

Dear friends, comrades, EWC members

Let me first of all thank Claudia and the ETUC for the initiative they have taken in organising this EWC Conference. It is an important conference and we will discuss today and tomorrow a number of important issues. We will discuss as well new opportunities as they derive from the new rights and tools that come out of the recast EWC Directive.

IndustriAll European Trade Union is the newly created European Industry Federation, and is the merged organisation of the former EMF, EMCEF and ETUF-TCL. We are currently organising around 550 EWCs.

The EWC Directive has created in 1994 a new level in the industrial relations system. It was the legislation we needed to address issues on decision-making level in transnational companies. Before 1994, we didn't meet the decision makers in many companies as they were based outside our own country. We didn't even know, in most cases, our colleagues / workers' representatives from other countries. In such an environment, it was easy for an employer to play off workers against each other. It was hard to check information.

18 years have now gone by since the first Directive of 1994. EWCs became important players in European Companies, and they are for us one of the cornerstones in our work with transnational companies. They offer us the possibility to meet company management, to receive transnational information and to have consultation on proposed measures. In many companies, management knows that they have to take the EWC seriously. The EWC has become a key-partner in the information and consultation process at European level.

I would like to use the opportunity to raise a number of points:

First, we will discuss today and tomorrow the new rights stemming from the recast Directive of 2009. With the new definitions on Information and Consultation, it is clear that companies must inform and consult EWCs on time and, in any case, prior to decision. EWCs have the right to analyse and examine company proposals, to look into them, to make counter-proposals and to discuss them with company management. I will not go into further details on

this, as this will be broadly discussed today, but it is our responsibility now to use these rights and to claim them in our companies and EWCs.

Other new rights, such as the right to report back, places the EWC at the heart of such an information and consultation process. The EWC is not an isolated body floating around at the European level about which nobody knows why it exists or what its added value is,... no..., it is part of an industrial relation system where you now have an integrated interaction between the local, national and European level. Precisely this point - the interaction between the national and European level - is also an important issue on the agenda of this conference.

Secondly, we have to push forward with our EWCs. We have to open new windows and explore new possibilities. But, we also have to understand that there is as well a role for trade unions at European company level. We have to balance the role of EWCs on the one hand and the role of trade unions at European company level on the other hand. In some EWCs, negotiations took place resulting in agreements on a number of issues. Examples are agreements on equal opportunities, health and safety, even on how to handle restructuring. As such, it was logical and predictable that EWCs started to explore also the possibility to negotiate. However, we have to be careful that the EWC, which is a group of workers' representatives not necessarily all union members, do not take over the activities at local and national level allocated to trade unions.

That is the reason why we have developed in our federation a policy where negotiations at European company level are generally done by trade unions and, more specifically, by the European federation on behalf of the national trade unions. During this negotiation, continuous involvement of the EWC is guaranteed, but the EWC does not lead the negotiation. We do not have the time now to discuss this point further, but for us it is clear that the EWC cannot take over all activities at European level, which are at national level generally divided between local works councils and local trade unions. IndustriAll Federation also expects from its EWCs and their members that they give us a sign when the company is willing to negotiate an agreement at European level – to ensure that we can take up the negotiation with the trade unions at the centre of the process.

This brings me as well to the third point. IndustriAll Europe is pushing for some years already the European Commission to agree on a legal framework for negotiation at the European level of a company. The European Commission launched some weeks ago a consultation document to discuss this issue. A future framework for negotiation of transnational company agreements must clarify the role for EWCs and Trade unions.

My last point refers to the support that we need to give to our European Work Council members. We have all together more than 20.000 EWC members now in more than 1000 EWCs. Although European, the daily support and follow-up has to be given by the national unions. At European level, we have to define our joint strategy and approach vis-à-vis these EWCs. At European level, we have to define our joint demands on the negotiation of an agreement, for example. We also have to support our EWC Coordinators at European level. However, it is up to the national trade unions to support the EWC members. Now, with this new Directive, EWCs are firmly anchored in an industrial relation system where there are clear links between national or local WCs and the EWC.

As a conclusion, I would like to say that this conference is important as it deals with the EWC 2.0, the next phase concerning EWCs, the EWC that gives you the possibility to really play a role in the European decision-making process of a company. But as we all know, having rights on paper is one thing, getting them in practice is another thing. We will have to fight ourselves into that position, to obtain that role and position. And we can only succeed if we all have the same understanding of these new rights, and if we are all willing to use these new rights in the future. Thinking in the same way, speaking with one voice, building solidarity between different plants and countries, will as never before become important for EWCs. The period when EWCs were just information bodies only informed when decisions were already taken is over. But it will only be definitively over, if we wish to use the new rights.

I bid you a good conference and success in your daily work in your EWC.

Thank you.