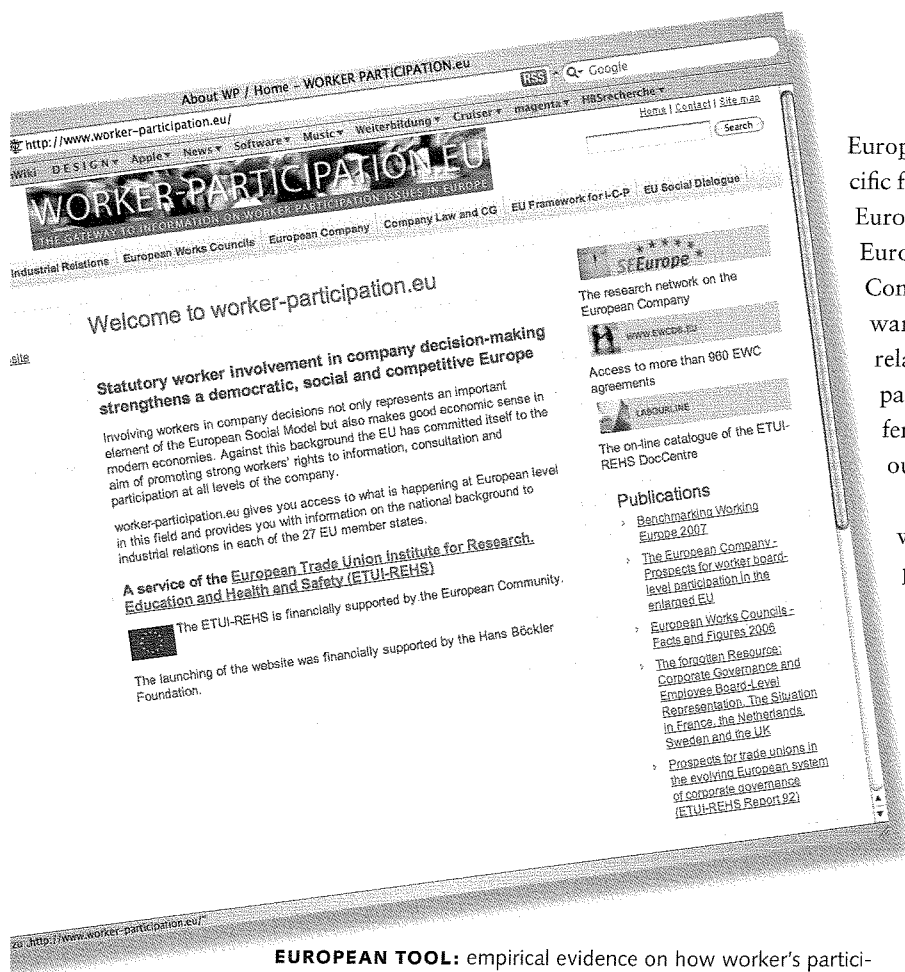


Logging on to employee involvement

WWW.WORKER-PARTICIPATION.EU The European Trade Union Institute's new English-language website brings together information on employee involvement in Europe.

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EUROPEAN TOOL: empirical evidence on how worker's participation anchors social Europe at workplace and company level

European industrial relations are like a jigsaw puzzle, where specific features of national industrial relations fit with cross-border European elements. New EU legislative developments, like the European Works Council (EWC) directive and the European Company (SE) directive, are increasingly driving processes towards a more comprehensive model of European industrial relations as they provide tailor-made arrangements for companies that operate across national borders. The way the different pieces of the jigsaw fit together is becoming more obvious and visible.

The new web service www.worker-participation.eu – which went online in May 2007 – aims to help users see the bigger picture by providing continuously updated empirical and theoretical information on industrial relations and employee involvement in Europe. Whereas its ‘predecessor’ www.seeurope-network.org, which has been integrated into the new website, focussed mainly on the implementation of the European Company (SE) and board-level representation, the new website is much broader in the topics and concepts it covers. It reflects the view that employee representation in Europe today is composed of several elements that link together. In the months and years to come, www.worker-participation.eu will contribute to a better understanding of the different pieces of the jigsaw and fuel discussions on the connections between them.

A SPECIFIC EUROPEAN TOOL The website will also give the concept of worker participation, as a specific European tool for combining economic with social goals, a home in the World Wide Web. It is aimed at employee representatives and unions, at both national and European level, as well as academics, political institutions and the general public.

With more and more companies operating Europe-wide (or even globally) the transnational level of employee representation is becoming more and more important. Company management, employee representatives and unions are increasingly dealing with cross-border questions of worker participation at different levels. This website seeks to meet the increasing need for accurate and easily accessible information by giving its users access to what is happening across Europe in the field of employees' rights to information, consultation and board-level representation. Information on the following topics is available on the site:

- European Works Councils (EWC)
- European Company (SE) / European Cooperative Society (SCE)
- European Information, Consultation & Participation Framework
- Corporate Governance & EU Company Law
- European Social Dialogue
- Financial Participation (in preparation)
- EU-27 Industrial Relations Backgrounds

Whereas the first six topics focus on European developments, the last section provides key information on industrial relations at national level. The aim of this section is not to systematically observe developments in the EU member states (a task already performed outstandingly well by the European Industrial Relations Observatory EIRO – www.eurofound.europa.eu/eiro/index.html). Instead, it offers basic information (and further documents and links) on all EU member states in respect of trade unions, collective bargaining, workplace representation, health and safety, board-level representation and the selection procedures for EU-level bodies (European Works Councils, SE Works Councils).

Some knowledge of these key issues is essential in organising effective transnational employee representation. If individuals are to be able to cooperate with one another, they need at least a rough understanding of the different national systems and traditions involved. Many EWCs have already made considerable progress in this process of internal cultural capacity building – developing a better mutual understanding of how things work in other countries. The need for transnational information was confirmed by the experiences of the first SEs. In the case of the Finnish-based Elcoteq SE, for example, a serious lack of knowledge seems to have ham-

pered the employee side in formulating its own strategy in negotiations with the employer. Besides an insufficient knowledge of SEs, a key problem was the absence of any knowledge of the different systems of worker representation, including board-level representation in the countries affected by the establishment of the SE. In this sense mutual understanding can be seen as a precondition for building up trust among the employee representatives from the different member states.

AT WORKPLACE AND BOARD LEVEL The website supports these processes by offering information on all countries, as well as online tools such as the 'Compare countries function' which makes it possible to quickly compare specific aspects of different countries' industrial relations. This tool will be further developed in the coming months and extended in the topics it covers, enabling users, for example, to compare the key differences between the national laws implementing the SE directive (such as how the national delegates to the special negotiating body are selected).

The sections on European Works Councils and on the European Company (SE) in particular offer a broad range of information relevant for both research and practice. The European Works Council Database contains the details and texts of agreements by which EWCs have been established, as well as agreements negotiated by EWCs on specific topics. The database also contains information on multinational companies falling within the scope of the EWC directive. This service has existed for more than ten years now and has been widely used as a reference source by a range of EU and national institutions, as well as research and academic centres, and is also a useful tool for those dealing with EWCs and employee participation in their daily work.

The European Company (SE) section is largely the product of the ongoing work of the SEEurope network, a project conducted by an international network of researchers from all EU member states, plus Norway, Liechtenstein and Iceland, under the leadership of the ETUI-REHS. It provides access to the information on SEs that those involved need. With the SEEurope fact sheets the website gives information on all SEs set up so far, with a specific focus on worker involvement.

The new web service www.worker-participation.eu provided by ETUI-REHS – and developed with the support of the Hans Böckler Foundation – underlines the importance of workers' participation. It brings together a comprehensive range of information, and provides empirical evidence on how workers' participation anchors social Europe at workplace level and contributes to better economic performance and sound corporate governance. This approach differs from the currently dominant view that focuses solely on transparency, to the benefit of only one stakeholder group – the shareholders. ■