
Foreword

This edited volume can be considered a follow-up to the book 1973-2013: 40 years of history of the European Trade Union Confederation¹ (ETUC). As the title suggests, this publication studied the origins and internal organisational development of the ETUC, and its positions, activities and policies in an ever-changing socioeconomic and political landscape which has seen the ascent of neoliberalism.

The ETUC as a monolithic organisation, representing the interests and needs of workers in Europe, thus stood central in this first volume, and the research focused on the ETUC's influence and effectiveness vis-à-vis the European Commission (EC) and the European employer organisations.

However, the internal debates, disputes and actual decision-making processes within the ETUC largely remained a 'black box', and this was one of the main reasons for the production of this second book. For this publication, financed by the ETUI, we invited a number of authors to participate and approached Andrea Ciampani and Pierre Tilly with the request to be its editors. We greatly appreciate their endeavours in coordinating the project. The authors of the individual country chapters in this volume seek to crack open the ETUC's 'black box', at least partly, by highlighting how different trade union models, traditions and cultures have come together in the organisation. As in the first volume, the contributors take a historical perspective, highlighting the determinants, developments and legacies of the relationship that the union confederations have had with the European integration process over a forty-plus year period. This is a twofold exercise. The authors examine the dynamic relationship between the member organisations and the Brussels-based ETUC within the context of the highs and lows of the European integration project. At the same time, they study the possible influence of the ETUC upon its member organisations

1. Degryse C. with Tilly P. (2013) *1973-2013: 40 years of history of the European Trade Union Confederation*, Brussels, ETUI. Apart from the English version, the book is also available in Chinese, French, German and Italian.

in their home countries, via the unions' international or European departments or through the feedback effects of debates at both the European and national levels.

Accordingly, the research questions are manifold. Why do national union confederations (or union centres) apply for ETUC membership and what kind of pathways have candidate member organisations been able to use to attain membership? What have been the reasons for (dis)approving applications and what are the (initial) expectations of ETUC membership? In what ways and how effectively do affiliated organisations play the diplomatic game to influence ETUC policymaking? To what extent are the union confederations changing their views on the authority, jurisdiction or mandate of the ETUC and the resources it has, because of how the policies of the European Union (EU) have affected, negatively or positively, their home countries? And finally, how has the relationship evolved over time between the national confederations and their union members at home in terms of promoting and supporting the 'European Social Model' (including its transnational industrial relations institutions) and the ETUC approach towards European integration?

The ETUC currently has 89 member organisations from 39 European countries. Evidently, not all of them could be studied and included in one single volume.² Apart from the availability of authors, several factors were considered in selecting the countries, such as: the union confederations' significance within the ETUC; the mixture of union identities and cultures; the combination of different economic structures, industrial relations systems and welfare state regimes; and, finally, the geographical balance of countries. These considerations resulted in the inclusion of the following ten countries: Belgium, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Spain, Sweden and the UK.

Belgium, France, Germany and Italy all have a long-standing European tradition, having been along with the Netherlands and Luxembourg the six founders of the European Economic Community. Most of the union confederations in these countries were co-founders of the ETUC; others like the French Confédération Générale du Travail (CGT, General Confederation of Labour) or the Belgian Algemene Centrale der Liberale Vakbonden van België/Centrale Générale des Syndicats Libéraux de Belgique (ACLVB/CGSLB, General Confederation of Liberal Trade Unions of Belgium) joined at a later stage, illustrating how the ETUC has been able to bring unions together despite their ideological divisions. Together with France and Italy, Portugal and Spain, the two countries of the Iberian Peninsula that joined the EU in 1986, represent an ideologically fragmented and often strained union landscape. The union confederations from Sweden and Norway, divided along occupational lines but brought together in 'Nordic alliances', represent the rather 'hesitant' Nordic approach to European integration. Undoubtedly, now when we are witnessing the unfolding aftermath of the United Kingdom's historic decision to leave the EU, studying the shifting approach of the Trades Union Congress (the TUC, the UK's national trade union centre) towards European integration and the ETUC is as relevant as ever. Finally, while the history of unions in central and eastern Europe is quite diverse, the focus in this book is on the union centres from Poland, the largest of the so-called ex-communist countries, and particularly on NSZZ Solidarność (Solidarity), which held a distinctive position before the fall of the Berlin Wall.

2. Likewise, the relationship between the ETUC and the European Trade Union Federations and Interregional Trade Union Councils is not fully explored here. However, the authors do pay attention to the federations and councils in the country chapters if relevant to their analysis.

Understandably, the chapters often differ in terms of their method, structure, time-frame and content. One of the difficulties the authors have been confronted with in their analysis is the many different actors that not only intervened in the national internal debates but also at the European level. Therefore, only a partial picture can be sketched of these debates. In a way, it is easier to follow the EU debates because of the limited number of arenas (the ETUC Congress, its executive committee, steering committee and specialised committees and the days of action) and the relative accessibility of sources. Moreover, the academic literature on the historical dynamic between union confederations at the national level and the EU level is rather limited. Besides secondary literature, memoirs and testimonies, the chapters very often make use of expert interviews with key figures; some authors also turn to the (union) archives for the early decades.

It is impossible to do justice here in this foreword to the empirical richness of the chapters. However, it can be stated unreservedly that all chapters provide varied and very valuable insights into the relationship between the ETUC and the national union centres or union confederations, which could feed into theoretical approaches regarding, for instance, multi-level governance, the Europeanisation of national organisations, trade union democracy, and transnational union strategies and learning. Content-wise, emphasis is placed on those issues that matter most in the relationship between the ETUC and its member organisations. Below we give a brief overview of the chapters.

In Chapter 1 Jürgen Mittag undertakes an analysis of the German trade unions in relation to the European integration process over the past 60 years. Mittag provides a multi-dimensional and nuanced account of the interaction between the ETUC, one of its co-founders the Deutsche Gewerkschaftsbund (DGB, the German Trade Union Confederation), and its main affiliated unions such as IG Metall, in relation to the integration process. In particular, he warns against taking a simple teleological view of history. Thus, although the integration process gave rise to an organisational and structural adaptation of union policies in the long run, the commitment of the German unions to the European project has been marked by periodical ebbs and flows as well as by heterogeneity in their preferences, which sometimes diverge from those of the umbrella organisation, the DGB. This evolution has been predominantly driven by the interplay between the international, European and national political/ideological and socioeconomic environments, as well as the unions' defence of the interests of their rank-and-file members. Those specific interests, embedded in a sectoral and national context, have given rise to multi-level and multi-faceted union strategies aimed at influencing the European decision-making process. The underlying principle for the German unions has been a pro-European stance and the promotion of a 'Social Europe' which, in their view, is today needed more than ever and which would preferably resemble the corporatist institutions of the Rhineland model of capitalism.

The French case, presented by Claude Roccati in Chapter 2, is particularly complex, as the three main confederations, Force Ouvrière (CGT-FO, Workers' Force), the Confédération française démocratique du travail (CFDT, the French Democratic Confederation of Labour) and the CGT, have exhibited different attitudes towards European integration and the role of the ETUC, and come from different union traditions (social democrat, Christian and communist, respectively). The author shows how the French union confederations have evolved in different ways in this regard. FO, while critical about the creation of the ETUC, initially had a more positive opinion about EU integration. Since the end of the seventies, however, FO has undoubtedly become one of the strongest critics of EU integration among the union confederations. The CFDT, meanwhile, adopted a much more positive (although

still critical) approach, which was in line with the ETUC consensus for a long time but is now generally more positive than that of most of the other ETUC members. Finally, the CGT, initially very critical of EU integration, viewing it as a capitalist project, later adopted a more nuanced position.

Written by Andrea Ciampani, there are two common threads running through Chapter 3, which focuses on the three Italian union confederations and their relationship with the ETUC; two of these confederations, the Confederazione Italiana Sindacati Lavoratori (CISL, the Italian Confederation of Workers' Trade Unions) and the Unione Italiana del Lavoro (UIL, the Italian Labour Union), co-founded the ETUC. First, the chapter makes the argument that when new applications are made by unions from countries that are already represented in the ETUC, the approval from Brussels to become affiliated is very much conditioned by the dynamics within the national domain of union relations. In the Italian domain, characterised by a union pluralism based on cultural and ideological divisions, Ciampani demonstrates that the affiliation of the Confederazione Generale Italiana del Lavoro (CGIL, the Italian General Confederation of Labour) to the ETUC in 1974 only became possible when the union started changing strategy towards pro-European integration in the late sixties and a process of union unity between the three confederations emerged in the following decade. Although this unity never materialised, Italian union confederations have taken a common stance at the European level when it comes to the position of the ETUC and the role it should play; this forms the second thread in Ciampani's chapter. While tensions between the confederations have never disappeared, particularly due to different strategies towards Italian industrial relations and economic policies, good personal relationships between the union leaders in charge of the European or international departments have contributed to a relatively common understanding. Over time, the confederations have been striving for an ETUC that is more than just a political lobbying institution in Brussels; they would prefer an ETUC that acts as a 'real trade union', which implies delegating more union power to the European level, within the multi-level EU decision-making process.

Chapter 4, written by Richard Hyman, begins by noting that 'the relationship between Britain and the rest of the continent has always been problematic'. The British industrial relations system is also very different from the continental one and became even more distinctive following Margaret Thatcher's attacks on collective bargaining and unions. The position of the TUC on EU integration evolved from that of clear hostility to substantial support after the speech by Jacques Delors at the Congress of Brighton in 1988. Nevertheless, divisions remained between the sectoral trade unions regarding the Economic and Monetary Union and later the Lisbon treaty. The TUC is one of the biggest member organisations of the ETUC and consequently a big contributor to the budget, and although this caused some problems in the beginning, it has been a loyal supporter. John Monks, ETUC General Secretary from 2001 to 2009, does not recall any significant arguments between the TUC and ETUC. Nevertheless, according to Hyman the debates around the EU have affected only a minority within the union movement and most of the activities still focus on national or sub-national matters.

Chapter 5 covers Belgium. The two authors Quentin Jouan and Pierre Tilly highlight the fact that the two main Belgium trade unions were part of different internationals, the Algemeen Christelijk Vakverbond/ Confédération des Syndicats Chrétiens (ACV/CSC, Confederation of Christian Trade Unions) in the Christian one and the Algemeen Belgisch Vakverbond/ Fédération Générale du Travail de Belgique (ABVV/FGTB, General Federation of Belgian Labour) in the socialist. They also represent different union approaches. At

the international level the relationship between them (or their affiliated sectors) was complex and is still difficult from time to time, and this makes the simple fact that these two unions were together in the ETUC from the beginning important. The authors briefly explore different facets of the relationship between the Belgian union confederations and the ETUC, from the solidarity movement with NSZZ Solidarność and the closure of Renault-Vilvoorde to the Bolkestein Directive and the Doorn group's coordination of wage bargaining for the Benelux countries and Germany. Their argument is that the Belgian union confederations have always been very dynamic and innovative and have been pushing in various ways to have a more active and efficient ETUC; they are also among the few arguing for increasing the ETUC budget. However, their proactive commitment towards the ETUC has not been without its critics at certain moments.

In Chapter 6 Sigfrido Ramirez Perez presents the case of the Iberian trade unions and their move from the periphery to the centre. Covering Portugal and Spain, both countries still under fascist dictatorships at the time of the ETUC's creation, the author highlights the complex period from the creation of the ETUC in 1973 to the democratic transition in the late seventies and early eighties. The admission to membership of the Spanish Comisiones Obreras (CCOO, Workers' Commissions) and the Portuguese Confederação Geral dos Trabalhadores Portugueses (CGTP, the General Confederation of Portuguese Workers), both with historical links to communist regimes, caused great tensions within the ETUC, particularly from the German side. Following the election of Emilio Gabaglio as General Secretary in 1991, the Iberian union confederations played an increasingly active role in the ETUC, as illustrated by the succession of ETUC presidents Cándido Méndez (Union General de Trabajadores/UGT, General Workers' Union) and Ignacio Fernández Toxo (CCOO). Politically, the union confederations in the two countries have followed different paths: 'The break of the UGT and CCOO from their historical political allies contrasted with Portugal where UGT-P [União Geral de Trabalhadores – Portugal] and CGTP maintained strong links with political parties on European issues.' Finally, the author draws attention to their role since 2008 in the aftermath of the Great Recession in pushing the ETUC to adopt a radical critique of the EU governance while at the same time supporting a strong alternative European integration.

In Chapter 7 Erik Bengtsson examines the historical scepticism of the Swedish union confederations towards the European integration process and European-level coordination between unions. A similar scepticism can be found among the union confederations in other Nordic countries: even before the establishment of the ETUC they had set up their own regional coordination body called the Council of Nordic Trade Unions. The Council has since been the backbone of Nordic union cooperation (and eventually of cooperation with unions from the Baltic States). Although some scepticism still lingers today, particularly regarding such 'core issues' as collective bargaining, the Swedish unions have over time taken a more favourable stance towards, and even pro-active role within, the ETUC. Many factors can explain this development: the weakening of the unions' institutional embeddedness at home, Sweden becoming a member of the EU in 1995, and the ongoing economic integration in Europe. Finally, while this integration began as a relatively positive experience, particularly with the EC pursuing a social agenda in the late 1980s, serious concerns started to emerge at the beginning of the 2000s and persist to this day about cross-border posting and agency work challenging the Swedish labour market model.

In Chapter 8 Jon Erik Dølvik considers the question of whether the Norwegian experience has mirrored that of Sweden. His analysis starts by looking at the position of Norway vis-à-vis the EU, which has left a long-lasting mark on the Norwegian unions' strategies and

policies on European issues. The ‘no’ side won in referendums on EU membership in both 1972 and 1994, and the European Economic Area (EEA) agreement with the EU means that since 1994 Norway has been an insider in the Single Market but, as a non-Member State, an outsider in the political decision-making process towards further European integration. Norway’s asymmetric position has provided an incentive for the unions to strive for better cooperation and coordination with the ETUC, which was co-founded by the Landsorganisasjonen i Norge (LO, the Norwegian Confederation of Trade Unions). At the same time, however, internal discord about European integration has lingered in the Norwegian labour movement since the two referendums and the EEA agreement became a contested issue in certain union circles; the current suboptimal regulation of cross-border posting and agency work is not very helpful in this respect.

Finally, Chapter 9, written by Adam Mrozowicki, is the only chapter analysing unions from central and eastern Europe. The chapter’s historical timeline begins in the early 1980s with the establishment of NSZZ Solidarność. Following increasingly repressive measures by the communist state, the union turned to the international arena, although not without difficulties due to its strong anti-communist sentiments. While Mrozowicki remains dubious about the possible impact of the three Polish union centres on the ETUC in terms of its identity and organisational structures, the author does provide ample evidence of this influence working the other way round. Indeed, the two main union centres had to overcome their historical rivalry (in particular on the issue of material assets, but also related to their political identities) in order to join the ETUC. The Polish union centres’ membership of the ETUC and European Trade Union Federations has strengthened their cooperation, served to professionalise their European and international activities and promoted the simplification of their internal union structures.

The ETUC has not only acted as an arbitrator between competing union confederations. From a union policy standpoint, the chapters reveal above all that national union centres and confederations, although not without reservation, have increasingly embraced the idea of a stronger European umbrella organisation defending the interests, needs and rights of the working class across Europe.³ The transnational and democratic power of the ETUC is now more than ever needed to countervail the dominance of multinational companies, continuing cross-border financial flows, the undermining of wages and working conditions that have been established in national laws or collective agreements, and the expansion of platform capitalism (the latter reviving to a certain extent the working conditions of the nineteenth century). However, in the current era marked by a deepening ecological crisis, refugee movements, Brexit, the rise of right-wing populism and the common distrust of mainstream political parties, the national unions’ rank and file in several countries are divided in their support for and very appraisal of the European project, although not for the first time. Indeed, at the time of writing this foreword, the EC is once again attempting to find an answer to the EU’s now very existential crisis by promoting a social Europe via President Jean-Claude Juncker’s ‘Social Pillar’. It remains to be seen whether this will constitute a fundamental change in European social policy or merely pay lip service to the idea.

This volume offers a different perspective to those publications that cover only the EU level of the trade union movement. As well as encouraging diverse interpretations and

3. A further strengthening of the ETUC would also involve a substantial shift of resources from national levels to the transnational level. However, most unions across Europe are struggling with their own resources at home.

debate, not only among union leaders but also union activists, we hope that the book will attract more attention to this topic of the interaction between national trade unionism and European integration, and even inspire further publications.⁴

While there is a logical focus on the main union confederations in those countries marked by union pluralism, the chapters are well-balanced in terms of their scope and attention. However, they can only provide *a* history, not *the* history, of the relationship between the ETUC and the national union confederations. As the discipline of historiography aims to demonstrate, the *objective* history of a subject does not exist; historical research imbues the past with meaning according to the dominant paradigms of the time in which it is executed. Each epoch sets its own research questions, leading to constant revisions in our interpretation of the past. In view of this reality, we encourage the development of a critical dialogue between this book and future historical research, as well as further research on union confederations in countries that are not covered in this volume.

Finally, we are very grateful to Luca Visentini, the current General Secretary of the ETUC, and the former General Secretaries Emilio Gabaglio, Lord John Monks and Bernadette Ségol for their advice, guidance and continued support during this long-term project. Furthermore, all country chapters have been reviewed by several former or current Deputy General Secretaries and senior advisors of the ETUC, as well as by academics in the field of employment relations at the national or European level. We would like to thank the following people for reviewing the chapters and for their valuable comments: Manuel Bonmatí Portillo, Jean-Jacques Danis, Joël Decaillon, Christophe Degryse, Jon Erik Dølvik, Tom Jenkins, Wolfgang Kowalsky, Rafaël Lamas, Jean Lapeyre, Lars Magnusson, Juan Moreno, Józef Niemieck, Claude Rolin, Kaare Sandegren, Knut Arne Sanden, Peter Scherrer, Peter Seideneck, Robert Szewczyk and Jeremy Waddington. Last but not least, we wish once again to thank the editors Andrea Ciampani and Pierre Tilly, as well as the authors, for their patience, time and devotion to this fascinating project⁵.

Philippe Pochet, ETUI, General Director, and
Kurt Vandaele, ETUI, senior researcher

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4. There are two forthcoming books in this series which make the European Social Dialogue a central focus. The first book is written by Jean Lapeyre. He assesses his own experience as a key actor in the Social Dialogue, which he was in charge of as the Deputy General Secretary of the ETUC from 1991 to 2003. In the second book, General Secretary Carola Fischbach-Pyttel of the European Federation of Public Service Unions (EPSU) tells the history of one of the most important European Trade Union Federations.
 5. However, needless to say, the views and interpretations expressed by the authors are theirs alone and do not necessarily reflect those of the union confederations, union centres concerned or the reviewers.