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The role of EWCs in accessing transnational level information and the day-to-day functioning of the EWC

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The role of EWCs in accessing transnational level information

- EWCs are meant to redress the information asymmetry between management and labour
- Most of the information EWCs get is already available on freely available financial reports
- Most information is provided during the annual meeting
- Sometimes it is presented in a more meaningful way than in freely available reports (type of aggregation, product lines, groups of countries)
- Rules are important, but how we use them is crucial

The day-to-day functioning of the EWC

- The main point is whether the EWC has a day-to-day functioning or it is a mere annual act of compliance
- This depends partly on the rules (is there a select committee? How many meetings are envisaged?), but mostly on how trade unions “use” EWCs
- Trade unions can invest on EWCs and create a day-to-day functioning:
 - Collect information and monitor developments during the year
 - Support members with training, coordination activities, expert knowledge
 - Rely on national-level information procedures
 - Activate links between national trade unions, EWC members, within and across national borders, with the help of European Trade Union Federations
 - Usually, national trade unions of the headquarters have a key position and EWCs somehow reflect the “home” industrial relations climate. Companies with EWCs may be targeted to invest in participatory industrial relations

Some reflections

- EWCs are instruments in the hands of the actors
- Often, employers tend to do as little as possible
- But we should not forget that they started as fully voluntary bodies within MNCs
- EWCs can be a tool for supranational HRM practices, in the hands of management? A similar point is made for German work councils!
 - The weakness of EWCs makes this unlikely
 - As for German WCs, they can become a tool for union (re)vitalisation
- EWCs are valuable assets to get information and coordinate action:
 - Be prepared and ask question during the year and before the annual meeting
 - Keep and enhance contacts between members and national trade unions, and European Federations throughout the year
 - Keep contacts with company management
 - Develop communication channels with employees
 - “Home” national trade unions can have a crucial role in all this