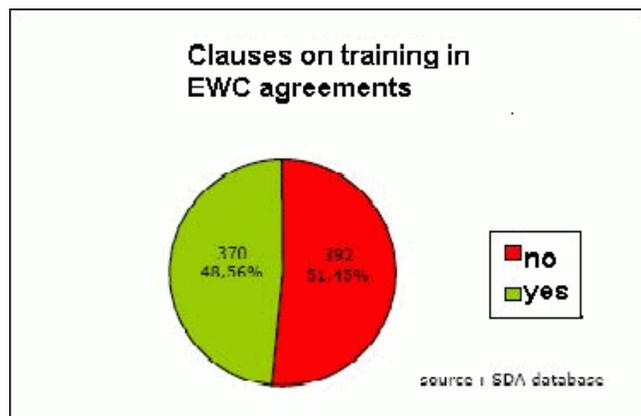


Information sheet no. 3

16 May 2008

Training: a vital instrument for representatives on European Works Councils

Although EU Directive 94/45/EC on the establishment of European Works Councils doesn't even mention training, more than 350 agreements have already got clauses providing training for workforce representatives. Numerous surveys have confirmed that such training helps to improve teamwork between EWC members and boost the efficiency of EWCs in general. Employee representatives on EWCs are supposed to play an important role in anticipating and managing corporate restructuring in Europe. It is impossible to imagine how they are supposed to do that if their training requirements are not acknowledged and taken on board when the directive is revised.



The duties of workforce representatives call for extensive ongoing training

The need for training of EWC members is quite clear when you think about what they are supposed to do. The EWC Directive says that:

companies "operating in two or more Member States must inform and consult the representatives of those of their employees that are affected by their decisions;

... appropriate provisions must be adopted to ensure that the employees of Community-scale undertakings are properly informed and consulted;

... the European Works Council (...) must (...) be kept informed and consulted on the activities of the undertaking or group of undertakings so that it may assess the possible impact on employees' interests (...)"

So, the EWC members are expected to:

- understand all the information they are given on the development of activities in a large multinational company;
- analyse project content and strategic developments presented by top management;
- assess the likely impact of any measures liable to seriously affect workers' interests;
- team up with representatives from other countries with different languages, backgrounds and cultures to agree on joint positions and opinions which they can submit to top level management.

EWCs have created a new level for representing workers, since they bring together workforce representatives at the highest level of multinational companies (at least in Europe) with a duty to participate in information and consultation processes with top management on a transnational and/or Europe-wide basis. This is a major responsibility and poses considerable challenges to people who, in most cases, have not been trained to do this sort of work. This is why we are insisting that the directive must make access to training available for workforce representatives in all EWCs.

University studies agree with EWC members - training is a top priority

This is not just a case of union bureaucrats in Brussels saying that EWC members must have training. Back in 2001, a study conducted by Professor Jeremy Waddington found that EWC members were already saying that training was the most important topic for any revision of the EWC Directive. In fact, 96.2% of EWC members agreed that training was the top priority, more even than those who asked for clearer rules for information and consultations (93.4%) and specific rights in the event of mergers or takeovers (90.9%).

What kinds of training are needed?

Promoting greater European solidarity is an important objective for the unions. So, we believe it is very important to develop understanding and common purpose among workers' representatives who are used to very different national cultures and systems of representation. This means that even representatives who already have lots of experience as members of local or national bodies will still have very specific training requirements when they become EWC members.



It doesn't matter how positive and cooperative management is, an EWC can only be effective if it becomes part of a network of representation in which it links up with local and national works councils and union bodies. In other words, the workers' representatives on an EWC cannot be happy just to take part in an information and consultation exercise with management: they must also be capable of setting up information and consultation procedures between all the local and national

representative bodies that represent workers within the multinational company they work for.

These procedures should enable them to check the reliability of information provided by management and prevent workers in one country being played off against those in another by local managers. So, besides having the technical, economic and language skills they need to do their work, EWC representatives need training that has been specifically designed to enable them to:

- ✓ familiarise themselves with the various national systems of workforce representation practised by other members of their EWC;
- ✓ overcome communication difficulties. This isn't just about language, it is also important to learn about the expectations of behaviour and meaning that come from different national cultures and traditions;
- ✓ identify areas for communication and co-operation with other representatives;



- ✓ develop a communication and information strategy between the represented workers and the respective EWC;
- ✓ know about and think how best to use the specific resources that national bodies have at their disposal (e.g. financial expertise in France, co-determination in Germany, representation on board of directors or supervisory boards, etc.).

Whereas any good international training course will always focus on intercultural communication, many new additional training needs are coming up all the time. As issues like corporate social responsibility, sustainable development or health and safety start cropping up on the agendas of European meetings, workforce representatives will need to have the training to tackle them in the appropriate manner.

ETUC, the European Trade Union Institute and training

Over many years, the ETUC and the European Trade Union Institute (ETUI-REHS) have already accumulated substantial experience in training workforce representatives and members of EWCs. Along with other union training organisations we are convinced that the EWC Directive must include solidly anchored rights to training for all EWC members. Millions of workers are relying on EWCs to deal effectively with difficult and complicated issues on their behalf. Without training, no EWC member can be expected to live up to their expectations.

Useful links:

The ETUC website: <http://www.etuc.org/>

The ETUI-REHS database on EWC agreements: <http://www.ewcdb.org>

Social Development Agency (SDA) database: <http://www.sda-asbl.org/DbInfo/inizio.asp>

For further information, please contact:

Bruno Demaitre, ETUI-REHS Education Officer

E-mail: bdemaitre@etui-rehs.org