and cooperation procedures. The "Social Protocol", agreed under the Maastricht Treaty and binding for all EU Members except U.K., nevertheless extends the qualified majority vote and requires the cooperation of the EP in several new labor and social policy areas.<sup>6</sup> However, the Social Protocol is only incompletely integrated into the EU legal structure and tends to add to the fragmentation of the EU's social and labor policy domain (Rhodes 1995).

The impact of EU's "variable geometry" (Streeck 1993), the coexistence of several different regulatory regimes varying in space and scope, is uncertain. We may add to this factor, the uncertainties about which member states will be part of the European Monetary Union (EMU) and its future impact on European political unity and social policy. One might expect that different regulatory regimes hinder the development of convergent conditions and policies. But it might also be argued that competition between regulatory regimes in Europe helps to select the "best" policy by trial-and-error. The extension of qualified majority voting and the "Social Protocol" have changed the game for many governments and national interest groups. They can no longer hide behind the inevitable British veto and now have to show their real preferences (Lange 1992). More stringent European regulation in the social and labor policy domain is not likely to be among the preferences of most governments (Majone 1993; Streeck 1994).<sup>7</sup>

The Maastricht Treaty and Social Protocol have included a self-regulatory path, as demanded by organized labor and capital, and in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity. This "fuite en avant" (Goetschy 1994), however, depends on the organizational incentives and political support for a social partnership, as well as internal compliance, of organized labor and capital. At the eve of the Maastricht negotiations and at some occasions since then this extra-legal route has been taken with some success. Yet, we will argue in the next section, considering the last barrier to transnational interest intermediation for labor, that self-regulation will be limited since European employers are by and large unwilling or unable to keep their part of the bargain.

<sup>5</sup> The ETUC has only a limited role in providing assistance and support for labor representatives. They can neither select nor sanction the national labor representatives who are nominated by the governments of their country.

<sup>6</sup> The Treaty introduces a *co-decision* procedure (Art. 189b) and a *cooperation* procedure (189c) in some policy domains. Yet, in the social and labor policy domain the latter procedure applies only in the case of health and safety (Art. 118a(2)). Art. 2 of the Protocol extends the cooperation procedure to directives setting minimum standards for working conditions, employee information and consultation rights, equal opportunities, and reintegration into the labor market.

<sup>7</sup> Even under the qualified majority rule of the Social Protocol a coalition of Spain, Portugal, Italy, and Greece against the other seven can bloc legislation which increases costs and impairs their competitiveness. With the entry of Austria, Finland, Sweden in 1995 they are a few votes short, which seems to worry Spain in particular.

## 9. Barriers to European Collective Bargaining

The interest organization of capital in Europe is as diverse as that of organized labor, thus putting a toll on the self-regulatory path. Political and religious splits are less important with respect to organized labor, but functional and regional differences still are prevalent. Business interest associations are often divided in producer (trade associations), labor market (employer associations) and regional business community interests (chambers).<sup>8</sup> While the organization of employers tends to match the degree of centralization and encompassiveness of organized labor, the producer interests are more differentiated by branch and product. In most countries small firms and trades, agriculture, finance, commerce, private services and the public sector are organized in separate employer associations, if at all. The organization density of employer associations varies, from very low in the United Kingdom to very high in Germany and Scandinavia. However, not scale and density but discipline is probably the main worry of employer associations. We must bear in mind that the members of business associations are not individuals, as in the case of unions, but corporate organizations which vary in size and resources. Large firms have often a larger voting power and a viable exit option. The centrifugal tendencies and large differences in employer organizations across Europe have important consequences for the transnational relations with organized labor (Streeck and Schmitter 1991).

At the European level, we find a large number of European organizations, national pressure-groups and company lobbyists (McLaughlin, Jordan, and Maloney 1993), but strong employer associations at the sector level are missing (Lanzalaco and Schmitter 1992: 203). In 1958, with the start of the Common Market, the Union of Industrial and Employer Confederations of Europe (UNICE) was founded. Initially UNICE was mainly a pressure group of industry with some advisory functions. In the 1970s UNICE assumed also the role of coordinating the national employer associations, mainly in response to the establishment of the Standing Committee on Employment and other forms of social dialogue (Platzer 1984: 111).

Today, UNICE incorporates the dual representation of both producer and labor market interests and encompasses both business and employer associations across Europe. Like ETUC, UNICE's territorial scope reaches beyond the European Union, though it acknowledges the territorial divisions by attributing only an "associate" status to affiliates from non-EU countries.<sup>9</sup> UNICE's leadership is quite happy to spare itself the multi-level association quandary of an additional sector structure with integrated branch associations. Such an addition, following the ETUC's example, would only add to the already considerable centrifugal tendencies within UNICE.

UNICE shares the fate of ETUC insofar as its resources and competences are quite limited. It admits publicly to be understaffed (with a staff of 36 in 1991) and complains of

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<sup>8</sup> In Denmark, Germany, Finland, Norway, Sweden, and Switzerland producer and employer interests are represented in different organizations. While Chambers exist in most countries, they vary in their functions and mandate, note that only in Austria the mandatory Chamber is entitled by law to collective bargaining (cf. Lanzalaco and Schmitter 1992).

<sup>9</sup> In 1991, UNICE combined 32 central confederations (employer and trade associations) from 22 (EC: 12, EFTA: 6, plus Turkey, Cyprus, Malta, and San Marino) countries.

being underfinanced compared to the EU "subsidized" ETUC (Tyszkiewicz 1991). UNICE's constituent members differ in resources and competences, particularly in their authority to bind members and conduct centralized collective bargaining (Upham 1992). Moreover, UNICE's associational authority is undermined by direct representation of national employer associations, independent branch organizations, direct access of multinational companies, and independent lobbyists in Brussels, as well as by the informal but influential consultation group of large companies (e.g. "European Round Table"). There is a separate European employer association in the public sector (CEEP) which has shown greater readiness to cooperate with ETUC, partly since the non-conciliatory British public sector remained outside CEEP.

Wolfgang Streeck has persuasively argued that, in contrast to ETUC, UNICE's weakness serves its members well, for it helps as an excuse for maintaining a reactive "hands-off" strategy in EU social and labor market regulation (Streeck 1995). The unions reproach UNICE to present itself as a "letter box", just passing on demands to its national members. It is probably fair to say that UNICE is not just unwilling but also incapable of assuming a role of interest intermediation due to the limited authority given by its member organizations, though this also holds to a large extent for ETUC. UNICE's dual functions, the large differences in organization and bargaining practice across countries, competition between different countries for investments, the differentiation of producer interests, limited resources, and the exit threat of multinational corporations, would make anything beyond a loosely organized pressure-group a major political and organizational success. This is unlikely to happen without considerable pressures from an interventionist "state" and a successfully mobilizing union movement at the European level that developed on a national level.

## 10. Conclusion

We have argued that national unions, when faced with a domestic crisis and an erosion of national power, do not always seek international alliances and pool resources with other union movements. And if they do, they find many obstacles on their road, some due to their own doings, some built and reinforced by others. Analyzing the challenges that compel unions to transnational collective action, we find it useful to distinguish between "push" and "pull" factors. On the one hand, there are pressures from below that force unions on a path of transnational cooperation and on the other, there are incentives from above that make such a path more promising. We have shown that neither push nor pull factors were strong enough to make transnational action the unequivocal and dominant strategic choice of union movements in Europe.

There are a number of endogenous and exogenous barriers to international solidarity, both of which are important and interrelated. Even if European unions were well-organized and had overcome their differences, without some minimal cooperation of the European "state" and of European employers it is very difficult to conceive of any transnational dynamic. Theoretically one can design a scenario, comparable to national industrial relations and welfare state development, which entails a mutually reinforcing

spiral of centralization of interest representation in Europe. However, given the present configuration, the weak power of European unions, the weak organization of European employers, and weak stateness of the European Union, such a dynamic is most unlikely. Moreover, unions will not be in a position to break out of the present mould, given the structural problems which confront unions - large scale unemployment, de-industrialization, de-collectivization of employment relations, membership decline, and decentralization pressures.

Our two main theses focus on the conundrum of national diversity (how to overcome and encompass European diversity) and the transnational associability quandary (how to create and maintain European unity) from two supplementary approaches - the comparative perspective and the integration analysis. For an understanding of Europeanization of organized labor we have to look at both, the national and European level, at the barriers set by cross-national diversity and the pathways towards European unity. Nationally entrenched union diversity and different industrial relations patterns hamper transnational coordination, in many cases even before it can take off. Not only is it difficult to combine the goals and interests of so many different actors, but different repertoires of action are institutionalized in distinct national ways. Compared to the times of Marx, workers have travelled more, know more and find it easier to talk to one another, but international solidarity between unions has become more difficult after a century of national integration of labor into distinct welfare states. National welfare states are in many respects under pressures for reform, but the main basis of solidarity between workers or citizens is still confined to domestic borders. This is why transnational action in the labor and social policy domain responds more to the calculated strategy of national union leaders than to the impact of international solidarity among workers across borders.

Labor unity has always been difficult to achieve, whether in Europe or within national states. The option of international collective bargaining forced upon unions by market developments, and resting solely on voluntary negotiations between market participants, has proved to be a nonsuccess in Europe. We do not see any favorable conditions for international collective bargaining unless there is prior harmonization of economic, legal and organizational conditions. The option of creating an international hierarchy of organized labor requires the aggregation of interests across various countries and sectors, and the transfer of authority to a supranational "summit" by national peak and sector organizations which themselves vary in power, scope and ideology. The integration of functional interests remains problematic and the sector organizations still are not capable of taking over collective bargaining functions. Thus the ETUC and its EICs are not ready to engage, or to become focal in the achievement of European collective bargaining. The prospect of a truly transnational union that disregards national borders remains even a remote dream. The network option, linking unionists and works councilors, horizontally and directly, in Euro-works-councils and cross-border regional committees, may be merely an "Ersatz" strategy but certainly the most promising one under the present circumstances.



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