

RESEARCH

Transnational solidarity in the world of work? Theoretical framework applied to the European Minimum Wage Directive

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Abstract

Taking the European Minimum Wage Directive as an example of solidarity in the EU, we develop a theoretical framework showing different forms of solidarity action and on the transnational level discussing them. We reconstruct three types of solidarity-based form of actions that were present in the discussion of the Directive and ask which of this forms have been enacted by whom and which role played bridging and bonding elements. We conclude that these elements are important to form interest groups that pushed for the development (or not) of the regulation, which in turn serves as a solidarity measure in the EU.

Keywords: European minimum wage, solidarity, collective action, EU level, cohesion

1. Introduction

Solidarity is probably one of the most undeniable concepts of the social sciences. It is present in almost any idea of group being it a family, an association or the nation state. Solidarity is at the core of our societies, of the possibility of living together and cooperating as a group. It contains various dimension that are located between opposing poles, as for example particularism and universalism (Lessenich, Reder and Süß 2020). When thinking about transnational solidarity, however, some acknowledged premises of solidarity are challenged, such as a shared identity, specific borders,

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stabilisation mechanisms and a certain level of interaction within the group (Engler 2016). Morgan and Pulignano (2020), therefore, theoretically suggested that elements of bonding and bridging are even more important on the transnational than on the national level to overcome the named problems. While bonding elements emphasise commonalities and homogeneity within a group, allowing it to act together, bridging elements enhance common discourses, networks of collaboration and organisational structures.

In the following we want to work out a theoretical framework to solidarity and its preconditions of overall workers' organisations on the EU level. Although historically labour unions had ambitions to create an international movement, they have developed as member organisations creating particular organizational and governance structures, based on different cultures of mobilization, adapting to institutions bound to the respective nation state and different systems of labour relations (Bernaciak, Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2014; Ferner and Hyman 1993).

This leads to a rather heterogeneous constituency for transnational umbrella organisations, especially the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) as well as sectoral federations at European level, being "associations of associations" (Platzer and Müller 2012:864). They can be seen as already institutionalised expressions of transnational solidarity joining power resources to represent workers' interests in the multi-level system of the EU (Mende 2021:182). As the Commission admits only organisations to consultation, which are able to speak for a broader range of constituents, it sets the field of influence by privileging umbrella organisations (Obradovic and Alonso Vizcaino 2006:1061; Mahoney 2004). Hence, the European (con)federations are not only supposed to represent workers all over Europe, but may also have a particular self-interest in policies and regulations of labour at the European level as this increases their particular influence and justifies their existence. In this respect the "logic of influence" (Scmitter and Streeck 1981) is a "reason to be" for these organisations. However, a problem of 'fragmented solidarity' may emerge when the assumed interests of the national constituency of single union organisations diverge from what is pursued by the transnational organization as a goal to achieve better working and living conditions within Europe. Hence, the question arises whether single union organisations give priority to the assumed interests of their (national) membership, or whether these are placed back to achieve an assumed improvement for all workers in the European Union.

In the following we differentiate various forms of solidarity according to the type of organization (individual members) or (con)federation (associations as members), respectively to the level at which they act. We further distinguish goals pursued,

different motives and forms of action. In general, the improvement of living and working conditions are seen as a solidary goal of all unions. Differences may arise whether this is pursued giving priority to a sectoral or the national constituency, or with a European perspective.

According to the literature, we see a threefold explanation for the specific manifestation of transnational solidarity. First, transnational solidarity goals are supported, if they go along with an improvement of the own (national) position. Second, when a conflict of interest with respect to concrete issues emerges between national and transnational solidarity, we would expect a successful process of bridging and bonding to overcome (national) particularism and exclusionary forms of solidarity. Bridging may include internal negotiations and compromise, while bonding would include an assertion and prioritizing of common values. Third, this process is successful, when primarily opposing organisations can be convinced (by changing the original proposal for a regulation by compromise) to also gain an advantage for their national constituency via the transnational regulation.

This theoretical framework is applied to the process of establishing the European Minimum Wage Directive (EU 2022/2041) that came into force in 2022. On a very first view, the support of the Minimum Wage Directive would be 'natural' to unions' solidarity at the European level – but this is far from reality. With respect to this empirical topic, we, therefore, ask: Which forms of solidarity have been enacted by whom? We may also ask which measures of bridging and bonding have been applied and why they did not succeed to convince all opponents within the group of the unions? Even if our approach may defect the glory of transnational solidarity, it nevertheless may provide insights to successfully negotiate a compromise to better working conditions at the transnational level.

The article proceeds as follows: A literature review introduces a multi-dimensional understanding of solidarity (section II). Then preconditions to national and transnational forms of solidarity are discussed (section III). Based on this literature review, we elaborate on how to distinguish different types of solidarity on national and transnational level (section IV). Furthermore, the minimum wage regulation as an instrument is sketched as a solidary goal, promoted by European entities (section V). After giving a brief introduction into the scientific discussion on the European minimum wage, focusing on the social partners' organizations, we analyse actors' constellations promoting and opposing the European minimum wage. This is to line out different goals, motives and interests and to display elements of bridging and bonding as (un)successful paths towards inclusive transnational solidarity (section VI). Our conclusion (section VII) is that the European minimum wage may be seen

as a result of solidary governance towards a common good, namely a further step towards 'positive integration' (Scharpf 1996; Scharpf 2014) and European social cohesion.

2. A multi-dimensional understanding of solidarity

'Solidarity' is used in many different contexts with rather different meanings and purposes for a variety of actions (Wallaschek 2016). Accordingly, it would be a quite extensive task to provide a traditional literature review (as for example exists in Hondrich and Koch-Arzberger 1992). We therefore appreciate that Lessenich and his colleagues (2020)³ have suggested a multi-dimensional understanding of solidarity, defining five central dimensions each of them to be understood as a continuum between two poles. We briefly summarise their – unfortunately only in German available – complex definition. It clarifies the multiple facets of solidarity related to different motives, forms of action and individual or collective actors – regardless concrete historical developments. Changing the original sequence of dimensions as introduced by the authors, we want to highlight some contradictions inherent to solidarity that may help us to understand particular problems of transnational solidarity.

According to the authors, the *distinction between social and political solidarity* overall sees the former pole as social practice that is rather altruistic, while the latter is related to political power and redistribution. Here, social identity achieved within the process of mobilisation or organisation based on reciprocity between members is of importance. Another distinction is between *solidarity as institutionalised form and as individual action*. The former includes mutual support governed by regulation that may nevertheless be founded in a rational self-interest (see explanation for the emergence of a welfare state by Rawls 1971 (2020)). Institutionalised forms of solidarity include a permanent commitment, but need a feeling of identity within an (imagined) community. In contrast, social behaviour and practices (of individuals) providing – material (money), physical (demonstration) or symbolic (greeting address) – support to any disadvantaged group is less conditional. This goes along with the dimension that distinguishes between *unilateral and reciprocal support*. Whereas unilateral support is close to charity, organisational structures and institutions based on reciprocal support create strong bonds between group members and are more likely to go along with political forms of solidarity aiming at social change. This leads to the dimension highlighting *the continuum between a stabilising or transforming mode of solidary interaction*. In line with Durkheim the authors see in solidarity

3 Additional thoughts are marked by citations of other authors.

an element of social integration and stabilisation in modern societies. Transformative solidarity, in contrast, aims at changing structural conditions to better social conditions. Historically this was fuel to workers' movement and the formulated goal to change capitalist production, but it may also be linked to new questions of transnational action with respect to more global justice and redistribution or environmental protection.

The dimension of solidarity *between particularism and universalism* highlights both the inclusive and exclusive function of solidarity. The globalised world increases the understanding of a universal connectedness of all people, social movements may emerge to demand common goods with a universal impact, as for example international regulation for the protection of the environment. In contrast, particularism is frequent in organisations with strong reciprocal relations, a common identity and clear borders. They may emerge while defending common interest and opposing their (class) adversaries, but they also may defend their achievements against third parties – indicating the particularistic element of solidarity. Accordingly, Stjernø (2011:4) characterised working class solidarity as a fusion of self-interest with the interest of class.

For us, this last dimension of solidarity indicates a challenge to overall nation-based organisations to enact transnational solidarity, when transnational goals are expected to negatively impact the interests of their original constituency. The other outlined poles of the different dimensions of solidarity can help to describe different motives and applications of different forms of solidarity. As a next step, however, we very briefly sketch other definitions, and the preconditions of solidarity on national and transnational level.

3. From national to transnational solidarity – adapting forms of (inter)action

Based on Engler's idea of solidarity as "a particular social norm that applies to a specific collective, is reciprocally recognised by its members, translates into certain practices of cooperation and mutual renunciation, and is backed by sanction mechanisms" (Engler 2016:35 our translation)⁴, we can conclude that the traditional idea of solidarity presupposes at least four criteria: (i) a certain level of homogeneity of

4 When thinking transnationally, we confront the problem of having to expand the understanding of what is the scope of the group or collective as well as to come up with new forms of possible goals and (inter)actions.

the group to create an identity, (ii) specific borders, (iii) interaction processes and (iv) stabilisation mechanisms within the group (Engler 2016:54-56). Within the understanding of the concept in the national context, these four elements are more or less easily to be found and to be constructed in order to safeguard the internal cohesion of a given group or a country⁵.

With the advent of globalisation and of individualisation, these conditions started to become blurry and became harder to define – even in the national context. Identity cannot be defined anymore as a high degree of homogeneity that emerges from common presuppositions of what means to share a space, namely (national) history and fate – so far working as one of the “action formation mechanisms that generate commitment to solidarity” (Gajewska 2009:39). Through structural change and individualization in combination with migration, we see an increase of heterogeneity of groups with different lifestyles and interests. As this goes along with rising social inequality within a shared space, it is creating problems of social cohesion. At the same time globalisation, economic and ecological crises raise the awareness of interdependencies beyond the nation state not only among governments, but in the broader citizenship. Group formation goes beyond the “national container society” (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002), and may exist at national, regional, sectoral or local level, but also may combine actors at each of these levels seeking for transnational collaboration.

Transnational solidarity, therefore, has to tackle the increased complexity of a multi-level system that blurs the borders of given (national) groups, but combines different levels of group demarcations. This may, on the one hand, create even more problems of cohesion of the wider group or movement, but on the other hand, it allows a greater number of members to be bounded, albeit by more complex interactions. Following Lahusen (2020:302) we could say that solidarity in modern societies is “organised and stabilised on various levels of aggregation and institutionalisation” (informal networks, civil society organisations, welfare states, all possibly being active at local up to transnational level). He points out that these different levels are interrelated, but stabilisation may be weaker and more fragmented when it comes to transnational solidarity. More concrete, Knodt and Tews (2017) distinguish between individuals and collective actors as well as a horizontal dimension of interaction that refers to solidarity within one government level, be it supranational, national or subnational, while vertical solidarity spans over different levels. As their focus is on

5 About doubts concerning the “natural” homogeneity of the working class even before globalization and individualisation see Hyman 1999.

state interaction, a lack of solidarity, respectively selective solidarity is explained by missing long-term cost-benefit calculations of member states as well as reciprocity expectations linked to single instead of a cross-issue perspective.

Hence, we may summarise that transnational solidarity seems harder to be achieved. Moreover, solidary action seems to be motivated by both altruism and self-interest, respectively it depends on processes that enable the combination of different motives in order to overcome the problem of fragmented solidarity alignments.

A complementary approach to transnationalize the idea of solidarity, respectively the understanding of its emergence beyond national borders, therefore is to focus on what Morgan & Pulignano (2020) call the bonding and bridging elements. In their work, the authors come back to Putnam's idea of social capital highlighting, on the one hand, bonding elements as those that emphasise commonalities and homogeneity within a group while giving it strength and allowing it to act together. On the other hand, bridging elements require the development and maintenance of common discourses, networks of collaboration and organisational structures that can connect and bring together spatially disseminated communities. Bridging elements, thus, can provide strength of collaboration beyond relatively isolated communities even when bonds are weak. Therefore, solidarity between different groups can be constructed socially as well as it can be institutionally embedded (Morgan and Pulignano 2020:20). As bonding usually is stronger in a given local (work)place or community where face-to-face contacts are common, a more exclusive principle of solidarity may develop. Bridging activities on a higher level may even weaken intensive social bonding of local communities while, at the same time, developing broader solidarity-based (transnational) communities (Morgan and Pulignano 2020:21).

Taking together the preconditions Engler described and the idea of bridging and bonding from Morgan and Pulignano, we understand that transnational solidarity is to be build up in a process, where actors do not only defend solidary goals, but actively have to engage in bridging and bonding elements in order to stabilise group formation and cohesion on a transnational level (Nussbaum Bitran, Dingeldey and Laudenbach 2022).

4. Different forms of solidary action

The literature displayed so far suggests that to trace transnational solidarity, we have to reflect the difference between individual and collective actors forming groups or engaging in coalitions, that pursue solidary goals within a multi-level governance system. In order to do that, we need a rather complex analytical tool set. We focus on

workers' and trade unions' solidarity in Europe. Ideal type distinctions with respect to actors, goals pursued and forms of interaction, we draw from general assumptions made in the literature on European trade unions and collective action research, but also on bridging and bonding processes named by Morgan and Pulignano (2020). Selectively, we also apply the concept to other actors, namely Member States and employers, albeit differentiating their possible goals. All in all, we emphasise the political pole of solidarity, admitting, however, that sometimes social forms of solidarity may also play a role within this arena. We make use of different dimensions of solidarity developed by Lessenich, Reder and Süß (2020) to sketch different motives and applications of different forms of solidarity.

Differentiating according to the type of relevant actors, their motives, more or less concrete goals pursued, and the dominant forms of interactions, we define three types of solidary action with respect to the national and transnational level. We differentiate an *instrumental form of solidarity to increase the individual or organisational power position* by creating a network or an organisation based on reciprocity of members' actions (as a type zero). When concrete goals within this spectrum only reflect interests of the (core) members of the respective group or of the original constituency, we refer to it as a *particularistic form of solidarity* (type 1). In contrast, we see a more *inclusive form of solidarity* (type 2) when goals pursued go beyond the direct interests of the original constituency (i.e. core workers or national members) to support others or to create a common good.

We have to admit that solidarity of type zero may be enacted also for non-social goals, as for example among employers to prevent the cost of social policy. In the case of workers, respectively trade unions' formation, however, this is closely linked to the advocacy of solidary goals.

Table 1: Three ideal type functions of solidary action in national and transnational labour relations

	National Level		Transnational EU Level			
	0. Functional Solidarity: collective action to increase power position	I. Particularistic Solidarity: to achieve social improvement for members	II. Inclusive Solidarity: to achieve a common good	0. Functional Solidarity: collective action to increase power position	I. Particularistic Solidarity: to achieve social improvement for national members	II. Inclusive Solidarity: to achieve a common good
Kind of Actors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Individuals Members of organisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collective actors (different principles of organising members) 	Collective actors	European (workers') movements National organisations (unions)	National organisations (for example ETUC)	National organisations (for example ETUC)
Concrete goals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To increase (individual) power resources Political participation and co-determination 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Demanding redistribution of working and living conditions for (core) members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Combatting crisis of nation state Benefit all citizens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joining organisational power resources Political participation on (trans)national level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvement of working and living conditions for national members – for European members 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improvement of social protection for broader group on transnational level Commitment to more transnational regulation/ European cohesion
Motives	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Joint feeling of suppression or injustice In opposing to (class) adversaries Reciprocal action combined with self-interest Altruistic support for the needy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Members' interest Class interest Power oriented self-interest of organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve (economic) development of nation state Self-restrain to achieve Common good and self-interest Of organisational power 	Political calculation and coalition building. Reciprocal action of organisations within umbrella organisations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Self-interest improvement of social protection for national members via transnational level Rational, power oriented self-interest of transnational organisation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Defending European members' interest (new identity) Short term self-restrain in combination with long term self-interest of national organisation
Kind of (inter)action	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Mobilisation strikes Creating/affiliation with union organisation Volunteering 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Campaigning, strike Acting within institutional settings: negotiation with employers (and state) on wage and working conditions Collaboration/ coalition building with others (political parties, NGOs, media, movements) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Neo-corporatist negotiation Exchange based on reciprocity with other actors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Collaboration and coalition building of national unions to form transnational (umbrella) organisations More or less spontaneous mobilisation, i.e. social action days and transnational support 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Negotiating compromises between national interests of labour organisations Influencing employers' organisations, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Compromising on common rules Accept compromises Based on long term reciprocity (?)

4.1 Functional Solidarity: collective action to increase power position

Feelings of injustice or opposition to (class) adversaries may motivate individuals to join and mobilise at local/workplace, sectoral or national level as group formation increases their power resources. A common identity is built on the (imagined) homogeneity of the group (social status) (Hyman 1999), common experiences and a shared aim. These bonding elements may lead to the formation of organisations, such as trade unions, institutionalising solidary action based on reciprocity. Motives are self-interest to increase (individual) power resources and the expectation of reciprocity within the organised members (Olson 1965). Derived goals to increase power resources are to institutionalise political participation and co-determination, respectively rules of collective bargaining – as the power of trade unions not only consists of the number of members, but also of institutional and societal power (Schmalz, Ludwig and Webster 2018).

Acknowledging that also at the national level group homogeneity of the working class has never fully existed and is lately decreasing (Hyman 1999), we see an even bigger heterogeneity at the transnational level⁶. As in European decision-making processes “representative organisations” to participate are demanded (Taylor and Mathers 2004:271), creation of (con)federations, such as the ETUC, is the most common way to increase national organisations’ power resources at transnational level – reflecting again a kind of self-interest of national organisations. Although the (con)federations are governed on the basis of reciprocity (Hyman and Gumbrell-McCormick 2020), single national organisations differ according to ideological foundations, traditions of mobilisation and different economic and legal contexts, and have different power resources (Bernaciak, Gumbrell-McCormick and Hyman 2014). Such heterogeneity of the group requires processes of bridging in form of coalition building, discourse and compromise to come to joint positions and to come to joint positions AND to be able to be able to pursue common goals. Joint actions of mobilisation such as European action days are of minor relevance, but are nevertheless relevant processes of bonding to form a European identity.

6 Although the motives of European Member States to form the EU were primarily of economic nature, the group formation between different countries may have worked on similar conditions, exercising solidarity among the Member States to increase their power position within a world market and jointly bear the challenges of globalisation (Steinvorth 2017).

4.2 Particularistic Solidarity: to achieve social improvement for members

Collective actors are formed to pursue common goals, which in the case of unions may be summarised as to achieve redistribution and/or to improve working and living conditions of their members. This is done through conflict (strikes), but even more often through negotiations with employers and other actors such as the state, respectively by coalition building also with political parties or social movements. As membership is heterogeneous, interests of core members may be prioritised at the cost of most vulnerable workers⁷. This may go along with self-interest of the organisation to maintain or increase its influence. Both motives, however, would lead to a particularistic form of solidarity.

To pursue solidarity-oriented goals in form of redistribution or social improvement becomes more difficult on a transnational level as it is more likely that different national or sectoral unions may have divergent interests. Some issues therefore may trigger fragmented solidarity, and national organisations may defend the interests of their national constituency abstaining to support the joint position negotiated at the European level. On the other side, also representatives of the transnational organisations may push for European regulation to increase their role and power resources as negotiator on transnational level (Taylor and Mathers 2004). In both cases a kind of self-interest dominates action at the transnational level and can be termed as particularistic solidarity.

4.3 Inclusive Solidarity: to achieve a common good

Solidarity has also been understood as a particular mode of governance in (welfare) state theory (Kaufmann and Majone 1986). Particularly neo-corporatist arrangements – between state and social partners – are supposed to pursue common goods that benefit all citizens, respectively the nation state (Streeck and Schmitter 1985). Often this includes a kind of self-restraint of social partners to support policies that go beyond the core interest of their members – possibly combined with (long-term) expectations of reciprocity among the participants. These interactions are based on mutual trust and exchange, cooperative negotiations. Concrete aims to participate in such arrangements may differ by situation and again include rational, power-oriented and by organisational self-interest driven motives, but also the responsibility for the good development of an enterprise, a sector or the society as such may be relevant.

7 Within national confederations – similar to the transnational level – interests of strong sectoral organisations may dominate.

In spite of group heterogeneity on transnational level, joint positions may be easily found as a position of opposition, as for example to criticise neo-liberal policies of integration, respectively to “negative integration”. “Positive integration” (Scharpf 1996; Scharpf 2014; Dingeldey and Nussbaum Bitran 2023) towards a Social Europe, steps towards more or less joint rules and institutions for all Member States, may signify a kind of a common good. Support is easy for national organisations that expect direct advantages by integration, namely strengthening of their national position and power. For those who fear that the “own” national models or interests are blurred – both for Member States, unions and other collective actors – support requires self-restraint, respectively the expectation of (long-term) reciprocity to achieve advantages for members in the future, a moral conviction to do the right thing or both. To achieve this kind of inclusive solidarity that goes beyond the direct national group interest, strong bonding elements such as symbols and narratives (i.e. combatting poverty or “equal pay for equal work at the same workplace”), but also bridging via (direct) interaction, negotiation and compromise within the umbrella and third parties determining the final regulation are necessary. When Directives are transposed into national laws, in the long run they may work as stabilizing elements and even may create more homogeneity between Member States – and finally work as bonding mechanism all over.

As already lined out, the collaboration between (nation-based) organisations on particular issues may face the problem of fragmented solidarities and the (national) membership logic may nourish a particularistic form of solidarity. Our main focus is, therefore, to explore the conditions and the process of how this may be overcome and inclusive solidarity be enacted at transnational level. As mentioned in the literature, we assume that bonding and bridging is necessary, but can only be successful, when final demands are framed in a way that also satisfies the self-interest of the national members within the transnational organisation. Additionally, a position of self-restraint needs expectations of reciprocity in the future (possibly an exchange with other issues).

Understanding the European Minimum Wage Directive as a step towards a Social Europe – out of unions’ perspective it can be seen as a common good. National union organisations easily may support it motivated by self-interest, when it helps to increase the national power position in wage negotiations. If these motives are not central, but legal regulation of wages is in contrast seen as a threat to national forms of collective bargaining and social partners’ identity, organisations may fall back to particular solidarity in this issue.

In order to give evidence to this thesis, we use secondary analysis, analysis of documents such as position papers, answers to the consultation rounds, etc. We start displaying the different positions held by relevant actors in the European Union when the initiative of the Commission started. We identify different forms of solidarity enacted by collective actors promoting or neglecting the European minimum wage proposal. Moreover, we line out how certain appeals and changes of the original proposal have been used as bonding and bridging in order to create support for the Minimum Wage Directive and to overall convince the opponents among the trade unions, respective single member countries. Although the approval of the Directive may easily indicate that these efforts were successful, our analysis underlines that some actors could not be convinced, but stuck to self-interest, respectively solidarity with their national or class-based constituencies.

5. Minimum wage as a form of solidarity and its 'coming out' in the EU

In the last two decades, minimum wages and their regulation have become an important issue (Dingeldey, Grimshaw and Schulten 2021). They help to ensure a fairer wage distribution and to create a floor narrowing the possibilities employers have to state low wages (Peña-Casa and Ghailani 2021:140). They also contribute to protect vulnerable workers and help to prevent wage dumping where collective bargaining is weak (Furåker and Seldén 2013:515). Additionally, employment is usually seen as a solution to problems related with poverty and social exclusion, but very low wages and in-work poverty is a reality that contradicts this understanding and undermines the full-employment model that is regarded as a guarantor of wellbeing in Europe (Peña-Casa and Ghailani 2021:134). Individualisation, deindustrialisation and the deregulation of the national labour markets have contributed to the undermining of some collectivist workers' protection such as a strong collective bargaining, making statutory minimum wages more relevant as a national political measure as well as making it more visible as a mechanism to reduce inequality (Wilson 2017:250-51). It, therefore, also represents a relevant element of social policy (Dingeldey 2019) as an institutionalized result of solidary action to achieve social improvement – mostly promoted by workers' collective actors.

Globalisation has impacted national labour markets, and questioned the capacity of national welfare states to counteract these inequalities (Calhoun 2002). Thus, the instrument of minimum wages as a form of solidarity may also transcend the national state and 'go' transnationally. Overall with respect to the European Union as a supranational policy arena, we can argue that a European wage coordination can

complement the economic integration and create “a level playing field for competition” (Fernández-Macías and Vacas-Soriano 2016:4).

In reality, the proposal of the European minimum wage was a contested issue. Although the original idea was first put forward by a handful of trade unionists in 2004 (Schulten, 2014), the most recent policy process was initiated by the EU institutional actors. In October 2019 the European Parliament had adopted a resolution on employment and social policies in the Euro area calling on the Commission to put forward a legal instrument to ensure that every worker in the Union had a fair minimum wage. Ursula von der Leyen, already president-designate of the European Commission at that time, supported the idea of such a legal instrument. The proposal suggesting a level of 60 percent of gross medium national wages or 50 percent of gross average wage, was expected to have most impact in countries that do not have a statutory minimum wage or where at present it is set at a lower level. Moreover, in sectors where low wage employment is more present, workers may expect significant pay rises, while employers will have to compensate for rising costs. Following this expected development, Central and Eastern European unions have been among the proponents of the idea. On the other hand, employers' organisations and some governments – mostly in low-wage countries – wanted to defend their international advantage through cheap labour and were, therefore, opposing the Directive, asking for a Recommendation only (see for example Jász 2021). At the beginning of the process also neoliberal governments of Austria and the Netherlands joint this view, while right-wing populist governments of Poland and Hungary were critical to the Directive more likely because of a general EU-critical position (Müller and Schulten 2022). Still, the strongest opponents of a binding European regulation were the Nordic (Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Sweden) countries, including their union federations, as they feared that the Directive would impact their national model of free collective bargaining, rejecting statutory minimum wage regulation also at national level (Seeliger 2017; Furåker and Larsson 2020). Hence, transnational interaction and compromise were needed at least within and between three groups of actors: first, trade unions, second, employers and their associations and third, between the EU entities, respectively the member countries. This overall took place within two consultation rounds between the EU authorities and the social partners. In order to explain the support for positive integration as an inclusive form of transnational solidarity, as well as its rejection by single actors, it is important to study in depth the process of policy making, including bonding and bridging elements as, for example, offered compromise overall with a focus on social partners, respectively trade unions.

6. Forms of transnational solidary action in place to promote the Minimum Wage Directive

Both trade unions and employer's associations at the transnational EU level have developed "multilevel structures of organization and representation" (Mende 2021: 182). These structures usually manifest in the form of umbrella organisations, which are "associations of associations" (Platzer and Müller 2012:864) with very different (national or sectoral) members in terms of size, resources, orientations and interests (Börzel 2010; Eising 2007). Bridging between national interests and creating bonding elements of identity, these umbrella organisations can be seen already as an institutional form of solidarity. To overcome national membership logics and self-interests, these organisations need to develop a way to frame demands in which all members satisfy their interests, but at the same time contribute to a more universalistic solidarity in the EU. We use the Minimum Wage Directive as an example to understand how the ETUC and employers' organisations developed different forms of solidarity in order to push their interests and eventually contribute to positive integration.

The introduction of the European Minimum Wage Directive can be seen as a turning point regarding social and wage policies in the Union. It follows after a neo-liberal approach regarding wage policies, which was marked by measures developed to tackle the crisis in 2008. Based on the decentralisation of collective bargaining and on the 'overall reduction in the wage setting power of trade unions' (European Commission 2012:103), these measures were contested with the proclamation of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) (European Commission 2017) in November 2017 and the idea of a European minimum wage. Being it an unprecedented regulation, the negotiations with the EU institutions and the search for joint positions within the social partners' organisation at the transnational level was challenging.

For the European trade unions, the discussion within the ETUC was marked by two strong opposing positions: on the one hand, trade unions in countries where statutory minimum wages were already set, opted for the Directive (Schulten 2008) and, therefore, supported positive integration. Trade unions from western and eastern Member States pursued the same goal, namely, to push for the Directive, still having different interests to do so. Western trade unions, for example in Germany and France, saw in the Directive a protective measure that could help them to reduce social dumping within the Union. For the Eastern trade unions, the Minimum Wage Directive would help to increase their power position in order to rise the wages level in their countries. The self-interests of Western and Eastern unions – represented also by the ETUC interest as the umbrella organisation – followed a political form of solidarity which tends to redistribute power, in this case to give workers better rights. Their self-interest to the institutionalisation of higher minimum wages in the

Union and, therefore, to positive integration made it easier for them to support the Directive and, therefore, to push for more inclusive solidarity (Seeliger 2018; Furåker and Seldén 2013).

On the other hand, trade unions overall from the Nordic countries, where minimum wages are regulated through a bargaining system, saw a threat to their “Nordic model” of industrial relations and held up a position of negative integration (Furåker 2020; Alsos and Eldring 2021). Having a different goal – to avoid the Directive – they could not find bridging and bonding elements with the rest of the unions represented in the ETUC resulting in an opposition to a more universalistic form of solidarity. Their self-interest of defending their model goes against the Directive’s proposal and, therefore, they did not support it.

Looking at our typology, we argue that unions from Western and Eastern Member States developed a form of solidarity that goes in line with type 2, that was inspired by self-interest to improve the working conditions of their members, but also was inclusive in order to achieve a common good for all workers in the Union. While Nordic trade unions developed a form tending to a particularistic solidarity to protect their workers in their countries, which is represented by type 1 in our typology.

In order to bridge between these different self-interests, during the two-stage consultation process (ETUC 2020a; ETUC 2020b), the ETUC pushed for a new directive’s draft that would include measures to promote sectoral collective bargaining as an important form to set minimum wages. In the first consultation document sent to the social partners, the issue of collective bargaining was not central. Still, it was present as the Commission stated that it will “respect national traditions, social partners’ autonomy and the freedom of collective bargaining” (European Commission 2020:2) and that “collective bargaining is central to wage-setting as it sets the terms of employment and working conditions of a large share of workers and tends to reduce wage dispersion” (European Commission 2020:4). By pushing for a more central role of collective bargaining in the Directive, the ETUC intended to bring Nordic unions to change their position regarding the Directive as their (national) interest would be respected. As a bridging element the ETUC response to the first consultation round stated that “only a European initiative which ensures adequate statutory minimum wages, strong and autonomous collective bargaining systems and increases the ability and capacity of trade unions so that they can bargain for fair wages can fully deliver on the promise of fair minimum wages for European workers, thus contributing to build wider public support for the EU project as whole” (ETUC 2020a:4). But also bonding elements were used to reinforce and highlight a certain homogeneity and common experiences of the workers in the Union. Therefore, the ETUC in its

response to the second consultation round invoked old and shared demands as common narratives by pushing the Commission: “concrete actions [which] need to follow, in order to ensure that work is properly valued, that workers earn a remuneration from which they can make ends meet and that unions can bargain for fair and just working conditions” (ETUC 2020b:2).

The inclusion of measures to support collective bargaining in the final version of the Directive as an “offer” made by the ETUC and the Commission to the Nordic trade unions, taking into account their self-interest, was not enough to make them change their position towards an interest based on common good and a less particularistic form of solidarity. Other countries such as Germany, were also positively affected with the inclusion of these measures, as they give trade unions more power resources within their countries. Better bargaining opportunities and the recognition of collective bargaining as a core element of wage settings put trade unions in countries where collective agreements are not legally binding on all workers of a given sector in a better position to negotiate higher wages. As the Nordic unions achieve this still on organisational power resources without any need of legal extensions of collective agreement, the respective “offer” of the ETUC and the Commission was not attractive to make them change their mind.

Also, the European entities had different positions. While the European Council preferred a more flexible regulation to give room for national governments and to guarantee that the Directive was covered by the EU Law, the European Parliament supported the role of unions, the strengthening of collective bargaining and less variation concerning exceptions for minimum wage application (Müller and Schulten 2022). Nevertheless, there is a political intention towards positive integration and a solidary goal of furthering Social Europe tending to an inclusive solidarity. This intention is clearly stated in Ursula von der Leyen’s “Political Guidelines for the Next European Commission 2019-2024”, her agenda as a candidate for president of the European Commission. There she states that “within the first 100 days of my mandate, I will propose a legal instrument to ensure that every worker in our Union has a fair minimum wage” (Leyen 2019:9). Also, by highlighting the Principle 6 of the European Pillar of Social Rights, namely that “workers have the right to fair wages that provide for a decent standard of living” (European Parliament, Council of the European Union and European Commission 2017:15), most Member States were able to bridge their differences and to align with the idea of the Commission. The common discourse also may be seen as a strong bonding element to highlight the need to fight for more social integration to back up negative consequences of economic integration and to strengthen feelings of belonging to the Union.

Within the employers' organisations we find a form of collaboration that is close to type 1 solidarity in our typology: solidarity as collective action to achieve social improvement for members. With respect to the Minimum Wage Directive this was 'used', to promote negative integration. Defending a position of market integration by eliminating barriers for trade and competition, employers' organisations could easily unite in opposition to the Directive (BusinessEurope 2020; SMEUnited 2020a)⁸. Maintaining the position of negative integration, they wanted to secure the status quo that suited them well and gave them room for individual action, a form of cooperation between them that tends to the particularistic pole of solidarity. In spite of economic and national differences, employers thus had a high degree of homogeneity in their self-interests and shared a clear goal: to avoid the Directive at all costs. Bridging elements such as to collaborate in order to defend the EU internal market using the already existent legislation, allowed them to build a strong coalition. For example, in its response to the second consultation round, BusinessEurope (2020:2) stated: "we find that a directive would severely damage our role and therefore [would] be unacceptable for us". In the same line, SMEUnited (2020b:3) in its first (and second) response argued that "the adequate level of minimum wage cannot and should not be decided at European level", backing up the existing regulation regarding wage setting. Employers, thus, joined their power resources to effectively exercise political participation and take influence against the Commission's draft. Additionally, using direct lobby (Dingeldey and Nussbaum Bitran 2023) to different EU institutions and writing joint position papers (European sector employers 2021), they were able to exercised collaboration that included national and sectoral organisations. However, they were not able to stop the Directive – as they could not convince their national governments, respectively the EU institutions in coalition with trade unions.

The final proposal of the Directive not only suggests to set minimum wage at 60 per cent of medium or 50 per cent of average income, but strengthens the position of unions as bargaining agents and demands measures to encourage collective bargaining, overall in countries where coverage is below 80 per cent. But also high flexibility was maintained as no country was obliged to introduce a statutory minimum wage at a certain level (European Commission 2022). Thus, the finally reached compromise through negotiations between the European Council and the European Parliament, mediated by the Commission, changed the initial proposal in line with union demands and the Parliament's position, but as bridging elements

8 One exception were French employers, who did support the Directive and together with the CGT, lobbied president Macron to implement it.

included 'offers' to all actors, giving opportunities to maintain national settings and procedures.

After the revision of the proposal the support for the Directive was huge. In the EU Parliament 505 members voted in favour, only 92 against, and 44 abstained. Also, in the European Council most countries supported the Directive. Only Denmark and Sweden as well as their unions highlighted their national interests and, therefore, a more particularistic form of solidarity, defending institutions of the nation state, respectively social achievements for their members and rejecting European integration in this point. The abstention of Hungary may be interpreted in the same direction, reflecting an overall critical view on European Cohesion.

When the ETUC, as an umbrella organisation, decided to back up the Directive (ETUC 2020b), the Swedish LO – as an extreme kind of protest – temporarily denied paying its fees (Dingeldey and Nussbaum Bitran 2023), thus even questioned established forms of solidarity as collective action among unions at the transnational level. The internal discussion of the ETUC, however, shows a mainstream of transnational solidarity to achieve social improvement – type 2 in our typology. For most of the ETUC members this decision allowed to combine self-interest of improving national power position and legal regulations with an inclusive approach towards European social cohesion. In contrast, employers stayed united in opposition to the Directive (Dingeldey & Nussbaum Bitran 2023) – or to say – stucked to type 1 solidarity to defend class interest.

7. Conclusions

The result of the discussion and the Directive itself show a way to develop positive European integration through the transnationalisation of group formation, using bridging and bonding elements. Political will of strong actors such as trade unions, and Member States' governments allowed to achieve compromise. Social values already anchored in the idea of national welfare states worked as bonding element in order to create a European social identity. But possibly also a critical discourse concerning the neo-liberal policy approach during the economic crisis and the resulting increase of social inequality - both within and between the Member States – gave ground for a change of policies towards a more social Europe. Particularly for the labour movement, it was not an unanimous decision and the feelings of belonging to a bigger unity promoting this change may have had bonding effects.

Even though we agree that the Minimum Wage Directive can be seen as a result of transnational solidarity within the European Union, different scales or gradations of solidarity predominate in the different groups. As we have shown, our three

groups of actors have different motives and self-interests to engage in transnational solidarity actions. These motives and the form of solidarity that different actors pursue also confirm old lines of conflict. First, conflicts between labour and capital are clearly present: whereas the ETUC opts for positive integration, employers' organisations push for negative integration. Protection of workers versus liberalisation of the labour market divides workers from employers and leads to develop more inclusive or particularistic forms of solidarity. Second, different national interests create conflicts within the EU Parliament and the ETUC along fragmented solidarities. Member States are highly heterogeneous, which makes it difficult to reach agreements at the transnational level.

Trade unions, respectively the ETUC as umbrella organisation, back up the Directive at the European level, as it is a solidarity goal strongly related to their constituency. However, trade union organisations that supported the Directive combined motives of self-interest to improve their national (power) position with the achievement of a more universalistic common good at the European level. Only the Nordic unions, which already have a strong national power position and high wages, could not recognise the strengthening of collective bargaining within the directive proposal as an element of reciprocity to the acceptance of European regulation. With respect to the issue of the minimum wage, therefore, the national trade union federations decided to protect the national sphere instead of aiming for transnational interests. With regard to this issue they remained loyal with a particularistic idea of national solidarity. Our second group, employers, reached a high level of transnational solidarity by developing strong bridging elements to more or less unanimously reject the Directive. Nevertheless, this truly transnational solidarity to increase power resources of their group is used to push for negative integration showing that they defend class interests. By doing this, instead of aiming for a model of neo-corporatism, where all actors are involved in order to reach positive integration as a way to regulate the Union's market, employers put their own interests in the foreground. Third, most Member States and the EU institutions found a shared position in order to defend the Directive, which was pushed forward by the Commission itself and enabled by compromises fostered by the European Parliament during the policy process. As an element of bridging, the progress towards similar regulation in all Member States, respectively social cohesion, may depend on the final commitment of Member States and how they implement the Directive – overall if it can be implemented by majority voting.

All in all, the advancement of the Minimum Wage shows that transnational solidarity is not easy, but it is possible. Applying our theoretical framework, this also indicates a form of inclusive solidarity towards social cohesion promoted by selective actors.

As a measure of a common European social policy it does not only help to control the conditions of the market operation, but also represents positive integration (Scharpf 1996; Scharpf 2014; Dingeldey and Nussbaum Bitran 2023). It signals European solidarity, especially with those workers who struggle most to cope with globalisation and Europeanisation pressures (Schulten and Watt 2007:5).

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