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WIBAR Conference Report

WIBAR Conference, University of Amsterdam-AIAS,
Amsterdam, The Netherlands
April 18-20th, 2007

Report
24/05/2007

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WAGEINDICATOR SUPPORT FOR TRADE UNION BARGAINING IN EUROPE (WIBAR)
Supported by the European Commission in its Industrial Relations and Social Dialogue Program,
Budget Heading 04030301. Nr 2006/VP001/10017, runs from 08/2006-08/2007¹

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1. The WIBAR project

The WIBAR acronym clearly announces the goal of the project: *WageIndicator* support for trade union bargaining in Europe. AIAS/University of Amsterdam has developed the WIBAR project in co-operation with the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC). The project runs from August 2006 – July 2007. The *WageIndicator* dataset is the main instrument of the project.

In a preparatory phase, from August 1, 2006 - March 30, 2007, the WIBAR team produced, based on choices made at a Brussels trade union seminar in September 2006 and on the huge amount of information of the *WageIndicator* dataset:

- tailor-made, short reports on six themes, with cross-country comparisons concerning issues that are important for national trade unions, the ETUC and the European industry federations: working time; low pay; training; older workers; collective bargaining coverage; and work-related stress, as well as a seventh report with conclusions and recommendations;
- tailor-made, short reports on 13 industries, treating the six themes mentioned above and covering: agriculture; manufacturing; utilities; construction; wholesale and retail; hotels, restaurants, catering; transport and communication; finance; other commercial services; public sector; education; health care and social work; and other community and social services.

The WIBAR Conference on which we report here took place from Wednesday April 18, 2007 – Friday April 20, in the Dutch National Trade Union Museum in Amsterdam. The conference was the main event in the implementation phase of the WIBAR project. Its focus was on presenting, and discussing the 20 preparatory studies with a group of union specialists, researchers and journalists. The studies could be seen as drafts, with the support of the conference debates to be improved and finalized.

In the follow-up phase of the project, from May 1 – July 31, 2007, the draft reports are going to be finalized and, jointly with the conference results, communicated to unionists, researchers, journalists and others in the EU and candidate countries interested in industrial relations systems and related bargaining processes.

2. The WIBAR Conference

2.1. *The participants*

The original aim was that the Conference should include 56 trade union participants, 45 from national unions and 11 from international trade union bodies, and a number of experts.

In early March the invitations for the Conference were sent out to the ETUC and the affiliated European industry federations, also invited for the September 2006 seminar, and via them to the national unions. Yet, the response remained low. This might partly have to do with the high pressure of current union activities in this period, notably with the preparations for the 11th ETUC Congress, taking place in Seville from May 21-24. Second, the limitation to English as the sole conference language clearly hindered the participation of a number of unionists from notably Southern and Eastern Europe. Third, it may well be that the interest in the union movement for international comparisons is rather latent, and asks for wider and more intensive public relations efforts to attract a broad union audience.

In the end, the conference attracted 27 participants, 15 trade unionists as well as 12 experts, including the 5 WIBAR team members. Among the unionists, 3 represented international bodies (ETUC, ETUI-REHS and EPSU) and 12 represented organisations from 8 EU member states (Belgium, Bulgaria (2), Finland (2), Germany, Hungary (2), the Netherlands (2), Poland, Spain). From these 12, 6 participants represented union confederations and 6 represented single unions from various industries (public servants, railways, chemicals etc., finance and administration, health and social care, communications). Among the 27 participants, a majority (15) was female; 7 out of the 15 unionists were women. Albeit a small group, the variety of levels, industries and gender represented as well as the spread over old and new member states contributed substantially to the debates.

A list of participants can be found in Appendix 2.

2.2. *Introductory presentations and debates*

The Wednesday, April 18, afternoon session was dedicated to an introduction to the WIBAR project and the conference from various perspectives.

Theo Bouwman, former President of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs of the European Parliament (EP) and consultant/researcher of STZ, chaired this session. Bouwman welcomed the participants. He stressed, from his EP experiences, the importance of the regular international exchange of information between workers' representatives, and gave a short overview of the conference outline.

Wilna Wind, responsible for policy co-ordination on terms of employment in the Board of the main Dutch union confederation FNV, lectured on National and transnational bargaining strategies in Europe. She started by emphasizing the experiences of the Dutch unions with the *WageIndicator*, revealing gaps between negotiated collective agreements and actual practice, thus acting as an eye-opener for union negotiators. Wind pointed at the existence of the Doorn consultation, trying to counter undercutting of wages across countries. She referred to the functioning of the ETUC Collective Bargaining Coordination Committee, its annual reports, the ETUC Collective Bargaining Report, and the expansion of an expert network. Wind pointed at the provisional WIBAR results, showing that the industry ranking with regard to

work-related problem is virtually identical. In her view this proves that comparisons between sectors are better than between countries. Thus, industry coordination by the European professional secretariats has the warm support of FNV. It can be successful but these are time-consuming activities, and the continuous delivery of information from the various countries proves to be difficult. Particularly here the WIBAR project can provide support.

The lively debate after the presentation of Wilna Wind concentrated on the pros and cons of European wage coordination by the unions as well as on its likelihood in the foreseeable future. Generally, EU-wide collective bargaining concerning wages was regarded as quite unlikely for a long time to come. Yet, it was mentioned that even although the EC Treaty excludes remuneration from the scope of EU social legislation, it could be feasible that social partners at EU level adopt an autonomous agreement related to the minimum wage.

Maarten van Klaveren, WIBAR researcher, presented the WIBAR project. He gave a short introduction on the six themes and 13 industries, the choices made in this respect, and some of their interrelations. Van Klaveren pointed at the conclusions and recommendations of report No. 7, based on within-country comparisons across industries, comparisons across countries, and a problem ranking of industries.

Next, invited by Theo Bouwman the participants introduced themselves shortly.

After a break, Nuria Ramos Martin and Wim Sprenger, both WIBAR researchers, gave a joint presentation on the European legal and bargaining context. Ramos Martin explained the emergence of the social dimension of the European integration process: the development of EU social law and also of the social dialogue at EU level. She pointed at the tensions between the economic and social dimension of the European integration. Ramos Martin emphasized the major role of ECJ case law in the development of EU law, as well as the involvement of the social partners in shaping EU social law (cf. the part-time and parental leave Directives). Both the cross-industry and the sectoral social dialogue have grown in importance, leading among other things to the implementation of the first 'autonomous' framework agreements by the European social partners (telework, 2002; work-related stress, 2004). Sprenger highlighted a number of practical problems for international cooperation of unions and workers' representatives, not only stemming from the existing lack of information but also from the variety of national industrial relations systems as well as social insurance and pension arrangements.

In the debated that followed, the active involvement of the ETUC was recommended in monitoring the national implementation of the framework agreements signed by the social partners at national level.

Kea Tijdens, WIBAR researcher and project coordinator, went into the basis of the project: the *WageIndicator* and WIBAR data. Tijdens' introduction covered the *WageIndicator* concept, the target population, the questionnaire, the response, and the findings on the selection bias.

During the dinner buffet, Paulien Osse, director of the *WageIndicator Foundation*, gave an extensive introduction about the *WageIndicator* website, including the origins, the set-up and the international expansion of the *WageIndicator* project. The participants showed a keen interest in the many opportunities opened by the expansion of the *WageIndicator*, for example in comparing wages and working conditions in multinational enterprises across countries. A practical example was given in explaining the efforts of Belgian and Hungarian unions to tackle the gender

pay gap with the support of *WageIndicator* information (supported by the EU EQUAL program).

2.3. Presentations and debates on themes

The Thursday, April 19th, sessions were concentrated on the six themes. Moreover, Paulien Osse ran a parallel workshop to make participants acquainted with the possibilities of the *WageIndicator*.

Low Pay

Maarten van Klaveren gave a presentation on this issue.

In the debate that followed various discussants underlined Van Klaveren's conclusion, that the relation between low pay and poverty is rather complex. Especially mobility in and out of work plays an (often underestimated) role here; poverty has also to do with exclusion from the labour market. Moreover, yardsticks concerning the incidence of low pay levels do not tell the whole story, as very high price levels can disturb a seemingly prosperous picture (Finland!). Here, PPP's definitely need to be taken into account. Second, various discussants emphasized and illustrated the difficulties of union wage co-ordination across countries.

Third, the pros and cons of a (national) statutory minimum wage were debated, with progress (the UK, Hungary) and the risk of the NMW being 'politically' used (the Netherlands) as both sides of the coin. It was mentioned that, although in countries like Germany, Italy and in Scandinavia a NMW was out of the question, this recently seems to change. Especially in Germany a fierce political debate on this issue has emerged.

The earlier conclusion of Wilna Wind was endorsed that the position of industries concerning the share of low paid shows many parallels across countries, the usual suspects notably being hotel/restaurants/catering and wholesale/retail. The position of groups of workers according to personal characteristics varied somewhat more across countries, although in nearly all countries under study women, youngsters, low educated and part-timers showed the highest low pay incidence – a striking exception being the middle-educated in the UK. Some participants plead for using the *WageIndicator* to trace more low pay aspects, like regional differences (cities vs. villages) and local vs. international companies.

Training

Wim Sprenger introduced this theme.

Various participants made reservations concerning 'negotiating training': agreeing upon a number of prerequisites does not guarantee broad participation in training. The discussants shared the view that in certain industries collective arrangements on training were under-utilized. Moreover, large numbers of workers in all countries investigated received less training than one week per year. The differences across countries the WIBAR research found, also in attitudes, aroused quite some debate. Especially concerning Spain it was suggested that 'hunger' for training might at least partly be a compensation for lack of initial education. It was emphasized that training cannot be isolated from company policies concerning HR and work organisation. For example, the fear of workers to be multi-skilled (with presumably a higher workload but not higher pay) may often act as a break on training. This implies that training provisions have to be linked adequately with provisions concerning working times and schedules.

Collective Bargaining Coverage

Kea Tijdens gave a presentation on this theme.

In the discussion that followed, especially the issue of the 'Don't know' answers aroused quite some debate. National union representatives suggested reasons for the high shares of these answers in some countries. Second, the coverage of managerial levels by collective agreements in the various countries was questioned, in relation with the various bargaining regimes and the outcomes in terms of pay / compensation. Third, various speakers illuminated the limitations of collective agreements. For example in Finland, these agreements do not define minimum wage levels; these depend on individual negotiations. Finally, the importance of investigating the correlation between union density and collective bargaining coverage (with shop stewards and works councillors as potential 'controllers') was emphasized; the WIBAR team promised to do so in the final version of the report.

Working Time

Kea Tijdens and Nuria Ramos Martin gave a joint presentation on this theme.

The main issues discussed were: working time as a fundamental element of the employment contract; the limitation of the working week (with the help of the EU TWD) as a fundamental social right and a long-standing union demand; the applicability of problems and proposals for amending the WTD; the role of collective bargaining in the implementation of the WTD provisions. The participants supported the idea that derogations be introduced only by means of collective bargaining. They also supported amending the WTD in order to phase out the possibility of member states to use an individual opting out. The opportunities were welcomed that the *WageIndicator* opens to clarify the misfits between contractual working hours versus real working hours.

In answering questions, Tijdens promised to give more attention to the division of working time issues by gender in the final report. Some participants plead for further confronting some WIBAR results with those of other research, notably on the opt-out and long working week issues. One participant suggested that the final report should also include working time issues not directly linked with the WTD debate, like the new regulations of working time (legal right to reduce working time(in Germany and the Netherlands, and the relationship between working time and the conciliation of work and family life (including treating the Framework agreement on part-time work). Finally it was asked to look after time-savings systems covering a quarter or half a year, but Tijdens answered that unfortunately the *WageIndicator* survey cannot deliver such information.

Older Workers

Wim Sprenger introduced this theme.

First, in the debate it turned out that the participants regarded the figures presented as valuable information to evaluate the differences in the positions of the various age groups in the national labour markets, as well as indicators of demographic problems. These problems are expressed in future labour market problems, the high costs of retirement, including early retirement, and the growing problems of solidarity between the generations. It was emphasized that this also has to be regarded against the backdrop of mobility decreasing with age. All participants mentioned that governments are heading for the same kind of solutions, notably increasing the pension age and breaking down early retirement arrangements. Yet, specific national conditions need to be taken into account, like the high participation rate of older Finnish female workers; conflicts of interest between high and low educated women in Bulgaria, concentrating on the issue of undoing the 'discriminatory' retirement age of women (60, instead of 65 for men).

Second, it was agreed that the low collective bargaining coverage rates for the younger generations (and the low union density among them) in most countries may

well hint at a serious potential problem for the unions, and is already hampering union resistance against higher pension ages and the breakdown of early retirement schemes. Third, the results on work-related stress for the various cohorts were debated. It was agreed that a natural selection process ('survival of the fittest') was most likely among the oldest cohort.

Work-Related Stress

Maarten van Klaveren gave a presentation on this issue.

The largest part of the debate focused on questions and answers on concepts of 'quality of work' and 'work-related stress' used and on relations between relevant factors. This included the issue of measurement, concentrating on differences between the outcomes of the *WageIndicator*/WIBAR and of the latest European Working Conditions Survey. Van Klaveren promised to go deeper into the differences in outcomes and possible explanations. The debate also touched upon the predictive value of quality of work indicators, and the possible use of these by unions and works councils. It was concluded that notably the combination of passivity and sudden high strain still remains difficult to measure and that negative effects are even more difficult to predict.

2.4. Presentations and debates on industries

The morning session of Friday, April 20th, was dedicated to the industries covered by the WIBAR project.

Maarten van Klaveren and Kea Tijdens presented the more detailed research results on six industries, covering the six themes. These industries were manufacturing and mining; construction; wholesale and retail; hotels, restaurants, catering; public sector, and health and social work. They pointed at 'danger zones' as well as at results indicating good practices.

Manufacturing and mining

In presenting and discussing figures from this industry, the recurrent theme was its broad and heterogeneous character. The presenters suggested that a follow-up of the WIBAR project, if organised and funded, could split up manufacturing into a number of sub-sectors.

Construction

The two main issues discussed here were the problems with self-employed and posted workers, which could hardly be reflected by the WIBAR data, and the high scores in most countries on 'physically exhausting work'. Participants advocated combating the problem of 'grey employees' not covered by labour protection legislation, for example with the help of a European sectoral framework agreement.

Wholesale and retail

The main issues of debate concerning this industry concerned the accumulation of workers' problems: the high low pay incidence, with (reasons for) the exception of Denmark; the low levels of training; the low collective bargaining coverage, and the high levels of physically exhausting work in a number of countries. Moreover, real working hours often seem longer than agreed. All in all, this was regarded a worrisome sector for unions all over the EU.

Hotels, restaurants, catering

Here too, the debate concentrated on the accumulation of problems to a degree even worse than in wholesale/retail: a very high low pay incidence; poor working

conditions; very few hours of training (nearly non-existent concerning health and safety), and a low collective bargaining coverage. It was suggested that the unions should try and find extra funding for organizing workers in this industry.

Public sector

As was concluded in the debate, in most countries the public sector is still a comparably attractive employer. Exceptions are the considerable low pay shares in Poland and the UK. On the other hand, training arrangements are quite good, and collective bargaining coverage remains high, notably in Germany and the UK. It was recommended that the good standards in the public sector concerning working conditions and collective bargaining coverage should be maintained, as this is also important for the union movement at large.

Health care and social work

The picture of this industry was rather mixed: long working hours in notably Germany and Poland; a high low pay incidence in Poland and Belgium (leading, as some discussants added, to problems of labour supply); good training facilities, needed to maintain professional standards; varying scores on work-related stress, with high scores for Spain; high collective bargaining coverage, and high awareness of the importance of collective agreements. As was concluded in the debate, the latter are important positive elements against the background of heavy budget constraints in most countries.

2.5. Final debate and evaluation

In a final evaluation round, chaired by Theo Bouwman, each participant gave his/her opinion about the Conference as well as about the WIBAR reports.

The general picture emerging from this round was quite positive. On the whole, the participants considered the conference as successful. Some stressed that the rather small audience was a blessing in disguise: it had made it easier to express and exchange opinions. Participants also regarded the information regarded by the WIBAR reports as very strategic for collective bargaining. A number of them stressed the importance of the two approaches followed, both through themes and through industries. Most additional remarks suggested ways to make the WIBAR results less prone for criticism, justified or not. First, it was suggested to pay more (explicit) attention to possible biases in the data. Second, it was suggested to enlarge the usefulness of the data by examining them wherever possible jointly with micro-economic data.

Finally, a number of suggestions were made to include some issues in this (or a next) project. First, the link with the indication whether the respondent is working in a multinational company (and if so, in which) can strengthen the position of unions in bargaining with multinationals. Second, spatial divisions within countries (region, city/village) were regarded as important. Third, participants agreed on the need to use the WIBAR data for the common delimitation of 'good practices' in the six fields covered. Finally, it was regarded as worthwhile that the WIBAR project is helping to create links of communication between researchers and union officials.

On behalf of the WIBAR research team responding on these comments, Maarten van Klaveren gave a short overview of the activities planned in the next two months, before the project ends. First, the researchers promised to produce new draft reports based on the conference debates, again to be posted on the *WageIndicator*/WIBAR site as soon as possible. In this respect, the possibilities to produce a book with the final WIBAR results in cooperation with ETUC and/or ETUI-REHS will be investigated.

The same holds for the possibility to slightly widen the discussions of this conference to some other unionists, not being able to join this conference. In particular it would be worthwhile to explore the possibility to organise in cooperation with ETUC a one-day seminar especially for representatives of international trade union bodies, if possible to be held in June in Brussels. Finally, also depending on having that conference and its attendance, it may be worthwhile for the researchers to bring visits to some national unions and international bodies with whom presenting and debating the WIBAR results seems of special value. These arrangements can only be suggested here, Van Klaveren added, as they call for a revision of the WIBAR budget, to be approved by the European Commission.

Appendix 1. Program

Wednesday April 18th	INTRODUCTION TO WIBAR		
Time	Activity	Speaker	Theme
12.00 – 14.00	Welcome & lunch		
14.00 – 15.30	Presentations		
14.00 – 14.15		- Theo Bouwman (chair)	- Introduction to the event
14.15 – 14.45		- Wilna Wind	- National and transnational bargaining strategies in Europe
14.45 – 15.15		- Maarten van Klaveren	- Introduction to the WIBAR project
15.15 – 15.30		- Theo Bouwman	- Introduction of participants
15.30 – 15.45	Break		
15.45 – 16.15	Presentations		
15.45 – 16.15		- Nuria Ramos Martin & Wim Sprenger	- The European legal and bargaining context
16.15 – 16.40		- Kea Tijdens	- The WageIndicator and WIBAR data
16.40 – 17.00		- Maarten van Klaveren	- Introduction to the WIBAR themes
17.00 – 17.30	Refreshments		
18.00 – 21.00	Dinner buffet, presentations and informal discussions		
19.00 – 20.00	Presentation	- Paulien Osse	- WageIndicator website
Thursday April 19th	THEMES		
Time	Activity	Speaker	Theme
10.00 – 10.15	Arrival participants		
10.15 – 11.15	Parallel presentations		
10.15 – 11.15		Maarten van Klaveren	Low pay
10.15 – 11.15		Wim Sprenger	Training
11.15 – 11.30	Break		
11.30 – 12.30	Presentation		
11.30 – 12.30	Presentation	Kea Tijdens	Collective Bargaining Coverage
12.30 – 13.30	Lunch		
13.30 – 14.30	Parallel presentations		
13.30 – 14.30	Parallel presentations	Kea Tijdens & Nuria Ramos Martin	Working time
13.30 – 14.30	Parallel presentations	Wim Sprenger	Older workers
14.30 – 14.45	Break		
14.45 – 16.00	Presentation		
14.45 – 16.00	Presentation	Maarten van Klaveren	Work-related stress
16.00 – 17.00	Refreshments and guided museum tour		
17.30 – 21.00	Dinner		

Friday April 20th	INDUSTRIES & CONCLUSIONS		
Time	Activity	Speaker(s)	Theme
10.00 – 10.15	Arrival participants		
10.15 – 11.15	Presentation		
10.15 – 11.15	Presentation	Maarten van Klaveren & Kea Tijdens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Manufacturing industry - Construction - Wholesale / retail
11.15 – 11.30	Break		
11.30 – 12.15	Presentation		
11.30 – 12.15	Presentation	Maarten van Klaveren & Kea Tijdens	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Hotels, restaurants, catering - Public sector - Health & social work
12.15 – 13.15	Lunch		
13.15 – 14.15	Discussion	Theo Bouwman (chair)	- WIBAR conclusion
14.15 – 14.30	Break		
14.30 – 15.15	Discussion and closure of conference	Theo Bouwman (chair)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evaluation of the conference by the participants - Closing address
15.15 – 16.00	Refreshments		

Appendix 2. Participants

Name	Affiliation	Country
Bijleveld, Leontine	WageIndicator Foundation	the Netherlands
Boonstra, Klara	Hugo Sinzheimer Institute, University of Amsterdam	the Netherlands
Borbély, Szilvia	Confederation of Hungarian Trade Unions	Hungary
Bouwman, Theo	STZ consultancy & research	the Netherlands
Dragstra, Anna	Amsterdam Institute for Advanced labour Studies, University of Amsterdam	the Netherlands
Franco, Jan	Algemeen Christelijk Vakverbond	Belgium
Gerven, Minna van	Amsterdam Institute for Advanced labour Studies, University of Amsterdam	the Netherlands
Hermanussen, Ria	STZ consultancy & research	the Netherlands
Janssen, Ronald	European Trade Union Confederation	Belgium
Keune, Maarten	European Trade Union Institute / REHS	Belgium
Kevätsalo, Kimmo	Central Organisation of Finnish Trade Unions	Finland
Klaveren, Maarten van	Amsterdam Institute for Advanced labour Studies, University of Amsterdam	the Netherlands
Komiljovic, Máté	Trade Union of Hungarian Railwaymen	Hungary
Kouwenberg, Jan	European Federation of Public Service Unions	the Netherlands
Lóriz, Miguel	Federación de Servicios Financieros y Administrativos	Spain
Markova, Emilia	Confederation of Independent Trade Unions in Bulgaria	Bulgaria
Osse, Paulien	WageIndicator Foundation	the Netherlands
Pasanen, Terttu	The Union of Health and Social Care Professionals	Finland
Ramos Martin, Nuria	Amsterdam Institute for Advanced labour Studies, University of Amsterdam	the Netherlands
Schaapman, Marian	Hugo Sinzheimer Institute, University of Amsterdam	the Netherlands
Sprenger, Wim	STZ consultancy & research	the Netherlands
Surdykowska, Barbara	Solidarnosc	Poland
Terzyiska, Irina	Trade Union Federation of Communications	Bulgaria
Tijdens, Kea	Amsterdam Institute for Advanced labour Studies, University of Amsterdam	the Netherlands
Wal, Ingrid van der	Abvakabo FNV	the Netherlands
Welters, Marc	IG Bergbau, Chemie, Energie	Germany
Wind, Wilna	Federatie Nederlandse Vakbeweging	the Netherlands