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Obstacles to transnational trade union cooperation in Europe – results from a European survey

Abstract

This paper analyses obstacles to transnational union cooperation within Europe. It is based on a survey of unions in 14 European countries, and all members of the ETUC. The result shows that ‘hard’ IR-factors are generally more important obstacles to transnational cooperation than ‘softer’ factors such as cultural, linguistic, ideological and religious differences, and that there are sectoral differences in experiences of obstacles to transnational union cooperation: unions in the manufacturing sector tend to emphasize differences in industrial relations and a lack of organizational resources for transnational union cooperation, whereas low organizational priorities are held to be of more importance in the services sector and for unions for professional workers.

1. Introduction¹

In many respects, cooperation between trade unions in Europe is well developed. This cooperation includes a variety of activities, such as exchanging information; collaborating on training programs; co-producing collective statements or agreements; participating in union actions such as signing petitions, mobilizing demonstrations or organizing strikes; coordinating bargaining through coordination standards or principles; coordinating negotiations on plant restructuring and closure; and negotiating with European employer organizations at sectoral and cross-sectoral levels.

Whether this cooperation is considered successful depends on what issues one focuses on and what expectations one has. Against the background of the globalization of financial markets, however, as well as the Europeanization of product and labour markets, most observers favourable to trade unionism would agree on the need for a deepened and strengthened cooperation (e.g. Keune and Schmidt, 2009; Marginson and Sisson, 2004).

There are however strong obstacles to transnational trade union cooperation, such as the differences between countries in production structure, legislation and political policies as well as in language and culture; the absence of a counterpart willing to negotiate above the national or even local level; variations in ideological basis and occupational or sectoral interests between unions, as well as differences in organizational forms in different countries and

¹ The research on which this paper is based was funded by the Swedish Council for Working Life and Social Research. The author would like to thank Mattias Bengtsson, Bengt Furåker, Kristina Lovén Seldén, and the anonymous reviewer for helpful comments on previous versions. I am grateful also to Maria Jepsen, Vera Glassner and Kurt Vandaele at the ETUI as well as to Roland Janssen at the ETUC for constructive comments on the questionnaire.

sectors; and a lack of power or financial resources as well as support from union members for transnational cooperation. In research on trade unionism and industrial relations in Europe, these obstacles to transnational union cooperation are often discussed. But they are rarely studied head-on with a focus on the unions' own experiences of these issues.²

The purpose of this paper is to analyse union experiences of conditions and obstacles to transnational union cooperation within Europe on the basis of a survey sent out during 2010 to representatives of unions in 14 European countries, as well as to all European Industry Federations (EIFs) and all national member organizations of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). The paper focuses on the importance ascribed to different conditions for and obstacles to transnational union cooperation in Europe by the respondents. In addition it reveals variations in the importance of differences in national IR systems, organizational resources, sectoral interests, organizational priorities, and culture in obstructing union cooperation in different sectors.

2. Transnational union cooperation in Europe

Theoretically, it seems reasonable to speak of four forms of transnational trade union cooperation, signifying a process of deepened commitment and institutionalization of collaborative efforts (cf. Kay, 2005; Gajewska, 2008; Müller *et al.*, 2010): 1. The establishment of contact and exchanges of information in bilateral or multilateral *communication networks*, which increases the knowledge bank on which the individual unions base their activities and strategies (cf. Keune and Schmidt, 2009). 2. The identification

² There are of course exceptions, e.g. Gennard and Newsome (2005), Neergard and Dølvik (2005), cf. Waddington (2006).

of common interests and the establishment of relatively loose *coordination networks*, which enable unions to coordinate their actions (cf. Pulignano, 2004). 3. The development of common measures and activities on a ‘case for case’ basis in the form of *cooperation networks* while retaining the possibility to ‘opt out’ on any given issue. 4. The establishment of trans/supranational decision-making structures and continuous activities in the form of a *meta-organization* with a mandate and power to act on behalf of the member unions (cf. Ahrne and Brunsson, 2008).

In Europe, all four forms of cooperation exist (cf. Glassner and Pochet, 2011). Besides informal bilateral cooperation between unions in two or more countries (Traxler *et al.*, 2008), there exist coordination networks such as the Doorn group and the Inter-Regional Trade Union Councils (IRTUCs) that aim at increased coordination of national bargaining strategies and union activities between two or more adjacent countries. The Council of Nordic Trade Unions (NFS), and the Baltic Sea Trade Union Network (BASTUN), are other forums for sharing information and coordinating activities among the Nordic and Baltic peak level unions (Hammer, 2010; Marginson and Sisson, 2004: 105ff.). The European Works Councils (EWCs) have laid a foundation for union cooperation networks in transnational corporations (Gilson and Weiler, 2008; Stirling and Tully, 2004), while the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and the European Industry Federations (EIFs) negotiate agreements through social and sectoral dialogues with European employer organizations (Clauwaert, 2011; Welz, 2008).

These forums are the main arenas for union cooperation within Europe. The specific issues on which cooperation takes place vary widely, however. Some cooperation does actually concern core bargaining issues such as wages and working time, a great deal involves ‘softer’ issues

such as training, gender equality, health and safety, corporate social responsibility, and some merely results in general statements to strengthen the dialogue with employer organizations. Some cooperation is solely trade union driven, with transnational coordination of collective bargaining offering the most pertinent case (Glassner and Pochet, 2011; Hammer, 2010; Traxler and Mermet, 2003). In other cases it has been driven by the EU institutions, like the social dialogue in the mid-1990s (Dølvik, 1997), and the dialogue related to the European Employment Strategy/Luxembourg Process (Gold *et al.*, 2007).

The outcome of these collaborations and dialogues with employer organizations has often been described as quite meagre.³ The unions have had difficulties over the years in both reaching agreements on important issues and in creating effective cooperation networks and meta-organizations with the strength to negotiate on behalf of their member organizations. In addition they have been thwarted by the employer organizations, which reject attempts to create a negotiating system above the level of the nation state. However, there are some developments that indicate both possibilities and improvements in performance in recent years: for instance in the European Social Dialogue (Clauewert, 2011); in the European sectoral dialogue (Degryse and Pochet, 2011); in the work of some EWCs (Huijgen *et al.*, 2007; Müller and Rüb, 2007); and in the activities of bargaining coordination ‘from below’ (Traxler and Mermet, 2003).

³ On the EWCs see for example Gilson and Weiler (2008), and Waddington (2006), however see also Banyuls *et al.* (2008) for the prospects of successfully working EWCs. On the social and sectoral dialogue see e.g. Glassner and Pochet (2011), Keller and Weber (2011), Léonard *et al.* (2011), Marginson and Sisson (2004:82), Schroeder and Weinert (2004). On the sectoral dialogue see also de Boer *et al.* (2005), Pochet (2006), Keller (2008).

Obstacles to transnational union cooperation

Research on trade unionism and industrial relations in Europe has analysed existing forms of transnational union cooperation, their development and institutionalization, and their outcomes. A secondary theme often touched upon in such studies consists of the obstacles such cooperation has to overcome. The overall impression from this research is that the emphasis is often placed on institutional factors and national divergences, though organizational problems, resources, priorities and ideological differences are also mentioned, as are cultural factors such as language, cultural traditions and expectations. In this section I will try to give a condensed overview of factors discussed as obstacles at the different levels of cooperation presented above, beginning with the ETUC and the social dialogue, followed by the EIFs and the sectoral dialogue, border-region coordination, and the EWCs.

The development of the ETUC into a supranational decision-making organization has been fraught with difficulties. *First*, the makeup of national labour market institutions and ideological divisions resulted in major coordination problems. Differences in the organization of unions also played a role, particularly between the looser German and U.K. confederations in comparison to the Nordic ones. *Second*, tensions have existed between member organizations within the ETUC, not least historically because of ideological divergences – for example with the politically radical southern unions, and between the EU-sceptical attitude among Nordic unions and the partnership orientation and EU-optimistic tendencies in the Benelux (Dølvik, 1997; Hyman, 2001). Many unions have opposed giving the ETUC a mandate to negotiate on behalf of its member organizations. Additionally, the opposition between member unions that favour a top-down approach to European unionism and those preferring a bottom-up approach has caused problems (Dølvik 1997: 133ff., 142f., 395-402).

Third, employer organizations have acted against union cooperation at a European level. Their major strategy has been to resist transnational labour laws and agreements (Bransch, 2005; Dølvik, 1997: 176ff.; cf. Welz, 2008: 149f.).

There have also been major obstacles to union cooperation at sectoral level. *First*, the Commission previously put less effort into creating a strong social dialogue at this level, and the open method of coordination undermined the conditions for far-reaching cooperation on collective agreements (Bercusson, 2009; Keller, 2008; Weber, 2001: 134f.). *Second*, The EIFs have had inadequate powers and mandates to enable enforcement of compliance and implementation (Keller, 2008: 223; Léonard, 2008; Keller and Weber, 2011). According to some union representatives, agreements have not always been taken seriously since they are perceived as vague and difficult to implement (Murhem, 2008). There are also some obstacles relating to ‘coercive comparisons’, i.e. concession bargaining has been used to maintain national employment levels (Pulignano, 2009). In addition some representatives see European activities as a way of exporting their own attitudes, while for others the most important thing is to strengthen the relationships between the social partners (Murhem, 2006). *Third*, there are additional obstacles at national level. Among Eastern EU member states, union organization is weak at sectoral level. There are also variations regarding sectoral divisions in different countries (Keller, 2008; Léonard *et al.*, 2006; 2011). *Fourth*, the employer organizations are structurally fragmented and reluctant about the sectoral social dialogue. Many organizations are business organizations rather than employer organizations, and in some sectors there are competing employer organizations (Dufresne, 2006; Keller, 2008; Keller and Weber, 2011).

The looser ‘bottom-up’ cooperation networks at confederal (Doorn) and sectoral level (e.g. IRTUC) have also encountered difficulties. *First*, coordination is one-sided as employer

organizations are not interested in transnational agreements (Marginson and Sisson, 2004: 105). *Second*, national differences make it more difficult to coordinate negotiations across borders, because of differences in timing and levels of bargaining. The industries in which agreements are negotiated vary between countries, as well as organizational structure. The inclusion of bargaining issues varies, as does the extension/coverage of the agreements. Some cover the entire labour market, others, as in Germany, only a district, and often just one company, in Eastern Europe or the UK (Traxler *et al.*, 2008; cf. Glassner and Pochet, 2011). Cross-sectoral coordination (e.g. Doorn) is even harder than sectoral coordination, ‘due to the high degree of interest heterogeneity at the cross industry level’ because of strong differences between export-oriented industrial and the more ‘sheltered’ services sector (Glassner and Pochet, 2011:13).⁴ *Third*, there are disagreements on recommendations and minimum levels, and how to control their implementation. The agreements are basically voluntary. This means that peer review and benchmarking are mainly used as control methods. Additionally, there are difficulties in bridging the gap between ‘one-tier’ and ‘two-tier’ negotiations (Marginson and Sisson, 2004: 111ff.).

Turning to the EWCs, previous research also points to obstacles. *First*, national institutions differ (e.g. ‘single-channel’ and ‘dual-channel’ systems), and influence the degree of ‘rootedness’ of works council’s representatives in unions, as well as representatives’ attitudes to works councils. In general, attitudes towards collective negotiations through EWCs have been more positive in countries with lower wages and decentralized agreements (Dølvik, 1997: 386f). British representatives tend to see the employer side as an antagonist, while the Dutch representatives perceive their counterparts as social partners (Huijgen *et al.*, 2007).

⁴ Though, as noted by Pulignano (200), the acceleration of out-sourcing leads to increasing international competition concerning wages and working conditions in the services sectors.

Stirling and Tully (2004) show that southern European representatives expect more from negotiations compared with northern Europe. *Second*, there are inherent factors in works councils that run counter to a development of a common European worker identity (Knudsen *et al.*, 2007). The roles and tasks of the works councils are somewhat unclear, the representatives' resources are generally meagre, they have inadequate training, the composition of the councils often changes and meetings are infrequent (Gilson and Weiler, 2008). Communication between representatives is sometimes hampered by lack of access to e-mail and a lack of language skills (Huijgen *et al.*, 2007; Müller and Rüb, 2007). Different cultural backgrounds are also causing misunderstandings on how to participate in meetings and some representatives are unwilling to speak a foreign language (Stirling and Tully, 2004). Besides this, cooperation can be curbed by a contradiction between a member's corporate identity and his or her identity as a union member.

In table 1 I have tried to compile some of the obstacles mentioned as important in the literature, just to give a more schematic overview by classifying them theoretically.

Table 1 approx. here

3. Data and methods

The data for the following analyses were collected through a web-based/postal survey sent out in 2010 to trade unions in 14 European countries, as well as to all ETUC-member organizations. For countries where membership data was available we chose not to include organizations with less than approximately 10,000 members. In others we excluded some

unions that we suspected to be small because of a narrow occupational basis. In order to produce good validity, respondents at central positions in the organizations were selected: we targeted the secretary general or the president, and in cases of repeated non-responses we sent follow-ups to the vice-president, the international secretary/correspondent, and finally to an official responsible for collective bargaining. In some cases the targeted respondent delegated the task to other officials. As a result, more than half of the questionnaires returned have been filled out by the secretary general, the president or the vice-president of the organization, almost a quarter have been filled out by an international secretary/correspondent, and six per cent of the responses came from an official responsible for collective bargaining.

We used somewhat varied strategies for different countries: the main strategy being the web-survey version. All the surveys sent to Spain, however, took the form of a traditional postal survey, since we could not get hold of e-mail addresses. In addition to the e-mail reminders, in some cases (Sweden, Denmark, Finland, UK) we also sent out a final reminder in the form of a postal survey. As shown by table 2 we had varied success in getting good response rates: the worst cases being Poland and France, countries for which we also had great difficulties in reducing the number of organizations. With the exception of these two countries the overall response rate is quite good (76 %), though with a bias towards better rates in the Nordic countries.

Table 2 approx. here

The set of items analysed in this paper are responses to two general questions concerning obstacles to and conditions for union cooperation. The data is analysed both in a descriptive fashion, and a more analytical one. The results of the descriptive analysis are presented as

percentages and means based on the entire data set. An attempt is then made to reduce the number of dimensions by Principal Component Analysis (PCA) in order to compare the importance of different dimensions of obstacles and conditions against sector as an independent variable. The reason is that sectors differ in production processes, transferability of production location, and exposure to international competition – according to recent research to such an extent that sectoral differences in industrial relations within countries are bigger than national differences within sectors in Europe (cf. Bechter *et al.*, 2011). The PCA and compared means-analyses were performed on a data set containing only the fourteen countries listed in table 1 (n 220), the reason being that the sectoral comparison might otherwise be biased by the fact that the peak level respondents included a larger number of union organizations from new EU-member-states than did the responding sectoral unions. The PCAs were, however, tested against the whole dataset, which yielded rather similar solutions (not presented).

Ideally, one would use a theoretically stringent sectoral division according to the approach of Crouch (1999) for instance. However, since unions organize according to different principles, I have approached the question of sectoral distinctions more pragmatically, on the basis of both the classification of economic activities in NACE and the occupational classifications of ISCO-88 (COM). Thus, in the analyses I use six categories: “manufacturing,” “construction,” “transportation,” “services,” “professions,” and “peak-level” confederations (cf. Larsson *et al.*, 2012/forthcoming).

The following should be noted about these categories: “manufacturing” includes unions organizing also in chemicals, mining and forestry, though with a main interest in the manufacturing industries. The distinction between “professions” and “services” is drawn so

that unions mainly organizing occupations at level 1-2 in ISCO-88 (COM), i.e., occupations that require academic education, such as lawyers, engineers, doctors and nurses, dentists, psychologists, teachers, and social workers, are classified as "professions," while those mainly organizing occupations at other levels are classified as "services." Ideally, a distinction would have been drawn between public and private services, but unfortunately it is hard to find a clear and consistent division between unions in different European countries along this line. In addition, I have separated "transportation" from services in general, since transportation has a higher degree of internationalization than services in general.

"Construction" is also separated from the other sectors as it has been under a growing competitive pressure due to the increase of posted workers following the inclusion of new EU member states in 2004 and 2007 (Dølvik and Visser, 2009; Bechter *et al.*, 2011: 27f.). Unions organizing in more than one of these sectors are not presented in the tables other than as parts of the total.

Before turning to the results one aspect of validity needs to be taken into account. The fact that transnational trade union cooperation in Europe involves so many forms, levels and issues is a problem when surveying conditions for and obstacles to such cooperation in general. The results presented below are not therefore as valid when discussing specific arenas or issues of cooperation as when discussing cooperation between unions in general.

4. Transnational cooperation: obstacles and conditions

Most of the unions in our survey take a positive stance towards transnational union cooperation. Almost all agree that cross-national union cooperation will, in the long run,

improve conditions for European workers – to some, or to a high degree (94 %). Most cooperate in exchanging information on collective agreements on a regular or sporadic basis (92 %), and over two-thirds of them collaborate on training programmes for union representatives (71 %). More than half of the unions have been involved in coordinating negotiations concerning plant restructuring and closure, on issues such as redundancies, wages, or training (52 %), and more than a third of them exchange observers and negotiators in collective bargaining (38 %) (cf. Furåker and Bengtsson, 2011). In addition many unions have participated in coordinated union action during the last three years. Most have signed collaborative statements, petitions or open letters (79 %). More than half have participated in transnational demonstrations or boycotts (56 %), and some state that they have participated in coordinated overtime bans, blockades or strikes (18 %).

These results may be compared to Nergaard and Dølvik's (2005) survey of Nordic unions with 1000 members or more. Approximately half of the unions cooperated regularly with unions in other countries by exchanging wage statistics, negotiation results, or by coordinating strategies in wage negotiations. More than two thirds had signed petitions or the like (69 %), while a third had participated in manifestations (35 %) and a fifth in boycotts/blockades (21 %). The somewhat lower degree of collaboration in Nergaard and Dølvik's survey, as compared to ours, may partly be explained by their inclusion of smaller unions than in the present study.

Nergaard and Dølvik's survey also covered obstacles to transnational union cooperation. When ranked according to the factors to which Nordic unions attribute the greatest importance the following order appeared: lack of economic resources was the greatest obstacle (>45 %), followed by lack of power (>35 %), low priority from the member

organizations (>30 %), language barriers (>30 %), divergent national interests (>25 %), too much bureaucracy (>20 %), cultural differences (>15 %), and ideological disagreement (>10 %). The obstacle that was considered least important was that the ETUC and the EIFs were over dominant (>5 %) (Nergaard and Dølvik, 2005: 59).

Our survey contained similar questions about obstacles to trade union cooperation within Europe. Table 3 presents the results ranked from most to least important. The general tendencies are similar to those in Nergaard and Dølvik (2005). Differences in financial resources among unions are generally seen as the greatest obstacle to union cooperation in Europe. Thereafter follows a set of four items which concern IR-factors (in a narrow sense), such as national differences in labour market policies and regulations and the negative approach of employer organizations, but also factors relating to internal priority issues in the union: i.e. low priority from union leaders and low interest from union members. Two items which are of slightly less importance follow: the first concerns language differences, the other is IR-related, i.e. competition between high and low wage countries. At the bottom of the table we find five additional obstacles that are somewhat less important: diversity in ideological or political or religious orientation, differences in union membership rates, the ETUC's lack of financial resources, the weak mandate given to the ETUC by its member organizations and differences in national culture and tradition.

Table 3 approx. here

The wide dispersion of the results over all categories is notable and also that the range of means is quite compressed, signalling that the overall picture is complex. All the factors are important to a high degree for some respondents. It is not therefore so easy to single out more

than a few obstacles that really stand out as more important than others. What is more, the greatest dispersion is related to factors one would expect to be of quite varying importance in different countries: negativity from employer organizations, competition between high and low wage countries, and union membership rates. The mandate of the ETUC is another of these.

Table 4 displays the results of a set of questions concerning the conditions that are important for successful trade union cooperation within Europe. These results confirm some of those in table 3 and add greater stability and additional information to the interpretation. Three of the six factors are seen as more important than the others. First come similarities in labour market policies and regulations between the unions cooperating. The second involves similarities in occupational interest, i.e. strongly related to the sectoral basis of the unions. Union leaders' personal networks and relations take third place.

Table 4 approx. here

The three lower variables in table 4 are consequently considered to be somewhat less important conditions for cooperation generally – though, still quite important for many unions. They comprise cultural and linguistic similarities, as well as ideological, political and religious ones. In this way these results confirm the results of table 3 in that differences and similarities in IR-factors between countries (and within sectors) are very important for the prospects for transnational collaborations, as are organizational resources and priorities, at least in comparison to cultural factors such as similarities and differences in ideological, political and religious orientations and in national cultures and traditions.

5. Obstacles to union cooperation – dimensions and sectoral aspects

In order to compare the effects of sectoral differences on perceived obstacles to union cooperation within Europe I will first try to show that there are underlying dimensions that explain much of the variation shown in table 3 above. By doing this it is then possible to compare only a few dimensions, instead of comparing all twelve items presented in table 3. Table 5 shows the results of a PCA analysis demonstrating the reasonableness of a four-dimension solution that distinguishes four factors representing IR-differences, organizational resources, culture and priorities.

Table 5 approx. here

Table 6 shows the results when the means of different sectors are compared for each factor-based dimension. As a comparison to table 4 above, table 6 presents a somewhat different ranking of means since the factorial based dimensions are aggregated indexes. Taken together we now see that the two priorities-items constitute a more important dimension than the three IR-differences-items or even the organizational resources dimension. The cultural dimension is still, however, rated as the least important obstacle.

When comparing the different sectors we find that the ranking of dimensions of obstacles varies between sectors. For manufacturing and construction, a lack of resources is seen as the most important obstacle for developing cooperation, followed by IR-differences, whereas in transportation it is IR-differences between countries that pose the major obstacle. For unions organizing professionals and in the services sector as well as for the peak level confederations

it is the priorities dimension that is most important. Not surprisingly, we thus find the greatest difference is between unions in the export oriented manufacturing sector and those organizing in services and professional work, i.e. sectors more sheltered from international competition. Unions in construction and transportation are somewhere in between these poles, as are the national peak level organizations.

Table 6 approx. here

These differences should be understood in relation to both the existent forms of transnational trade union cooperation in different sectors, and their basis in the different forms of industrial relations and the varied competitive pressures that exist in different sectors and industries. The sectoral level is not only the most important level of collective bargaining within the EU15; in many sectors it is also the level at which the most far-reaching forms of union cooperation and European bargaining take place through the European Industry Federations (EIFs) and the sectoral social dialogue as well as through cross border bargaining coordination (Marginson and Sisson, 2004: 97ff.). The development of such cooperation is related to the different production processes and work organizations that characterize different industries and sectors (Bechter *et al.*, 2011). Some industries, particularly in manufacturing, are highly exposed to international competition since their product markets are highly integrated and their work organization makes possible a high degree of transferability of production location. Exposed industries in which labour is mobile across borders such as coal, steel, agriculture, transportation, and construction also belong to the “first generation” of EIFs, with longstanding traditions of cross-border union cooperation. These industries are, together with industries that have undergone liberalizations, e.g., civil aviation and telecommunications, and construction because of the Posting of Workers Directive, the ones

that have had the greatest cause to collaborate across borders since they are affected by common industrial policies in the EU. It is thus in the manufacturing sector, and particularly in the metal industry, that one finds the most far-reaching transnational coordination of activities between unions (Pulignano, 2009; Müller *et al.*, 2010; Glassner and Pochet, 2011). It is thus understandable that organizational priorities pose less of an obstacle to the development of a deepened cooperation than the actual resources and the institutional differences in industrial relations between countries, which may make it difficult to cooperate even though there are strong incentives and ambitions to do so.

The more “sheltered” industries, e.g., public services such as education and healthcare and private services such as hairdressing, on the other side, are less exposed not only to international competition in their consumer markets, but also to transferability of production location (Bechter *et al.*, 2011; Glassner and Pochet, 2011: 13). They have been under less pressure to develop cross-border cooperation and are thus latecomers in terms of European cooperation and sectoral dialogue. As noted by the Commission report on European sectoral social dialogue: “While European sectoral social dialogue largely covers the primary and secondary sectors of the economy... several services sectors are still without an organized social dialogue at the European level” (European Commission, 2010: 7). This may be a reason for not placing transnational cooperation high on the organizational agenda, not least since their members are less directly affected by international competition and “regime shopping” from the employers, as compared to industries in manufacturing and construction. This may explain why priority obstacles, i.e. low priority from union leaders and a lack of interest from members, are seen as the most important ones.

6. Conclusions

This paper shows that, when studying the unions' own experiences of conditions and obstacles to transnational union cooperation in Europe, the picture that emerges is quite complex. An initial conclusion is that the unions themselves recognize many obstacles to such cooperation. When ranking which obstacles to and conditions for transnational union cooperation are the most important according to the unions themselves, differences in the financial resources available to unions is number one. This factor is closely followed by others concerning differences in industrial relations between countries. As discussed by many researchers, differences and similarities in labour market regulations and policies between countries are important for the prospects of transnational union cooperation, as is negativity from employer organizations and similarities in occupational interests. Priority issues are quite important too in that low priority from union leaders and low interest from members are seen as a major obstacle to transnational union cooperation.

What is quite striking is the fact that the 'softer' factors such as cultural, ideological and religious differences – and similarities – as well as language are considered much less important for transnational union cooperation than the 'hard' institutional and contextual factors. Union leaders' personal networks and relationships are of greater importance than cultural and linguistic factors. One might also note that the greatest dispersion in responses is related to issues that one would expect to vary in importance in different countries: negativity from employer organizations, competition between high and low wage countries and union membership rates.

It is, moreover, also worth noting that the ETUC-related obstacles – i.e. a lack of financial resources and lack of mandate given to the ETUC by its member organizations – are viewed as relatively minor obstacles to union cooperation. This may be the result of the general approach of the questions. The respondents were asked to grade the different factors as obstacles to transnational union cooperation in general, and the ETUC-related factors only concern one arena/body of cooperation, whereas other factors may concern all forms of cooperation. Another factor of importance for these results may be that giving a high grade to these obstacles may constrain the respondents themselves to award additional political and financial resources to the ETUC, which may be problematic in relation to the domestic interests of trade unions (cf. Larsson *et al.*, 2012/forthcoming). In any case, these issues seem to be quite sensitive, as there is an increase in missing values in the responses on the ETUC-related items, as compared to the other obstacles listed in the questionnaire.

The analysis also shows that there is an underlying dimensionality in the results. It is possible to separate *differences in IR* from a *resources-dimension*, a *culture-dimension*, and a *priority-dimension* in the PCA on obstacles to transnational union cooperation. These results are of interest *per se*, but in this paper they were primarily used to construct the factors on which to make a comparison of the effects of sector on perceived obstacles to union cooperation within Europe. The main results of this comparison is that the unions within manufacture emphasize differences in industrial relations and a lack of organizational resources as the most important obstacles to transnational union cooperation, whereas organizational priorities are held to be more important in the services sector and for unions organizing professional workers. The latter also emphasize the importance of shared occupational interests for successful cooperation. We should be careful not to overstate these differences, however, since they are only relative and in some cases quite marginal. The differences between sectors are not great

enough to claim that the obstacles and conditions for transnational union cooperation in Europe are different in kind. On the contrary, there seems to be relatively strong similarities between different sectors.

To conclude, just like globalization, the Europeanization of product and labour markets provides incentives for unions to collaborate transnationally and strengthens the advocacy for such cooperation in the trade unions. It may even bring the nationally diverging interests and objectives of trade unions closer (Keune and Schmidt, 2009). It may, thus, seem paradoxical that differences in industrial relations are viewed as a stronger obstacle to cooperation in sectors containing industries in which convergence in IR has made considerable progress – i.e. some industries in manufacturing and in transportation (Bechter *et al.*, 2011). However, one must remember that these are also sectors for which transnational cooperation is important because of their exposure to international competition, and that a strong priority on transnational cooperation may make institutional obstacles seem even stronger than they appear in sectors in which cooperation is less prioritized – and possibly even less needed because there is less competitive pressure. As previous research has shown, transnational union cooperation is well developed in Europe, and has a long history, not least in sectors under high competitive pressure. This study, however, confirms another result of much previous research. It shows that transnational union cooperation still has many obstacles to overcome – both in day-to-day cooperation and in the overall process of producing a more satisfactory outcome for European workers.

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Table 1. Obstacles to union cooperation according to previous research

	ETUC/SD	EIF/SSD	Border region/ bottom up coord.	EWCs
Institutional factors in the arena concerned	-Negative employer organizations - Weak resources and mandate of ETUC -Differences between top down/bottom up approaches	-Lack of support from Commission (no binding agreements) -Weak mandate and weak compliance mechanisms in EIFs -Fragmented and dismissive employer organizations	-One sided cooperation (No counterparts at same level) -Weak compliance mechanisms	-Unclear roles and tasks -National (plant) competition
National IR-differences	-Different national IR-settings: regulations, policies, and relations to employer organizations -Different sectoral divisions and union organization	-Weak sectoral organization in some countries -Different sectoral divisions and union organization -National competition/concession bargaining	-Timing of collective bargaining varies -Variation in industries covered by agreements -Differences one/two tier bargaining.	-Single versus dual channel systems – Conflict- vs. consensus oriented employer relations
Organizational resources	-Low membership rates, and weak resources in some countries			-Meagre resources -Little training of representatives
Organizational Priorities	-Different ambitions among leaders and different membership priorities	-Different ambitions between countries and industries		-Variation in priorities between countries -Clash between organizational and union identity/interest
Culture, traditions and ideology	-National cultures (e.g. general EU-scepticism), languages, and ideological bases of unions			-Differences in languages, culture, traditions and ideology between representatives

Table 2. Sample and response rates

Country	Percentage of responses	Response rate % (freq.)	Sample freq.
Austria	2.8	88 (7)	8
Belgium	4.4	39 (11)	28
Denmark	8	69 (20)	29
Finland	6.4	42 (16)	38
France	7.2	18 (18)	101
Germany	6.4	59 (16)	27
Great Britain	7.6	61 (19)	31
Iceland	1.2	50 (3)	6
Ireland	2	33 (5)	15
Norway	9.6	71 (24)	34
Poland	8	15 (20)	131
Spain	5.6	54 (14)	26
Sweden	15.6	100 (39)	39
Switzerland	3.2	35 (8)	23
<i>Other country*</i>	8.4	33 (16)	48
<i>EIFs</i>	3.6	75 (9)	12
<i>TOTAL</i>	<i>100</i>	<i>49 (250)</i>	<i>(512)</i>

* Peak level organizations (ETUC-member) in other European countries. All in all ETUC has -- besides the 12 EIFs the associated organization (EUROCADRES) and four national observer organizations – 83 national member organizations (82 when the survey was initiated). Since 34 of the member organizations are in the 14 countries above, 48 national peak level organizations are included in this category of “other”.

Table 3. Obstacles to union cooperation within Europe. Means and percentages (n250)

<i>To what degree are the following factors obstacles for union cooperation within Europe?</i>	Mean	Not at all	To a low degree	To some degree	To a high degree	n**
Differences in financial resources among unions	3.06	5	13	53	29	242
Diversity of labour market policies and regul.	2.86	6	24	49	21	241
Low priority among union leaders	2.84	7	24	47	22	242
Employers' 'divide-and-rule' strategies	2.80	11	24	37	27	223
Low interest among union members	2.79	8	23	50	19	241
Differences in mother tongue/language skills	2.76	6	31	44	19	242
Competition between high/low wage countries	2.72	12	26	39	23	236
Diversity of unions' ideol./pol./rel. orientations	2.65	8	31	48	13	237
Differences in union membership rates	2.64	13	27	44	16	237
Lack of financial resources of the ETUC	2.63	8	34	45	13	205
Weak mandate given to ETUC by member org.	2.57	12	35	36	17	203
Differences in national cultures and traditions	2.52	10	38	43	9	242

* range 1-4 (not at all = 1, to a low degree = 2, to some degree = 3, to a high degree = 4).

** don't know/no opinion is counted as missing. Missing values were excluded from the analysis, which accounts for the varying totals.

Table 4. Conditions for successful union cooperation within Europe. Means and percentages (n 250)

<i>To what degree are similarities in the following respects important for successful union cooperation within Europe?</i>	Mean	Not at all	To a low degree	To some degree	To a high degree	n**
Labour market policies and regulations	3.29	2	10	44	44	241
Occupational interests among unions	3.26	1	11	48	40	234
Union leaders' personal networks and relations	3.24	2	10	50	38	240
Union leaders' mother tongue and language skills	2.82	8	23	48	21	239
Unions' ideological/pol./religious orientations	2.62	10	32	43	15	235
National cultures and traditions	2.50	9	41	41	9	237

* range 1-4 (not at all = 1, to a low degree = 2, to some degree = 3, to a high degree = 4).

** don't know/no opinion is counted as missing. Missing values excluded from the analysis , which accounts for the varying totals.

Table 5. Obstacles to union cooperation. Means and factor loadings. 14 countries (n217)

<i>To what degree are the following factors obstacles for union cooperation within Europe?</i>	Mean 1-4*	Factor 1 <i>IR-differences</i>	Factor 2 <i>Resources</i>	Factor 3 <i>Culture</i>	Factor 4 <i>Priorities</i>
Differences in financial resources among unions	3.01	.209	.818		
Diversity of LMPs and regulations	2.87	.539		.349	
Low priority among union leaders	2.83				.848
Low interest among union members	2.79				.828
Employers' 'divide-and-rule' strategies	2.78	.839			
Union leaders' mother tongue and language skills	2.73		.739		
Competition between high and low wage countries	2.71	.830			
Diversity of unions' ideol./pol./-rel. orientations	2.67			.843	
Differences in union membership rates	2.67		.636	.446	
Differences in national cultures and traditions	2.50		.287	.733	
<i>Eigenvalue</i>		2.97	1.43	1.41	0.95
<i>% of variance</i>		29.7	14.3	14.1	9.5
<i>Cronbach's alpha</i>		0.7	0.69	0.58	0.65

Principal component analysis with Varimax rotation. Number of factors set to four because of the reasonableness of the solution and the closeness to 1 in the fourth factor (cf. Kim and Mueller, 1978: 41ff.). Factor loadings <0.2 suppressed. Missing replaced with means. Both the ETUC-items from table 4 were excluded because of the relatively lower response rates.

*n's vary between 197 and 214

Table 6. Obstacles to cooperation across sectors in 14 countries. Compared means (N 220)

<i>Dimension</i>	TOTAL	Manuf.	Constr.	Transp.	Services	Prof.	Peak level
F4. Priorities	2.82	2.50	2.69	2.55	2.87	3.08	2.81
F2. Resources	2.80	3.07	3.00	2.56	2.67	2.78	2.70
F1. IR-differences	2.78	2.91	2.82	3.00	2.81	2.68	2.56
F3. Culture	2.58	2.54	2.62	2.45	2.67	2.62	2.57
N	193-212	37-39	11-13	9-11	50-57	53-60	20-21