

Working group on the future of the Trade Union

This group was initially created to think about the adequacy of the existing federal structures to existing change of our working environment, and whether digitalisation and the intensification of remote work should not call for a switch from a geographically based structure (BXL, LUX, etc) into a functional one (Commission, Counsel, etc). The Congress however wanted to enlarge the problematic looked into, by focusing on: how to get new members and improve the image of Union Syndicale, how to serve our members and how to integrate the increasing demand for more democracy at work into our trade union agenda.

With the challenges posed to Unions in an ever changing society, the purpose of this group was to reflect on how can the Union be prepared for the years ahead. This reflection would cover fields from rethinking its structures, to the challenges posed by emerging new ways of working, and not forgetting how to get new members and better serve the existing ones.

I. Structure of the union

The initial reflection of the group was if the current structure of the Union Federal serves its purposes. The conclusion reached is that the Federal Structure is something very valuable, for the Independence and Proximity it allows to the member organizations. This comes however with the understanding that some of the current base structures might be too burdensome, and a reflection should take place as to if they require a sub-level.

The current Federal structure should be the backbone guiding any thought on the type of services the different levels can offer the associates. It is understood that it is the USF that should act as the face of any major need, such as protection of whistle-blowers and harassment victims, but also that USF has to play a role in supporting the member organisations with training and addressing the issues related to (lack of) Social Dialogue in their domains, or creating an external communication structure to help the member organisations have a further reach, as well as implementing an internal communication structure which allows better synergies and best practices exchange between member organisations.

II. How to serve our members.

The support to our members is twofold: (1) individual and (2) global action. In addition, some action needs to be taken to recruit new members keeping in mind the articulation between local and federal level as well as the main principles of the organisation.

(1) The individual support -bearing in mind the USF principles- it shall be given by local organisations and shall be:

- a. allocated to **all** members, be they active or not.
- b. offered **by** trade union **colleagues** who are adequately **trained**.
- c. made known through proper communication tools *what the Union can do and whom to contact* in our website the US page on the Intracomm and on the Newsroom.
- d. maintaining the intermediate role of the Union between the member and the Administration the Payment Master Officer (PMO), Medical Service or other instances in defending member's interests.

(2) global actions, defining and defending as for example measures related with-psychosocial risks, social dialogue, negotiations, anticipation of future reforms, working time, digitalisation.

Concerning the recruit of new members, it is proposed to organise

- events inviting potential new members, for example breakfast every 3 months ("the USF breakfast" in the Maison Syndicale)
- targeted communications towards potential newcomers.

The articulation between the local and federal level should be clearly reflected, keeping in mind the main principles of the Union such as solidarity.

III. Getting new members

As regards getting new members, we looked into the HR aspects, the quality of the service provided, the oral communication and the written communication.

1) HR aspects

- i. Need for secondments
- ii. Involving retired members
- iii. Develop our own efficiency (through digitalisation, automating, etc.)

2) Quality of service & expertise

- i. Training our staff representatives
- ii. Creating an inter-section database to ensure the carrier longevity/mobility
- iii. Create a network of trainees
- iv. Appoint mentors

3) Oral communication

- i. Breakfast with newcomers
- ii. Prepare the members and family members to selection tests whatever the grade
- iii. Participate to external targeted events to enlarge our knowledge and expertise
- iv. Workshop for newcomers (e.g. at induction phase)
- v. Mobilise young new members
- vi. More social contacts/ collaboration for all the new members and/or intersections

- vii. More Speakers sessions (including on USF offer and specific topics with or not experts)

4) Written communication

- i. Develop intracom US page
- ii. Develop newsroom USF page (strengths, history, international playground, benefits, etc.)
- iii. More social media (keeping in mind risks of backfiring)
- iv. Use other section communication, like newspapers

IV. Advocating for democracy at work

1) Co-decision vs social dialogue

Democracy at work was another important topic of discussion. We all value democracy, however it stops in the workplace which is where we spend most of our times. In that regard, Europe has developed a model giving workers the right to participate in the decision-making of their firms/public organisations at different levels, including by having representatives in supervisory board or decision-making bodies. Even in the public sector, there are instances where one Executive Board member of a given institution is elected by the staff (Banque de France). The question is whether USF could also put forward such type of vision, sometimes referred to as co-decision or Mitbestimmung.

The principle of co-decision was however opposed by some who see it as blurring the responsibilities between the employer and the employee. In their view, what matters most is to have the framework already in place properly applied. In fact, those who were aiming high were also those who had the weaker participation framework. At the EU Commission for instance, participation mechanisms are already in place, such as Joint Committees, which might make the need to enhance staff participation mechanisms less urgent than in other institutions (such as the ECB) where there is not such a level of involvement.

Overall, the question was also about ensuring that the participation mechanisms foreseen by the rules would lead to an effective influence in the final outcome.

2) How to effectively influence outcome

This brought us to look into the various action modalities to create bargaining power. First of all the right to strike, which has been emptied from its effectiveness due to unilaterally imposed minimum service obligations. Second, the capacity of the union to engage with its members and staff at large was also seen as a key factor of success. In that regard, due attention should be paid to the emergence of staff networks steered by the employers. This occurs typically under the pretence of fostering diversity, but carries a high risk of being instrumented to bypass the staff representation and divide the staff. It was deemed important that unions take the lead in the building or animation of networks of colleagues and members.

3) Ensuring fundamental union rights

In that regard, we came back to the fundamentals of freedom of association, which is that trade unions should be given the necessary room to be active and exist. In some organisations, anti-trade union tactics were limiting the capacity of the unions to properly perform their functions. The availability of time dispensation (secondment) granted to trade union representatives was deemed to be key, as such a function cannot be performed on top of a normal 40 weekly hours jobs. Also, it was observed that the administration was in some institution not complying with its principle of neutrality, interfering with the election process or even deciding about mandate limitations or imposing their own election rules, with a view to favour representatives which would defend a stance closer to that of the employer.

4) Concrete proposals: EP resolution + special Agora

The working group concluded on the need to adopt a specific resolution for the European Parliament requesting that the institution respects basic trade union rights.

It was also decided to suggest that a forthcoming edition of Agora could be dedicated to the topic of Democracy at work. Further research or publication on the topic, possibly in association with other academics or institutes, could be encouraged or carried out by USF.