

**ARE WE IN THIS TOGETHER? HOW METAL TRADE UNIONS FROM  
CEE AND SEE HAVE MANAGED TO POSITION THEMSELVES IN  
EUROPE**

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## 1 Introduction

As the production lines have become more international, also trade unions have been forced to adapt in order to keep up with the development by forming cross-border networks. On the other side increased labor transnationalism (Anner et al 2006) has posed challenges to trade unions due to the persisting divergence in patterns of industrial relations and the increasing international competition that threatens to seriously hamper the development of cooperation between European trade unions. This decline of European trade unions' strength is usually seen to stem from two different sources: On one hand, trade unions have lost a great deal of influence on the domestic arena (e.g. Eiroline 2002). On the other, a basis for international labor solidarity has also eroded; the increasing transnational competition over costs and productivity levels is believed to have set workers operating in different locations against each other (Hancké 2000). Under such conditions, a great deal of skepticism over the commonality of workers' interests and the possibility of transnational labor action seems indeed well grounded. If one further considers the structural and ideological differences between the European trade unions, prospects for transnational labor action are indeed bleak.

On the other hand, there is the increased importance of European cross-border cooperation that reflects at least three sets of changes. First is the increased scale of market integration, meaning pressure for intensified competition, rationalization and restructuring. Secondly, growing internationalization of firms apparent by an explosion of cross-border mergers and acquisitions during the last 15 years has increased need for the trade union cooperation on issues which can no longer be dealt at the national level. Thirdly, trade unions have understood the need for cooperation instead of confrontation in trying to guarantee the best possible circumstances for the industry in question. It is therefore understandable for national trade unions to utilize international institutions like the policy committees of the European Metalworkers' Federation (EMF) to deepen their international networks and deploy international comparisons, or at the deepest level, seek European-level accommodations on some issues with cross-border nature.

The metal sector in Europe has one of the most advanced structures in joint-decision-making and coordinated action. At the forefront are interdependencies built through the EMF institutions. The EMF's strategy is based on two pillars: joint-commitment to European guidelines and political determination of EMF minimum standards, which all affiliates are expected to oblige. While coordination of collective bargaining at national level is regarded important in preventing mutual undercutting in collective bargaining, the political determination of European minimum standards is seen as an important instrument for a steady and gradual increase in pay and working conditions in the industry. The trade unions have also been encouraged to form their own informal networks to tackle more regional or bilateral issues.

By using network analysis, this paper looks in particular how the metal sector trade unions from Central Eastern Europe (CEE) and South Eastern Europe (SEE) have fared in the European arena. How some of them have been overachieving in managing to gain more influence than could be expected. Conversely, why others have not succeeded in this? The analysis draws from three different datasets: First, self-reported ties and dependencies between the EMF affiliates. Second, official membership in the committees and SWPs. Third, self-reported policy preferences by the trade unions. By using ego-networks and analyzing trade unions positions in different issues through network effect model, it is possible to come up with directional networks, which show

power dependencies between actors and influence they possess over each other as well as potential and real policy networks.

## **2 The Ties that Bind – Underlying Determinants of Trade Union Cooperation in Europe**

There has been concurring debate about the European integration and how it has affected the trade union movement, stressing the differences and competition pressure hindering its development. In many cases, trade unions from old and new EU member states have been placed into interest conflicts and competitive relations due to outsourcing, contracting and subcontracting (e.g. Hoffmann 2002). The establishment of the Economic and Monetary Union (EMU) prompted trade unions into competition and national strategies (Martin & Ross 2001), thus imposing competitive pressure on workers through the management's strategy in multinational companies to play off workers from different plants against each other (e.g. Galgoczi & Keune 2005; Hancke 2000; Tuckman & Whittall 2002). On the other hand, solidarity among European workers is not predicted in the discussion on the future of the integration of European workers (Ebbinghaus & Visser 1997; Koch-Baumgarten 1999; Martin & Ross 2001; Meardi 2002; Visser 1998).

The different interests of workers from new and old EU member states as well as structures of trade unionism have been indicated as hindering labor interest representation at the European level since the early stages (Streeck & Schmitter 1991; Visser & Ebbinghaus 1994; Marks & McAdam 1996; Turner 1996). Overcoming this cleavage in interests is assumed to foster capacity for action at the EU level and defending labor standards and social policy (Dölvik 1997; Ebbinghaus & Visser 1996; Schulten 2004). Due to the EU enlargement in 2005 and 2007 the cleavages were supposed to become even deeper (Meardi 2002), and the enlarged market was supposed to pose new challenges for the trade unions (Kvist 2004; Marginson & Traxler 2005; Lado & Vaughan-Whitehead 2003; Visser & Ebbinghaus 1994). Therefore it is interesting to look more thoroughly at the new EU member states and candidate countries from CEE and SEE.

Although contributions in the field of trade union cooperation have until now stressed a lack of solidarity this is not the only scenario. Alternative approaches have been derived from both the theories on market liberalization as well as empirical examples. Most approaches analyzing the prospects and practice of European labor integration have stressed institutional differences and political-economic factors that are hindering cooperation. The convergence-divergence debate of European industrial relations has traditionally stressed the historical divergent role of national industrial relations systems (e.g. Lecher & Platzer 1998), which have taken a path-dependent route to convert the national practices and orientations to respond better with the legislative and structural context of the EU. However, the same structural factor, market integration, has been predicted either to lead trade unions towards competition (Streeck 1999) or to bring about strengthening of ties between trade unions (Burgoon & Jacoby 2004). Furthermore, European level cooperation is plagued by a vertical divide within trade unions, as the lower levels of trade union organizations are less internationally oriented than the top leadership and the European trade union confederations.

Already long before the current state of European integration Ulman (1975) argued that market processes such as integration, increased capital mobility and the competitive pressure imposed on labor were impelling trade unions to bargain across a broader geographical scope, something which has been later shown by Ebbinghaus & Visser (1996). Consistent with this theme, it is also possible to see cooperation as a reaction to market integration. Contrary to the usual assumptions on trade

unions, they are sometimes ready to cooperate and mobilize across the national borders despite their differences. Therefore it is worthwhile to explore this in order to find out what the basis of cooperation in the transnational context and competition are. As solidarity might not necessarily be derived from the interests based on the institutional and economic factors according to political economy and institutional approaches (Streeck 1999; Visser & Ebbinghaus 1994), there is clearly a need to perform an analysis of the interests and motivations in cases where trade unions actually decide to cooperate alongside the potential for cooperation. In order to do this, the conditions under which trade unions formulate their interests in non-national/regional terms are important.

Different interests of national trade unions are seen as an obstacle in the integration of labor. The trade unions remain oriented towards national economic interests while acting at the supra-national level, meaning that they are not able to formulate common transnational interests (Keller & Jacobi 1997). Long-term international solidarity and opposition is difficult to organize and to maintain in view of rational self-interested action of each national trade union (Ibid.). From the perspective of trade unions from countries with high standards, action at the European level does not hold the promise of any advantages against the national system. On the other hand, trade unions coming from low-standard countries find the high aim exaggerated and unrealistic (Streeck & Schmitter 1991; Kohl 2008), making them less eager to participate in European level action.

The single currency has forced trade unions to accept wage and social spending reductions. The regions with stronger trade unions are predicted to lose out on competitiveness to regions with weaker ones. This was predicted to lead them to accept labor-cost reductions (Martin & Ross 2001). The problem of contradicting interests was even more acute in the context of EU's Eastern enlargement, since trade unions from the old member states were afraid of the effects of free movement of labor and capital. Therefore Meardi (2002) predicted a conflict between trade unions from new and old EU member states, suggesting that there was a prospect for the development of alliances between Western labor and Eastern employers as well as Eastern labor and Western employers, although later studies (e.g. Krings 2009; Kohl 2008) have shown these fears to be overestimated. Instead there have been signs of diversification of industrial relations within the EU, leading to a two-tier institutionalization processes and regional coordination instead of European coordination (????).

The different institutional backgrounds of the trade unions and the different cultures are supposed to make integration difficult. The interests and institutional-cultural differences of trade unions from old and new EU member states not only determine their economic interests but also generate a framework for their strategy, resources and mobilization (Ebbinghaus & Visser 1994; Lillie & Greer 2007; Leisink & Veersma 2007). The institutional embeddedness in the national context is an obstacle to engagement in international affairs, while the trade unions tend to prefer national or regional solutions in favor of European. It is argued that the trade unions with sufficient resources for international engagement, such as those from Germany or Sweden, would be less interested in cooperation because of their reliance on their domestic opportunities for influence. Those with a weaker position in their national context might be more interested in forming international cooperation networks, but their resources are limited (Ebbinghaus & Visser 1994). This is also confirmed by the empirical study based on interviews on the trade unions' attitudes towards European cooperation (Bieler 2006) and resource based network analysis (Nordin 2009). It is possible to derive tactics and constraints of trade unions with regards to international cooperation

from the type of industrial relations that define their position in the domestic arena and incentives for cooperation.

### **3 Research Design and Methods**

The network data used in this paper was gathered in 2008-9 by sending out a semi-structured questionnaire to all 71 trade unions from 34 countries affiliated to the EMF. Because of the relatively large size of the network in this study, a decision was made to use an approach where only one person from each organization was asked to respond. This was usually either the general secretary or the person responsible for international affairs. The main source of analysis was drawn from the question pattern asking the trade unions to report both stable and irregular relationships they had with other trade unions as well as to tell, which trade unions they consider to be powerful. This is a commonly used method to collect network data (e.g. Laumann & Knoke 1987; Pappi et al 1995; Knoke et al 1996). Also, questions were made about the policy preferences of the respective trade unions.

The response rate was 62 %. In addition, some interviews with the EMF officials as well as officials from some of the affiliates have been conducted. All the network analyses were done by Ucinet and NetMiner.

### **4 Empirical Findings - Trade Union Networks**

Networks, whether they are institutionalized or non-institutionalized, form the core modus operandi of trade union cooperation in Europe. By engaging in the European level cooperation, trade unions are indicating an interest to think and act beyond their national borders. The typical examples of institutionalized networks are the EMF Policy Committees and their SWPs. Outside these formal institutionalized structures also informal networks have been formed. Typical for these networks is that they function on ad hoc basis, meaning ever-changing and potentially overlapping membership. Because of this, it is harder to keep track on these networks. Therefore these are being called un-networks (Maguire et al 2004) in emerging organizational fields. While members recognize some degree of mutual interest (i.e. they are affiliated to the EMF as they share interest of different degrees in transnational issues), relatively little or no coordinated action exists among them. Such contexts represent potential networks of organizations rather than already established networks (Gray 1985). Whereas institutions in mature fields tend to be widely diffused throughout the field and have high levels of acceptance among actors, emerging fields are more likely to be characterized by proto-institutions, which are more narrowly diffused and only weakly entrenched (Lawrence et al 2002).

#### **4.1. Power- and Policy-Oriented Networks**

There are many different factors that affect the structure of networks. Stokman & Zeggelink (1996) made a distinction between power- and policy-oriented networks. The definition of power takes many different forms: from formal to informal, and from single core to multiple cores within the networks.

##### **4.1.1. Power-Oriented Networks: Informal and Formal Power**

Power-oriented networks can be divided into two different categories: networks that are based on informal power i.e. reputation and networks that are based on formal power i.e. institutionalized

position.

In informal power-oriented networks the actors aim to form ties with the most powerful actors in the field in order to gain power themselves. The task of calculating both the effects of access relations in target actors' power positions and their subsequent effects on the final decisions are extremely difficult if not impossible. Thus, the actors have to choose bounded rationality strategy with the aim of optimizing their own control by directing their influence relations to those target actors that are perceived to be powerful in the network. Accordingly, the status differences between actors should contribute to the probability that there exists a relation between these two actors. The assumption goes that actors with low status are trying to create ties with the more powerful ones. Powerful actors on the other hand are likely to accept information from the less powerful ones for two reasons. First, it is usually advantageous for powerful actors to be (or at least seem to be) open for influences from different directions, since this enables them to justify their own influence attempts more easily. Second, more powerful actors usually have more resources in their use to accept and maintain more incoming relations.

On the other hand, some studies (e.g. Bonacich & Roy 1986) have found that contrary to the prevailing theory that assumes a positive relationship between an organizations structural centrality and its relational power, an organizational dominance within a group of organizations is a structural variable that is more closely related to inter-organizational power than overall centrality. Moreover, changes in dominance within a group of organizations and changes in inter-organizational power are associated not only cross-sectionally, but over time. Therefore, it can be concluded that while network centrality may be related to inter-organizational power within a singular, monotonically hierarchical structure, in the highly clustered system, the relationship between centrality and inter-organizational power dissolves. The primary theoretical implication is that the relationship between a structural variable like centrality and a power relation variable like inter-organizational power is therefore a contingent relationship rather than a determinant one.

Determining which trade unions in the European metal sector are powerful seems to be an easy task on the surface. By using network analytical methods, the degree centrality of a trade union in the network determines its position and thus power/influence it possesses. This simplistic analysis, however, does not take into consideration the above described definition of power-oriented networks, since it includes only information about the amount of ties, not their quality.

To get a more accurate picture of power-oriented networks than normal degree centrality could give, the Bonacich's degree centrality approach (Bonacich 1987) has been used here. Whereas the original degree centrality approach argues that actors who have more connections are more likely to be powerful because they can directly affect more other actors, Bonacich argued that being connected to others who are connected makes an actor central, but not powerful. However, being connected to others that are well connected makes one powerful, because this means that the actors are part of the network power structure. His argument was that having the same degree centrality does not necessarily make actors equally important. To measure power positions, the argument went on, each actor is given an estimated centrality equal to their own degree, plus a weighted function of the degrees of the actors to whom they were connected. Then, this is done again, using the first estimates (i.e. again giving each actor an estimated centrality equal to their own first score plus the first scores of those to whom they are connected). As this is repeated numerous times, the

relative sizes (not the absolute sizes) of all actors' scores will come to be the same. The scores can then be re-expressed by scaling by constants.

To illustrate this, Table 1 shows core - semi-periphery -periphery divisions based on traditional degree centralities. The threshold values chosen were >14,29 (Core) and >5,71 (Semi-periphery). The affiliates with a degree centrality >4,29 are considered peripheral here. When compared these to the Bonacich's degree centralities, the figure would look a bit different. On the other hand, Table 1 reveals the Bonacich's degree centralities that differ from these. In the case of Bonacich's degree centralities, the threshold values chosen were >9,55 (Core), >4,20 (Semi-periphery) and <3,80 (Periphery). When comparing these two degree centralities, it is evident that the Nordic trade unions have gained a more powerful position than their actual size would suggest. This would lead to suggest that better organized institutionalized structures affect the power positions.

**Table 1. Power, centrality & positions of trade unions**

	Bonacich's degree centrality	Bonacich Position	Degree centrality	Position		Bonacich's degree centrality	Bonacich Position	Degree centrality	Position
<i>GER1</i>	21,161	Core	52,857	Core	<i>SER1</i>	4,726	Semi-periphery	7,143	Semi-periphery
<i>NED1</i>	19,629	Core	20,000	Core	<i>POR1</i>	4,342	Semi-periphery	40,000	Core
<i>SWE1</i>	17,237	Core	15,714	Core	<i>UK2</i>	4,334	Semi-periphery	7,143	Semi-periphery
<i>DEN1</i>	16,173	Core	55,714	Core	<i>FIN5</i>	4,201	Semi-periphery	4,286	Periphery
<i>NOR1</i>	15,882	Core	21,429	Core	<i>NOR2</i>	4,201	Semi-periphery	2,857	Periphery
<i>SWE3</i>	15,573	Core	14,286	Core	<i>FRA4</i>	3,803	Periphery	5,714	Semi-periphery
<i>SWE2</i>	15,523	Core	22,857	Core	<i>UK4</i>	3,441	Periphery	2,857	Periphery
<i>UK1</i>	13,964	Core	30,000	Core	<i>ROM1</i>	3,283	Periphery	7,143	Semi-periphery
<i>DEN2</i>	13,805	Core	20,000	Core	<i>FRA6</i>	3,124	Periphery	4,286	Periphery
<i>CZE1</i>	13,478	Core	17,143	Core	<i>CRO1</i>	3,038	Periphery	20,000	Core
<i>AUT1</i>	13,300	Core	14,286	Core	<i>TUR1</i>	3,035	Periphery	5,714	Semi-periphery
<i>BEL1</i>	11,857	Core	25,714	Core	<i>NED3</i>	2,992	Periphery	4,286	Semi-periphery
<i>FRA3</i>	11,828	Core	12,857	Semi-periphery	<i>BIH1</i>	2,857	Periphery	10,000	Semi-periphery
<i>FIN1</i>	11,629	Core	21,429	Core	<i>SWI2</i>	2,827	Periphery	1,429	Periphery
<i>SPA1</i>	11,615	Core	12,857	Semi-periphery	<i>ROM2</i>	2,738	Periphery	5,714	Semi-periphery
<i>SPA2</i>	11,500	Core	15,714	Core	<i>FRA7</i>	2,512	Periphery	4,286	Periphery
<i>BEL4</i>	11,147	Core	27,143	Core	<i>LUX1</i>	2,503	Periphery	24,286	Core
<i>SVK1</i>	10,973	Core	15,714	Semi-periphery	<i>MKD1</i>	2,163	Periphery	8,571	Semi-periphery
<i>POL1</i>	10,881	Core	15,714	Core	<i>KOS1</i>	2,153	Periphery	14,286	Semi-periphery
<i>ITAI</i>	10,200	Core	12,857	Semi-periphery	<i>GRE1</i>	1,596	Periphery	7,143	Semi-periphery
<i>NOR3</i>	9,909	Core	10,000	Semi-periphery	<i>IRL1</i>	1,587	Periphery	1,429	Periphery
<i>FRA5</i>	9,551	Core	47,143	Core	<i>BUL1</i>	1,540	Periphery	17,143	Core
<i>FIN3</i>	8,352	Semi-periphery	7,143	Semi-periphery	<i>BEL2</i>	1,290	Periphery	8,571	Semi-periphery
<i>FIN2</i>	8,237	Semi-periphery	7,143	Semi-periphery	<i>SPA3</i>	1,279	Periphery	1,429	Periphery
<i>FIN4</i>	8,171	Semi-periphery	5,714	Semi-periphery	<i>MNE1</i>	1,073	Periphery	2,857	Periphery
<i>HUN1</i>	8,112	Semi-periphery	20,000	Core	<i>BEL5</i>	0,925	Periphery	2,857	Periphery
<i>NED2</i>	7,082	Semi-periphery	8,571	Semi-periphery	<i>ROM3</i>	0,873	Periphery	11,429	Semi-periphery
<i>ITA2</i>	6,901	Semi-periphery	7,143	Semi-periphery	<i>BUL3</i>	0,662	Periphery	1,429	Periphery
<i>BEL3</i>	6,827	Semi-periphery	20,000	Core	<i>MAL1</i>	0,637	Periphery	2,857	Semi-periphery
<i>ICE1</i>	5,872	Semi-periphery	4,286	Periphery	<i>ITA3</i>	0,340	Periphery	20,000	Core
<i>NOR4</i>	5,565	Semi-periphery	5,714	Semi-periphery	<i>CYP1</i>	0,271	Periphery	5,714	Semi-periphery
<i>FRA1</i>	5,397	Semi-periphery	8,571	Semi-periphery	<i>BUL2</i>	0,000	Periphery	7,143	Semi-periphery
<i>POR2</i>	5,028	Semi-periphery	4,286	Periphery	<i>FRA2</i>	0,000	Periphery	0,000	Periphery
<i>POL2</i>	4,998	Semi-periphery	4,286	Periphery	<i>NED4</i>	0,000	Periphery	0,000	Periphery
<i>SWI1</i>	4,989	Semi-periphery	7,143	Semi-periphery	<i>UK3</i>	0,000	Periphery	1,429	Periphery
<i>SLO1</i>	4,917	Semi-periphery	27,143	Core					

- Bonacich's Alpha = 0.133
- SWP members in *italics*
- FIN3 represents all the Finnish trade unions at the SWPs
- Trade unions from new EU member states in CEE in red
- Trade unions from EU candidate countries from SEE in blue

As can be seen from the Table 1, in most cases the trade unions from Central Eastern Europe (CEE) and South Eastern Europe (SEE) have weaker power positions measured by Bonacich's degree centrality, despite relatively high normal degree centralities in some cases. The CEE trade unions (n=12) have an Bonacich average of 5,205, the SEE trade unions (n=7) 3,066 and the EU15 et al<sup>1</sup> trade unions (n=52) the average is 6,908, whereas in the normal degree centrality scale the CEE and EU15 et al score almost equally high (12,500 Vs. 12,637) and SEE 9,796. Following Bonacich's argumentation this is due to the fact that the trade unions from CEE are mostly connected with each other, thus undermining their chances of having influence over the entire field.

For a long time the European level collaboration was seen more as a Western project going parallel with the European Union's deepening integration (Lado 2002; Langewiesche 2002), witnessed by the fact that in steel sector, which is at core of industrial unionism, solidarity among Eastern and Western trade unions was for a long time non-existent (Bacon & Blyton 1996; Meardi 2000). Due to their socialist legacy, some of the old trade unions in the new EU member states still boast large number of members, but are organizationally limited in their ability to represent trade union interests in the European arena (Kohl & Platzler 2004; Pleines 2008). On the other hand, in many countries the trade unions have been more concerned about competing with each other than trying to collaborate, thus weakening the strength of the labor movement as a whole. Therefore the Western unions have had difficulties in seeing them as collaboration partners. Still, there is evidence (Kahancova 2009; Nordin 2009) of vital bilateral union networking gradually developing, since unions see the presence of foreign employers as an important incentive to foster an international union orientation and cross-border exchange of union resources. In general, the trade unions from the Czech Republic, Poland and Slovakia have been the ones with the strongest organizations to cope with the European level representation (Einbock & Lis 2007).

Prior to the EU enlargement in 2005, the Polish NSZZ Solidarność seemed to be in the most favorable situation, since as a pioneer of the free trade union movement in Eastern Europe, it was recognized by international bodies early on due to the fact that it had managed to establish various institutionalized and non-institutionalized contacts with its European and international counterparts even before the breakdown of the Communist regime in Poland, and being the first trade union from the CEE to become an EMF affiliate in 1993 (Einbock & Lis 2007; Dimitrova & Petkov 2005) along with trade unions from then Czechoslovakia and Hungary. At the other end are trade unions from ex-Yugoslavia; especially those that are not even EU candidate countries yet. Meanwhile candidate countries (Croatia, Macedonia and Turkey) have made more progress by introducing the European social model and striving for position compatible to the one enjoyed by the trade unions from CEE (Wannöffel et al 2007).

Before the EU enlargement in 2005 there were fears of inequalities in living standards and disparities in unemployment that might lead to substantial labor migration, threatening to undermine wages and conditions elsewhere in the EU. Another fear at the time was widespread social dumping, as markedly lower labor costs in the CEE countries were seen as an impulse for relocating productivity. These prognoses were at the time deemed unlikely (e.g. Marginson & Sisson 2006), due to the fact that lower levels of productivity would offset these differences. The evidence showed that real unit labor costs were marginal compared with the wage gap (Boeri &

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<sup>1</sup> EU15 + EEA + SWI + CYP + MAL

Brücker 2001). Not only labor-hostile management strategies, but also potentially divergent workers' interests were expected to jeopardize the solidarity between trade unions from Eastern and Western Europe. In many manufacturing sectors workers in the CEE profited directly from relocations and foreign direct investment (FDI), while at the same time western workers were faced with the prospect of losing jobs (Telljohann 2005).

The institutionalized view of formal power-oriented networks looks at the structural context in which the trade unions operate. This environment shapes their interaction and is thus an essential element in the explanation of the outcome for the network. An important facet of this context is the institutional landscape of the decision-making system in which the policy processes evolve. This includes on the one hand a formal institutional environment resulting from the political will of the EMF and on the other hand the interaction shaped by informal routines and exchange processes criss-crossing constitutionally prescribed linkages. These networks are not only for the access to information, but also for the coordination and concentration of functionally interdependent units.

Access to power is a central dimension of a network that can be measured in many different ways. In order to derive the power structure solely from network data, an argument can be made that there is unlikely to be formal network governance structures in institutional settings like policy networks, where powerful actors need to have access to reach their objectives in decision-making.

A common way of studying institutionalized power positions is to look at committee memberships (interlocking directorates e.g. Johanson 2006; Haunschild & Beckman 1998) as the measurement of power. Although the trade unions affiliated to the EMF are autonomous as far as their own trade union activities are concerned, they pledge themselves to respect, support and comply with the decisions and principles of the EMF decision-making bodies in certain matters. The affiliates are expected to report on issues such as current collective bargaining processes and restructuring to the EMF, evidenced by the success of the EMF coordination principle of collective bargaining from 1998.

In addition, the trade unions are encouraged to examine more advanced forms of cooperation within the framework of the EMF. This makes them part of a network, where everyone is at least in theory connected to each other through the institutionalized channels of the EMF. The main channels are the three Policy Committees (Industrial Policy, Collective Bargaining, and Company Policy) with their Select Working Parties (SWPs), Congress and Executive Committee, which draw, shape and decide on work programs and guidelines.

The Select Working Parties (SWPs) of the policy committees are responsible for preparation of committee meetings and, at the instruction of the committees, development and formulation of concrete proposals for joint positions. In principle every member organization has the right to participate in the SWP, but in practice currently only 19 are involved (EMF website 2010), representing the most active affiliates. Out of the CEE and SEE trade unions only the Czech one has been involved in the SWP's of the EMF Policy Committees. In the meantime, the SWPs have evolved into the most influential policy institutions in the EMF with their wide networks of contacts and regular meetings. All important recent EMF policy documents have first been drafted and discussed in the SWP, increasing their importance, and thus creating a two-tier model. The network evidence supports this, since normalized degree centralities of the affiliates represented in the SWPs are significantly higher than of those only in the Policy Committees, let alone of those not represented at all, as is the case for all the trade unions from SEE apart from the Croatian one.

**Table 2. Bonacich's degree centralities for different groups of trade unions**

Select Working Parties (n=19)	11,222
Policy Committees (n=53)	7,910
Non-Policy Committees (n=18)	2,293
ALL	6,486

Following the EU enlargements in 2005 and 2007, only the countries from South-Eastern Europe were left outside<sup>2</sup>. The EMF had established already in 2003 a South-Eastern European Forum (SEEF) to contribute to EU enlargement in this region. The situation for trade unions in some countries of Western and Eastern Balkans is very difficult due to the fact that the employers' organizations are either weak or are not existing at all. At the same time there are some employers who do not respect basic labor rights and some governments have been using the implementation of the *acquis communautaire* as an excuse to withdraw fundamental and labor rights, and that some foreign companies are not implementing or improving good practice with regard to social dialogue and collective bargaining. On the other hand, there are some examples of responsible behavior and even of good practice in some companies and employer organizations. The aim of SEEF is to help trade unions and strengthen their capacity to participate in social dialogue and European cooperation as well as creating possibilities for cross-border cooperation between unions in the Balkan region, although there have been some problems with this.

*"It is very difficult to cooperate with regional group, as they are not providing with data which we agree. Besides this number of Trade Unions from different countries are member of EMF, and they are presenting only one activity. They are not showing interest for unite. Instead of one stronger, we do have a few, but without influence."* (Trade union officer from SEE)

Against this background, trade union representatives from the metal sector all over Europe have pointed to a number of effects of globalization and Europeanization. First, increasing international competition and, thereby, a strict focus on costs dominates all aspects of employment relations at enterprise level, leading therefore to the always present question of outsourcing or relocation of production. Second, demands related to the qualifications and flexibility of employees has increased. This has enhanced the need for further training and education. Third, as a consequence of mergers and acquisitions, increasingly across borders, decisions seem to be taken outside the forums trade unions themselves have access to, making it more difficult for trade union representatives to establish a dialogue with the owners. Fourth, many smaller companies in the metal industries are subcontractors for larger, often multinational enterprises and are consequently part of cross-national production chains. This means that industrial action affects not only the individual company, but all links in the production chain, and thus that the pressure on the strike-bound enterprise is intensified.

From the trade union point of view, it becomes important to have well-developed, cross-national contacts. These changes have given the EMF more leeway to increase its role from strictly mediator of information exchanging information on national collective bargaining rounds to more concrete and binding policy-making, facilitating not only the exchange of information and experience, but also policy learning with regard to European trends and the formulation of mutually binding

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<sup>2</sup>Not counting countries like Norway and Switzerland that have voluntarily chosen to stay outside the EU.

policies. Benchmarking and peer pressure form an important part of such dynamics of the EMF (Gollbach & Schulten 2000).

#### **4.1.2. Weaknesses and Strengths - Different Interpretations of the Connection Between Pluralism and Power Within Trade Union Networks**

Pluralist tradition of industrial relations stems from the thought of the Webbs (1897) and Commons (1919) emphasizing a bargaining problem between stakeholders with competing interests where employment outcomes depend on the varied elements of the environment that determine each stakeholder's bargaining power. From a strictly labor perspective pluralism refers to competing interest among trade unions. There are two different interpretations how pluralism affects the national trade unions' possibilities to influence the decision-making. On one hand, strong pluralist approach argues that representing national interests<sup>3</sup> can be best guaranteed by having a broad unilateral support for the cause. On the other hand, weak pluralism emerges when the trade unions cannot agree on their targets and unilateralism becomes difficult, weakening the individual trade unions influence.

A prime example of strong pluralist approach are the Nordic trade unions that have arguably gained a more powerful position than their actual size would suggest. This would lead to suggest that better organized institutionalized structures affect the power positions. The formation of Nordic IN, a bargaining cartel that has similar institutional structure with the EMF, has made the coordination and cooperation easier, as it has meant mutual commitment to the common agenda. Nevertheless, the Nordic metal unions have faced a number of dilemmas. They have recognized a need to engage more actively in international, and especially European level, policymaking, including the coordination of bargaining processes. However, they have feared that European regulation may undermine their national bargaining autonomy. Against this background, it has been argued (Andersen 2006) that European integration has brought the Nordic metal unions to a crossroads in regards to whether to continue the close cooperation in the Nordic context or to coordinate common European policy initiatives instead. This became obvious in the case of The Posting of Workers Directive (Directive 96/71/EC), where the Swedish trade unions suggested opening up the whole directive, while the Finnish trade unions would have been happy with just some small modifications to it. Another key question is, whether it is better to continue acting as a brake on European regulation or develop new alliances in the European context (for example, within the framework of the EMF), and thereby try to counterbalance the otherwise dominant influence of the German IG Metall. What has certainly helped the Nordic unions is the high unionization rate, which counts among the highest in Europe. This has enabled the trade unions to receive more income from membership fees thus helping to strengthen their organization. A trade union with strong organization and large membership is also deemed more legitimate to represent the views of the workers, since it has a broader backing and greater resources to actually do something.

At the other end of the table, the trade unions from CEE and SEE represent the weak pluralist approach, which is characterized by internal disagreements on common policies. Following Bonacich's argumentation this is due to the fact that they are mostly connected with each other, thus undermining their chances of having influence over the entire field. Another reason behind this is the fragmentation of trade unionism in most of the CEE countries. This partially reflects the

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<sup>3</sup> There are different views on whether trade unions represent interests of their country or only interests of their members.

presence of old regime trade unions in most of CEE countries that survived the transition but were severely weakened with many of the former leaders and activists continuing to play a role. On the other hand, the most influential trade unions nowadays in these countries were built around political opposition, calling themselves free or autonomous trade unions. Whereas trade unions from the CEE have had modest success, the trade unions from SEE are still developing new strategies and organizational structures amid small resources. In a survey of trade unions from SEE, main tasks and needs reported were establishing new structures, training officers and shop stewards as well as consolidation among confederations at the national level (EMF 2009). Furthermore, on average a trade union in SEE has only three people working at the national level (headquarters), citing lack of human resources becomes evident (Ibid.). Since the role of shop stewards is among others to recruit new members, training them is important, especially because in most of the countries in CEE and SEE the company and plant level are dominating. This emphasizes the importance of lower level officers in strengthening the basis of trade unions.

Another reason behind this is the fragmentation of trade unionism in most of the CEE countries. Kohl (2008) has distinguished between politicized pluralism in Poland, cooperation-based pluralism in Hungary and innovative pluralism in Slovenia. The situation in Poland has been marked by great political polarization into two camps represented by Solidarnosc and OPZZ, both representing different political parties. The field of industrial relations became further fragmented, when a third, deliberately non-partisan neutral force, i.e. the Forum of Trade Unions (FZZ), as well as a large number of autonomous and non-affiliated sectoral and company unions were founded. This partially reflects the presence of old regime trade unions in many of the CEE countries that survived the transition but were severely weakened with many of the former leaders and activists continuing to play a role.

In Hungary the six new confederations cooperated from the start, in particular in the national Tripartite Council for Interest Reconciliation, and came to be the driving force behind the process of restructuring. And they were also the first to consolidate successfully their organizational role in the companies by establishing elected works councils in 1992 to prevent an unfair and delayed distribution of union property, amongst other things. Yet this did not halt the persistent decline in membership. In Slovenia, an almost unbridled organizational diversity has been typical until the recently. This process took momentum in two waves after 1990 and again after 2000, giving rise to the present number of seven central organizations. Yet the different tradition of self-government in Slovenia has helped to halt the erosion of trade union power in the meantime. Even during the era of former Yugoslavia with its “socialist market economy”, strong union presence was successfully maintained, including in the workplace, and reinforced by the introduction of works councils in 1993, excluding small businesses. An important innovative feature was the new instrument of sectoral wage determination in combination with the complete coverage of all workers by collective agreements. Tripartite structures at the level of the State and in social policies, which are linked up in networks in many and diverse ways, are another important feature. Conversely, other CEE countries such as the Czech Republic and Slovakia have succeeded in preventing inter-union pluralism to a large extent by thorough organizational re-orientation. Therefore it is no big surprise that the Czech and Slovak trade unions have the highest Bonacich degree centralities of the CEE trade unions.

In general, specific new forms of trade unions developed in each of the CEE countries during the period of transformation in the 1990s. Newly-established associations and re-foundations having

emerged everywhere, once the previously monolithic trade union organizations were disbanded. Yet they differ in the extent to which they have restructured and used the new freedom of association. A smaller number of countries succeeded to start with a clean sheet after having shed their ideology and exchanged the leadership; this applies, in particular, to those in which the formerly State-controlled labor organization came to be the drivers of transformation at the so called “round-tables” of reform forces, notably in the Czech Republic and Slovakia. In others, where the situation changed completely due to the formation of new and alternative trade unions at a very early stage, such as in Poland, Hungary and Slovenia, political and ideological aspects were correspondingly more virulent and resulted in a multitude of new foundations until the mid-1990s, and in some of them until very recently. The new pluralism made it difficult to distribute former trade union property. This turned out to be a formidable challenge and put a strain on inter-union relations.

#### **4.1.3. Policy-Oriented Networks: Positioning Based on Policy Preferences**

Contrary to the idea behind power-oriented networks, where the actor-specific preferences do not play a role per se, policy-oriented networks put an emphasis on the similarity of trade unions and their policy preferences. Here, the argument goes, the trade unions pick up their cooperation partners based on the similarity of policy preferences. Only after that comes the importance of the potential power position of this policy coalition. Whereas power-oriented networks can be seen as strictly means of individualistic strategic positioning in order to dictate the agenda, policy-oriented networks are based on the idea of collective positioning in order to get ones policy preferences through on the agenda.

The best way to identify policy-oriented networks is by applying the theory of actor-issue networks. As discussed in the beginning of this paper, these take the form of fluid coalitions in which sometimes to each other anonymous participants coalesce around a particular issue on an ad hoc basis. The main characteristic of issue networks is their temporary form that enables flexibility, since the members are motivated by the possibility to help shape the policies that they deem the most interesting for themselves.

There is no universally shared method of studying these issue networks, since they are generally regarded as ad hoc networks without clear strategic conceptualization at the central level or coordination between the members. The lack of coordination and networking between the members is usually regarded as a significant barrier for the development of these networks. They can also be characterized by a high degree of duplication and overlapping mechanisms and processes, since they are contingent on the awareness of members that issue preference similarities exist and identifying the network members who share these preferences.

One way of searching for the issue networks is by using blockmodels that enable adding the power dimension onto the analysis. Blockmodeling is a matrix algebraic method for sorting network actors into jointly occupied, structurally equivalent positions. A block is the partition of a sociomatrix of  $g$  actors, in one or more relational networks, into two or more discrete subgroups or positions, called blocks. The term block refers to a square submatrix of structurally equivalent actors that have very similar, if not identical, relations with actors occupying the other blocks. Blockmodeling is therefore a data reduction technique that systematically searches for relational patterns in network data by regrouping actors and presenting condensed aggregate-level information. The outputs are permuted density and image matrices displaying the pattern of ties within and between the blocks for each type of relations (e.g. Knoke 2008). Blocks can be constructed a priori using theoretical

principles, for example, by sorting the trade unions by regions as was seen in the previous chapter. Another alternative is to look for empirical patterns in a relational dataset a posteriori.

The traditional blockmodel analysis does not, however, help when trying to observe the under-organized domains, since it requires a priori knowledge of the amount of groups, and in the case of non-institutionalized networks, this kind of knowledge is not available. Therefore a model based on a posteriori knowledge is required. Because the most obvious ground for membership in under-organized domains issue preference similarity, this can be used combined with the self-reported connections to observe these kinds of groups. The trade unions were asked to name their top three issues and how these should be tackled. Issue preference similarity of the trade unions' ranking that was then applied into similarity based blocks.

**Table 3. Blockmodeling: Issues and How to Tackle Them. Trade unions in the Bonacich ALL TIES core in blue, semi-periphery in green and periphery in red**

	Through lobbying	Through coordination & benchmarking	Through formally binding decisions
<b>1. European-wide Growth and Employment Strategies</b>	BEL4; CZE1; DEN1; DEN2; FIN2; FIN3; FIN4; FRA4; FRA5; LUX1; NED2; NOR3; NOR4; SWE1; UK3  n = 15 Bonacich's avg. 8,942 Within density 0,305	BUL1; BUL2; FIN1; POR1; SWI1  n= 5 Bonacich's avg. 5,319 Within density 0,300	BEL2; BEL3; CRO1; CYP1; FRA2; GRE1; HUN1; SLO1; UK2  n= 9 Bonacich's avg. 5,268 Within density 0,111
<b>2. Coordination of collective bargaining</b>	n= 0	BEL2; BEL4; CRO1; CYP1; CZE1; DEN1; FIN1; FIN2; FIN3; FIN4; FIN5; FRA2; FRA5; GER1; HUN1; NOR1; ROM3; UK1; UK3  n= 19 Bonacich's avg. 9,251 Within density 0,316	FRA6; ITA3; NED2; POR1; SLO1; SVK1; SWE2  n= 7 Bonacich's avg. 5,947 Within density 0,095
<b>3. Controlling Foreign Direct Investments</b>	FIN2  n= 1	KOS1  n= 1	n= 0

<b>4. Supervising and supporting EWCs</b>	n= 0	BEL4; FRA5; GER1; LUX1; UK1; UK3 n= 6 Bonacich's avg. 11,756 Within density 0,467	BEL1; BEL2; DEN1; FIN3; FIN5; FRA6; ITA3; NED2; POL1; SLO1; SVK1; SWE2 n= 12 Bonacich's avg. 7,613 Within density 0,242
<b>5. Sustainable development and environmental issues</b>	n= 0	CZE1; UK2 n= 2 Bonacich's avg. 8,095 Within density 0,000	GRE1; NOR1; NOR3; NOR4; SWI1 n= 5 Bonacich's avg. 6,475 Within density 0,300
<b>6. Working conditions (working time, safety etc.)</b>	BUL2; DEN2; FRA4; NOR4 n= 4 Bonacich's avg. 6,071 Within density 0,167	BEL1; BEL3; BUL1; CYP1; FIN1; FIN5; FRA2; FRA6; GRE1; HUN1; ITA3; KOS1; LUX1; SVK1; SWI1 n= 15 Bonacich's avg. 5,550 Within density 0,143	POL1; ROM3 n= 2 Bonacich's avg. 5,782 Within density

<b>7. Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)</b>	n= 0	FIN4 n= 1	POL1; UK2 n= 2 Bonacich's avg. 6,360 Within density 0,000
<b>8. Training</b>	n= 0	BEL3; BUL1; DEN2; FRA4; NOR1; NOR3; SWE2 n= 7 Bonacich's avg. 9,085 Within density 0,286	BUL2; KOS1; POR1; ROM3 n= 4 Bonacich's avg. 2,891 Within density 0,000
<b>9. Controlling private equity</b>	n= 0	n= 0	BEL1; CRO1 n= 2 Bonacich's avg. 10,407 Within density 0,000
<b>10. EU-level industrial policies</b>	n= 0	SWE1 n= 1	n= 0

<b>11. Research &amp; Development (R &amp; D)</b>	n= 0	SWE1 n= 1	n= 0
<b>12. Strengthening trade unions</b>	n= 0	GER1; UK1 n= 2 Bonacich's avg. 19,658 Within density 1,000	n= 0

Table 3 presents a posteriori blockmodeling analysis of issue-actor networks based on the trade unions' issue preferences and the preferable means to tackle these. Applying the power dimension to the analysis, the blocks with highest Bonacich's average and the highest within density indicate the block members' central position in the network as well as already existing ties between the block members. From this angle, lobbying for European growth and employment strategies and coordination of collective bargaining are the strongest blocks.

These two issues bear a different character, making it therefore difficult to compare them with each other. While it is stated on the EMF "coordination charter" that European metalworker's unions have to elaborate a common political position on what they see as an appropriate minimum standard to be met throughout Europe, seeking to combine a politically-defined minimum with a more far-reaching goal in order to ensure that the overall concept will not be only about lower-standard countries catching up the rest (EMF 2001). Among introduced practices has been European Collective Bargaining Network (EUCOB@) in 1999, in which national trade union correspondents report regularly on the recently concluded agreements as well as on-going bargaining rounds. On the other hand, European-wide growth and employment strategies like the European Employment Strategy (EES) or Lisbon Agenda are more political tools, over which the national trade unions have little direct influence.

Comparing issues per se gives an idea of general direction trade unions would like to emphasize. Another way is to move within the issues and look at the procedures and strategies that should be adopted to determine the relevance of these blocks, concentrating solely on the columns. In most cases there are no strong competing blocks, i.e. divided opinions on how to proceed on certain issues; only European growth and employment strategies, coordination of collective bargaining and to some degree supervising the EWC's can be classified as such.

From the angle of the trade unions from CEE and SEE these issue-actor blockmodeling networks give a different picture than what the formal power measurement was able to give. As can be seen, there are several blocks where the membership consists of trade unions both from the EU15 as well as CEE and SEE countries. Whereas the traditional analysis of access to power emphasizes the role of the formal structures, this view makes visible preference similarities among trade unions. High within density indicates a tight network, where the trade unions are connected to each other, while high Bonacich average points to the potential for these preferences to move forward in the agenda

of the EMF. That some of these issues have already been institutionalized into EMF's modus operandi is evident from the fact that they have gained broad support among the trade unions.

## 5 Conclusions

By using network methods, this paper has tried to show how metal trade unions in Europe fare internationally using network approach. A special focus was given to the roles and positions of the trade unions from the CEE and SEE, and a comparison with the Nordic trade unions that are also representing a small region in Europe. Network methods are an effective tool for studying cooperation, power and participation. They enable the analysis of how advantageous or disadvantageous structural position an actor has in a network. This relational positioning of trade unions helps explaining their influence and power positions, and their ability to realize their interests to a considerable extent.

One of the most important determinants of network position is resources a trade union has. Since in most cases in the CEE and SEE these resources are scarce, the trade unions have been forced to compromise on their activity at the European level and instead concentrate on the national (sectoral and company) level activities. Also, scarce resources mean competition for them that can entail the rivalry between different trade unions in face of international competition for investments, threats of capital relocation, and against worsening of working standards and pay levels. When competing, the trade unions are not committed to compromise in their interests in face of foreign trade unions, instead only trying to pursue their own national interests. This is bound to lead to decreasing trust and weaker commitment to mutual agreements. Competition can take many forms, from open rivalry to weaker forms of competition, such as non-existing contacts and a lack of initiatives in seeking union partners abroad as Kahancova (2009) and Gajewska (2009) have showed in their studies.

By looking at the trade unions from CEE and SEE, one can see that they have mostly very few members and have been formed only during the last ten years (EMF 2010). Although there has been consolidation between the trade unions, the main obstacle still seems to be the spreading of resources. In average metal trade unions in South-East Europe employ just over 3 officers, thus making international cooperation a lesser priority (EMF 2009). This comes through quite clearly from the following comment:

*“Due to scarce financial possibilities we haven't been able to hire new officers to take care of the international matters.”* (Trade union officer from SEE).

As an answer to this there have been attempts to increase coordination through strong joint actions, unified viewpoints and finally mergers, instead of fighting internally over the right to represent workers. Despite significant achievements over the past decade of transition to market democracies, trade unions throughout the region continue to face tough issues: restoring real incomes and employment levels in the aftermath of transition, getting their voices heard in social dialogue, and representing workers' interests in an environment of rapidly changing social policies and reforms. Also the reluctance of employers to organize themselves has made it difficult for the trade unions to establish themselves at the sectoral level.

In the almost 20 years of transition, trade unions from CEE and SEE have turned into major independent actors in helping to introduce the new institutional framework of industrial relations. They have also earned invaluable expertise and experience in a very short time in the international front, having been accepted into organizations like the EMF already in the early 1990's. Now, trade unions are at a turning point once again, facing a choice to either continue their defensive positioning in trying to guarantee jobs for their own workers on lower condition than are standard in the rest of Europe, or engaging more deeply with their Western counterparts in trying to find the best solution for the whole Europe and seen as equal partners instead of receivers of aid.

*“Our point of view is that international solidarity issues are difficult and unsolved and there are many things to develop. For example, we are aware of a case where a company had plants in several countries and when they had to close one factory, employees in another country ‘clapped their hands’ when they heard of it. People are often very selfish for various reasons.”* (Trade union officer from EU15).

Scarce resources mean that trade unions are seemingly performing badly from the power-oriented view of networks. However, the policy-oriented view presents a picture of mutual-interests between trade unions from the EU15 and CEE and SEE. While these networks do not necessarily exist, they still show that despite formal powerful positions in the trade union networks, they are still able to get their voices heard by having similar policy preferences with the more powerful trade unions. Opposite to the trade unions from CEE or SEE, the Nordic trade unions have made their policy-oriented cooperation a priority, because they have realized that through tightening the cooperation and creating institutionalized structures, it is easier to agree on policies, thus making power a by-product of policy-orientation.

The best way to gain equal status is by introducing networks consisting of members from both EU15 and new member states in order to be able to cooperate on issues like wage dumping and underbidding competition. As prime example of this has been the Vienna Memorandum, founded in 1999 that consists of trade unions from both the EU15 and the CEE.

This paper tried to apply network theories to measure trade union participation and cooperation at the European level. There remain, however, questions how to assess the results of cooperation. Particularly, against which benchmark should the value be measured and whether the elaboration of success and performance presented here is accurate. Drawing from evidence elsewhere (e.g. Bernaciak 2010), it can be stated that not every incidence of trade union cooperation should be regarded as significant neither for the parties themselves nor for Europe. This leads to the distinction of levels, where cooperation takes place. While trade union leaders present their stances during committee meetings and congresses, low-ranked trade union officials often participate in inter-plant exchanges, with union members giving their consent for cross-border action.

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