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5 July, Panel 2 – Comment Martin Bartmann

I want to focus on two main topics: first on the issue of resources for European Works Council work, second on the impact of the different Industrial Relations systems on the Work of EWCs

Resources:

The GMEECO-project and the Joint Delta Working Group showed that trans-national employee cooperation is possible. But the level of cooperation and trans-national relations that was achieved would not have been attained without the resources of the GMEECO-project. In this respect the sustainability of the level of cooperation is uncertain.

Neither the EWC-directive nor the national unions or the European Metalworkers Federation provide European works councils with the resources needed to reach the level of cooperation of the Delta-group.

I believe that the employee cooperation at GME and especially the Delta-group could be a positive blue-print for the further development of European Industrial Relations. But my conclusion is also that EWCs should have more resources and competence to reach that goal.

- The EWC-directive has to be changed in this regard. To be realistic this is a mid-term target
- In the short-run the national unions and the EMF have to fill the gap. The EMF-coordinators are a good approach, but they need more time capacity for this job.
- In my opinion the use of electronic web based communication systems could bring forward the work of EWCs, too. The differing information levels, - a result of the different industrial relations systems - could be equalized by such systems, too. Preconditions of course are trust and the will to exchange information.

The European Works Council of GME is very creative in acquiring additional resources (e.g. resources from the EU, from EMF, Friedrich-Ebert-Foundation, Hans-Böckler-Foundation, and from the national unions. But in the long run this is not practicable and it can not be a blue-print for other EWCs.

Differing industrial relations systems:

The different industrial relations systems with different labour laws, collective bargaining systems but also different strategic approaches of unions and works councils lead to structural problems for trans-national employee cooperation. I want to mention only two examples:

- The differing possibilities for collective action in the countries make joint action difficult. The European Action Days at GME and the joint actions to support the workers in Azambuja clearly showed the differing possibilities and the problems to coordinate actions. Finally coordination was possible, but it took a lot of time and there is always a big risk of misunderstandings (e.g. „why is there no production stop in plant X, don't they want to show solidarity?“)
- In Europe there are different trade union strategies. For example between Germany and Sweden the strategies how to achieve job security differ greatly.

I don't expect a harmonization of the industrial relations systems in the near future which leads to the following conclusions:

- The knowledge of the other systems has to be widened. But often in processes like the Delta-site-selection-process there is not enough time for acquiring this sort of knowledge. The challenge is not only to advance the knowledge of the employee representatives, but workers have to be informed, too. Otherwise trans-national strategies and decisions are not transparent and workers will not support them in the long-run.
- An open reciprocal European information sharing is even more important than between plants in one country. Information hiding is poison for trans-national employee cooperation.
- The different union strategies have to be discussed open-mindedly.
- In the mid-run there should be a discussion about a harmonization of elementary rights of employee representatives in the EU. On the level of big companies company-wide agreed standards could be an alternative. Maybe that is not so realistic for GM but in other companies that are not so union-hostile this could be achievable.