

EUROPEAN CONGRESS GENERAL THEME

THE FUTURE OF WORK IN EUROPE

The market and the economic and social cohesion

Objectives

Work in Europe is undergoing a profound transformation, both in terms of working conditions and of regulation of the challenges posed by the internationalisation of markets, by regional integration and by internal changes within organisations. Technological change and the transition to a knowledge-based economy, changing employment and labour markets, demographic change and a new balance between family, work and education have become individual and collective challenges. This situation underlines the importance of the appearance of new organisational strategies to enable all those involved in the world of work to exercise their voice and influence.

Social partners and public authorities throughout Europe have redoubled their efforts at social creativity with new undertakings, new roles and new responsibilities. Economic and monetary union, the institutional reinforcement of Europe to achieve greater social and political integration and the imminent enlargement of the European Union are challenges to the agendas of those responsible for industrial relations systems at National and European levels.

A number of issues demand discussion, such as the current context of increased competition and social differentiation, in which new forms of political co-ordination increase both the complexity of the context and the need for interactivity in industrial relations and where reinforcing social cohesion is indispensable demands discussion.

Tracks

1-Industrial Relations, globalisation and competitive pressures.

2-The social dialogue and the new challenges for social partners in Europe

3-The enlargement of the European Union and Beyond

Programme Information

The Congress is organised in three main themes. Each theme will start with a plenary session, which will be followed by workshops.

Special seminars and various other events with a number of international specialists will concentrate on key issues of European industrial relations.

In addition, pre-Congress activities will focus on Portuguese labour relations, with participants having the opportunity to visit one firm for discussions with employees and management.

IIRA Study Groups will meet immediately after the Congress.

Further information will be available on the internet.

TRACK 1 – Industrial Relations, Globalisation and Competitive Pressures

Franz Traxler, University of Vienna

Globalisation is a complex phenomenon. As regards industrial relations, its most important dimension is internationalisation of markets and capital which has paved the way for manifold economic and technological changes in terms of corporate governance, production systems, work organisation, the sectoral and occupational structure of the economy, macroeconomic policy, etc.

Globalisation, understood as internationalisation of markets and capital, poses a considerable challenge to the traditional patterns of industrial relations for two main reasons:

- As a transnational process, globalisation is at odds with the established institutions of industrial relations, whose scope of regulations is still confined in territorial (in particular national) terms.
- Since globalisation of markets and capital both expands and intensifies market competition on a world-wide scale, it threatens to erode organised industrial relations. This is because organised industrial relations have to rely on the solidaristic principle of collective action, whereas market competition stimulates opportunist strategies, oriented towards the self-interest of the actors.

In line with this, globalisation is often presumed to transform the traditional patterns of industrial relations in two ways. First, it is argued to have a homogenising effect on industrial relations due to its transnational nature. This implies that the differences in industrial relations institutions across countries are evaporating. Second, globalisation is assumed to undermine organised industrial relations which have been characteristic of most European countries so far.

However, the globalisation thesis, as outlined above, has met strong criticism. There are numerous studies that have shown that cross-national differences in industrial relations continue to exist, implying that organised industrial relations have survived in many countries. Possible explanations for this observation are as follows: Economic internationalisation has more or less remained below the threshold of real globalisation, because trade penetration takes place mainly within the large economic blocs (e.g. Europe, America, the Asia Pacific region). Globalisation of markets imposes contradictory needs on industrial relations, namely higher flexibility on the one hand, and enhanced cooperation on the other. Last but not least, the national industrial relations systems have been able to process and filter market pressures.

At any rate, the continued public concern about the destructive forces of internationalised market competition in general and globalisation in particular requires reconsidering their actual impact on industrial relations from an analytical as well as empirical perspective.

Important topics related to the actors and levels of industrial relations are as follows:

- How much have multinational enterprises contributed to the homogenisation of industrial relations in terms of labour standards (including downward pressures on wages), employment practices, work organisation and employee workplace representation?
- How do small and medium-sized enterprises and their industrial-relations practices respond to growing international competition?
- Have employer associations and unions undergone essential change in policies, tasks, membership and organisational structures in response to the challenge of globalisation?
- How much does globalisation affect sectoral industrial relations differently? In other words, does globalisation cause growing divergence between protected sectors and sectors exposed to international competition? If yes, what is the consequence for the national industrial relations systems as a whole?
- How does collective bargaining relate to globalisation and intensified market competition? Does it decline? Is it used as a means of enhancing competitiveness or is it seen as an impediment?
- Do globalisation and competitive pressures foster or undermine macro concertation of policies among government and the confederations of business and labour?

WORKSHOPS

1. Globalisation, industrial relations and the multinational enterprises
2. SMEs and their industrial relations under growing international competition
3. Globalisation and its implications for trade unions
4. Globalisation and its implications for employer associations
5. Sector-specific differences in exposure to international competition and their impact on industrial relations
6. – Globalisation, market competition and collective bargaining
- 7 – Globalisation, demands for competitiveness and macro concertation of industrial relations

TRACK 2 – Social Dialogue and the New Challenges for Social Partners in Europe
Prof. Monteiro Fernandes, Instituto Superior de Ciencias do Trabalho e da Empresa, Lisbon

The scope of the tracks is a consequence of the growing intensity and depth of the debates, both at European and the national level, on the role of social dialogue and different forms of participation in the framework of economic and social governance. The importance of this complex argument reveals itself in a large number of issues that refer to the structures, methods, levels, actors and strategies through which the industrial relations systems work and make themselves relevant. The development of bargaining mechanisms in the framework of European regulatory action, the evolution of single national systems, the search for an adequate system for the public sector, the efficiency of social dialogue as an instrument of employment, training or gender policies, as well as its capabilities to tackle present-day challenges of flexibility and new forms of work, should be comprehensively discussed. New developing forms of social dialogue at the company level – including European Works Councils, employee involvement in the European Company and the new rules on information and consultation – as well as some national experiences in the field of social partnership, offer a complementary dimension of the general theme to be dealt with in this track.

WORKSHOPS

1. Social Dialogue (European Level)
 - 1A Social Dialogue at communitarian level
 - 1B Compared European systems
 - 1C Public sector
2. Industrial relations: systems and national experiences
 - 2A Trade Union movement
 - 2B Collective bargaining: levels, strategies, impacts
3. Employment, including Lisbon Strategy
4. Gender/equality, diversity
5. Participation
 - 5A European Work Councils, information and consultation at European level
 - 5B Participation and changes
 - 5C The national debates
6. Flexibility
7. New forms of work/tendencies/the future of work

TRACK 3 – The Enlargement of the European Union and Beyond
Dr. Kevin P. O’Kelly, University of Limerick, Ireland

The past fifteen years have seen enormous changes in the social, political and economic landscape of Europe as planned systems gave way to greater democracy and the introduction of the market economy, as the countries of Western Europe tried to adjust to accommodate this new landscape. This year sees the culmination of this process with the expansion of the European Union to include eight of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe as new Member States.

While impacting on all the peoples of Europe, these changes have most affected the lives of the people of these, nowhere more than on social policies and in the workplace. The transition, which resulted in economic decline in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe, in turn, resulted in many workers been exposed to exploitation, a drop in social protection and workplace standards, with the most vulnerable, such as the less skilled, older workers, women and those with disabilities, losing jobs .

Among the major changes contributing to a lowering of employment levels is the process of privatization of the old State enterprises adopted in all countries. Privatisation has resulted in major restructuring of companies and sectors, with the inevitable loss of jobs and the related loss of social services, such as housing, health and education, provided at the workplace. The transition also saw the emergence of entrepreneurship and the growth of the private sector with its different approach to employment relations, reflecting the emerging market economies.

Worker representation structures also changed with the fragmentation of the previously centralized trade union and the establishment of new independent unions, while, at the same time, the level of unionisation was falling as disillusionment with the unions, based on their role under the old system, took hold. On the other side of the social partnership the introduction of the market economy also saw the establishment of new employers’ organizations where none had existed before.

The objective of joining the European Union, adopted at an early stage in the transition, provided the impetus for change across the former planned economies, from the Baltic Sea to the Black Sea, as countries introduced a legal environment within which the market economy could operate and would be on line with the EU *acquis communautaire*. New labour legislation formed a key part of this process of legislative change, setting out new frameworks for the employment relations, including the role of representative bodies, employee involvement and social dialogue arrangements, worker rights, health and safety and equality.

The drive towards the market economy and associated labour relations took hold, not only in the EU Accession Countries, but it has also spread into neighboring European countries, such as Russia, Ukraine and other former Soviet countries, as these economies also introduced political and economic reform. Turkey, also, is addressing the need to modernize its economy, for example, through privatization, and its labour market through greater workplace flexibility and the introduction of social dialogue arrangements, as it prepares to negotiate EU membership.

Other complicating developments are a) the growing concern in Europe with social inclusion and finding an acceptable balance between the demands of work and family life; and b) the growing concerns with the impact of industry on the environment. The European Commission, the governments and social partners of the Member States through the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility are exploring ways to deal with these dilemmas.

Track 3 will seek to address the wide range of issues that have emerged as a result of the transformation of Europe since the demise of planned economic systems. It will examine the key topics of:

- Changes in labour law;
- The impact on employment, including on certain categories of workers;
- The role of social dialogue and social partnerships in the introduction of workplace flexibility;
- The affects on trade unions and unionization; and social cohesion and family friendly policies.

WORKSHOPS

1. Industrial Relations and EU Enlargement
2. Labour Law and Labour Rights
3. Trade Unions and the Challenge of Unionisation
4. Social and Employment Pacts
5. Employment
6. National Developments in Social Dialogue
7. Social Partnership as a Change Agent
8. Work/Life Balance