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Political Entrepreneurship at GM Europe – the European Employee Forum and the Joint Delta Working Group

The EU European Works Council Directive from 1994 suggested the set-up of a European Works Council (EWC) in multinational companies (MNC) in Europe. A EWC has been established at 784 of 2204 MNCs that are covered by the EWC Directive. However, the majority of the established EWCs do not contribute significantly to employment relations in MNCs. As the EWC Directive only provides minimum rights for employee representatives such as the right to be informed and consulted by management, the actual working of a EWC and its importance for employment relations depends to a large extent on the creativity and the skills of labor representatives, or to put it differently, it depends on labor's political entrepreneurship.¹ A prime example of such political entrepreneurship is the European Employee Forum (EEF) at General Motors. The European Works Councilors and its competent staff have had the creativity to explore and develop new transnational instrument such as European collective agreements, European Action Days and the *Joint Delta Working Group*. A recent new innovation is the GM Workers Blog that is used as a communication platform for GM workers worldwide. In addition, the European Works Councilors have had the leadership skills to persuade the rank and file for the need to cooperate across borders, the language skills to communicate in English and the soft skills to build trust among each other over time.

Over time, the EWC at GM worked out common principles and goals. An important principle has been to commonly resist plant closures and forced redundancies at GM Europe. A crucial goal of the *Joint Delta Working Group* has been to commonly negotiate with management the fair distribution of car volumes that allows the survival of all plants. An important instrument of the EWC has been collective agreements with GM's European management in favor of GM workers in Europe. The negotiations of such collective agreements have been backed by European Action Days, in which more than 40.000 workers across have taken part. Skeptics of EWCs have pointed to the only minimum rights provided by the EWC Directive in contrast to national labor representation laws. Certainly, an improvement of the EWC Directive and a greater leverage for EWCs in its dealing with MNCs is desirable. However, the GM case shows how actor choices matter and how a EWC can be effectively used as basis for transnational worker cooperation. Labor's political entrepreneurship at GM was crucial to develop the EWC beyond the only basic employee rights provided by the EWC Directive and to effectively contribute to the regulation of employment relations at a European MNC.

¹ Please confer to the following paper for a more detailed examination of the role of political entrepreneurs in transnational worker cooperation. Greer, Ian and Marco Hauptmeier: Political Entrepreneurship and Co-Managers – Labor Transnationalism at Four Multinational Auto Makers. *British Journal of Industrial Relations*. forthcoming.