

Chapter 8: Executives & the Unions

8.1. Executive trade union organisation models in Europe.

In the preceding chapter we established just how important, if not pivotal, the role of executives is proving to be, in view of the changes taking place and about to take place in the banking sector. We noted the existence of many problems that unite executives with the other employees in the sector, and we stressed the importance of their collective integration and expression, as well as their solidarity with the sector's other employees as a whole

Trade unionism among executives is usually a delicate question (and in many cases a particularly annoying one for the employers' side if not also for certain unions).

Greece is among the European countries where executives are not represented separately from the other banking sector employees.

Executives can take part individually in the sector's primary sectoral-level, occupation-based or enterprise-level unions, just like any other worker. Certain occupation-based unions, however, cover executive occupations or specialisations (e.g. accountants, qualified engineers, professors, etc.) in the public and private sector.

As a rule, the large secondary and tertiary union organisations in these sectors have no special department or division for collective expression or special coverage of executives.

Similar models of "union diffusion" – individual membership of executives in unions covering employees as a whole by sector, enterprise or occupation, may be encountered in the United Kingdom, Ireland and Portugal.

In the Scandinavian countries the national confederations are organised mainly on an occupational basis. Some of them represent, from the primary to the tertiary level, specialisations and occupations belonging pre-eminently to the area of executives.

However, the model of union organisation usually encountered in Europe (France, Spain, Italy) includes separate executive trade unions, which only on the tertiary level

are associated with the national confederations covering all workers. In France, there is also trade union representation for executives on the tertiary level, the CFE-CGC.¹

It is not part of the purpose and field of reference of our survey to concern ourselves with the general problem of collective representation of executives in Greece or to determine whether they are organised separately, let alone to examine to whether any of the existing European models would be better suited to a more effective collective organisation and representation of executives in this country.

Moreover, it is common knowledge that the models of union organisation are the product of long-term historical developments, national and cultural traditions. Thus we cannot evaluate them, or even accept them as models, without being aware and taking account of the conditions of social dynamics, the institutional framework and the collective practice that have created them and keep them in existence.

That is why we have limited our analysis to outlining the points of contact and connection, as well as the real conditions of collective coverage of the sector's executives by the unions covering other workers.

8.2. Basic questions covered by the survey.

The points covered by the questionnaire used in the survey were the following:

- To what degree do we encounter special unions for executives in the banking sector? What do those unions offer their members?;
- If there are no such unions, to what extent do executives join unions covering staff as a whole?
- To what extent do the existing unions promote executives' issues?

We addressed the foregoing questions to the banks and the enterprise-level unions. We may consider the responses we received to be representative of the sector under examination.

In the workshop attended by individual banking sector executives, we explored certain additional points, on the basis of a special questionnaire:

- **How satisfied do executives appear to be with their representation by the existing unions?**

¹ For details regarding the ways in which executives are organised in Europe, see MERMET E. "Les cadres en Europe", Institut syndical Europeen- EUROCADRES, Octobre 2000, pp. 22-31.

- **Similarly, how satisfied do they appear to be with the goals and effectiveness of the unions?**
- **Finally, to what degree do they believe executives should (or should not) organise in trade unions?**

The responses we received from the individual executives are, as we have noted elsewhere, only of an indicative nature. Nevertheless, they help us single out certain questions meriting particular attention and/or further investigation by the existing trade unions in the sector.

8.3. Presentation of the basic results.

8.3.1. Existence of special unions for executives.

According to the 13 banks that responded to the questionnaire, there are no special unions representing executives in the banking sector.

Of the unions that responded to this specific question, 94% (15 out of 16) are of the same opinion.

Only one union (a scientific association) believes that it represents executives in particular; the services it says it provides to them regard legal and collective coverage, cultural activities, etc. It should be noted that although all the similar associations in other banks appear formally to be “associations of degree-holders”, they do not believe that they represent executives in particular, insofar as the banking sector includes a large proportion of degree-holders who either are not executives or are not members and thus are not represented by the relevant associations.

8.3.2. Rate of executive membership in unions for all staff.

Since we found that in the banking sector, as in the country as a whole, executives are represented by the existing primary unions covering all staff, we thought it would be a good idea to take a closer look at their rate of membership in the existing unions, as estimated by the banks and relevant unions.

The results are shown in Diagram 8.1.

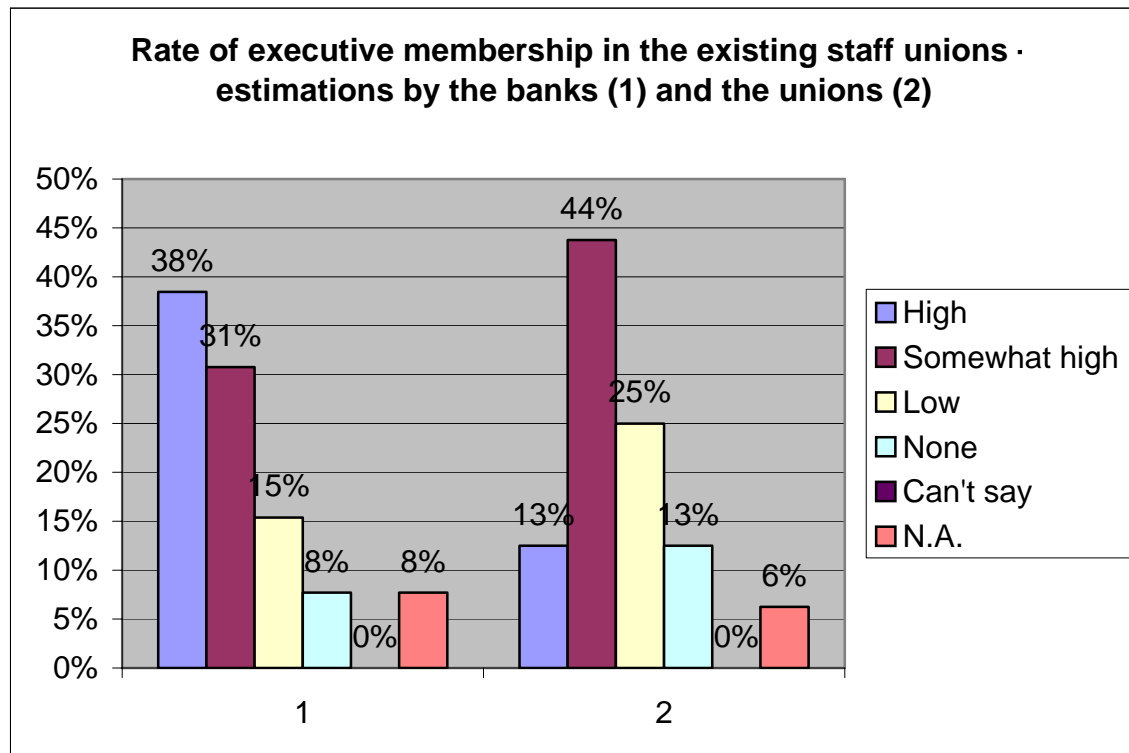


Diagram 8.1.

According to the data we collected, 69% of the banks estimate that the rate of executive membership in the existing unions is “high” or “somewhat high”, and 23% estimate that it is “low” or “none”.

The majority of unions, too, believe that executives are union members. However, there is a clear difference between the unions’ and the banks’ estimation of their membership rate.

The banks believe that their executives’ involvement in trade unionism, even as ordinary members of organisations that cover staff as a whole, is already significant.

By contrast, the unions appear to want something more than mere union membership for executives, i.e., more active involvement, representation and participation of executives in the collective practice for the solution both of common issues and of the particular problems of concern to them.

8.3.2. The degree to which the existing unions for staff as a whole promote executives' issues.

Clearly, one of the basic factors that may determine whether executives join the existing unions or not (without overlooking other factors such as corporate culture, tolerance or even employers who encourage them to join for a variety of reasons and purposes) is to what extent these unions promote executives' special issues, provide collective coverage and resolve their problems.

The results are shown in Diagram 8.2.

According to the results, the majority (54%) of the banks estimate that the existing unions promote executives' issues "a little" or "not at all" (**we should not forget that bank executives responded to this question on behalf of the banks**). By contrast, 31% of the banks responded that executives' issues are promoted "very much". More answered "somewhat", and two banks (15%) did not answer.

Most of the unions seem to take exactly the opposite view: **56% answered that they promote executives' issues "very much" or "somewhat"**, 25% "a little", and three unions (19%) did not answer.

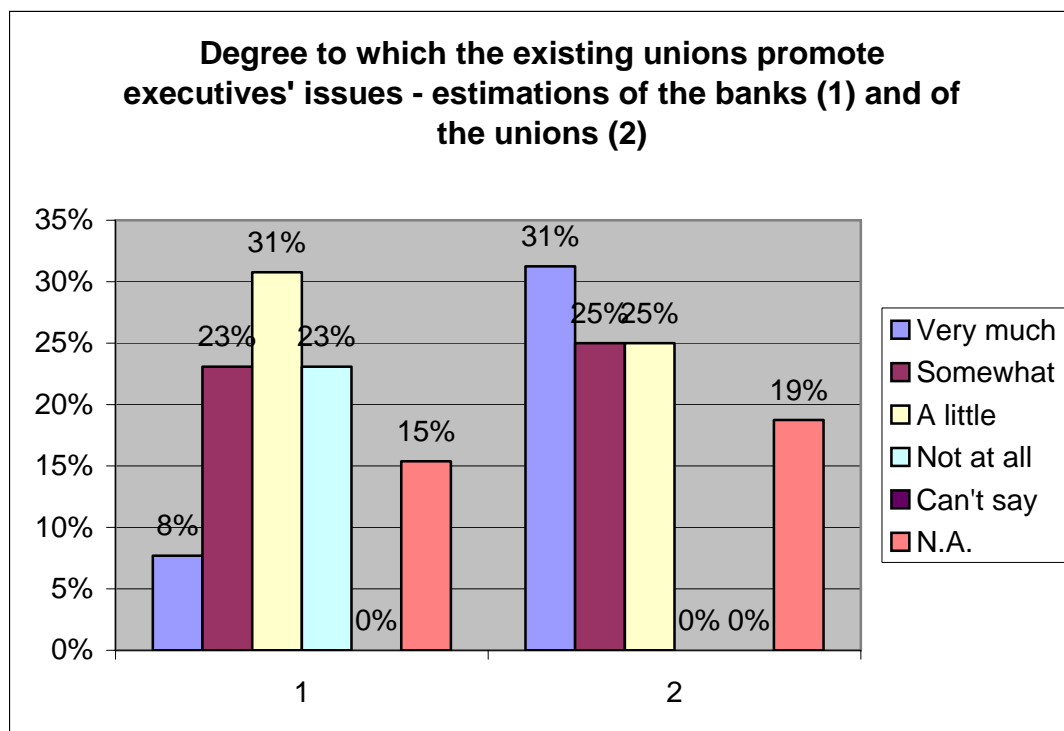


Diagram 8.2

The foregoing estimations may be interpreted in very different ways: it was not possible to weigh them reliably in the context of this survey. For example, the banks may encourage, tolerate or, on the contrary, be disturbed by unions' involvement in issues concerning their executives.

Those unions that state that they are satisfied with the action they are taking on executives' issues may say this because many people are joining them, and/or because they are taking action on general issues also of concern to executives (e.g. bonuses, evaluation systems, goal-setting, advancement and placement of executives) or finally because they are able to take action on an individual basis to serve or protect their members who are executives. This is true mainly in the banks in which the state has an interest.

Unions may be dissatisfied because not enough executives join them, and therefore employers either do not recognise them as competent to take action on executives' issues or view the stand taken by the company's executives as conflicting with the interests of the whole range of employees they represent.

In either case, we were not aware of any special union sphere of action or committee regarding executives in particular, something that might contribute to a more systematic investigation, understanding and treatment of executives' special problems.

8.3.3. Executives' degree of satisfaction with their relationship (representation – protection) with the existing unions for staff as a whole.

Diagram 8.3 shows the estimations of the executives themselves regarding their relations with the unions where they work. Although they only give a rough indication, these estimations show a moderate to low degree of satisfaction for 41% of the executives, whereas, on the contrary, 44% report that they are very satisfied or merely satisfied.

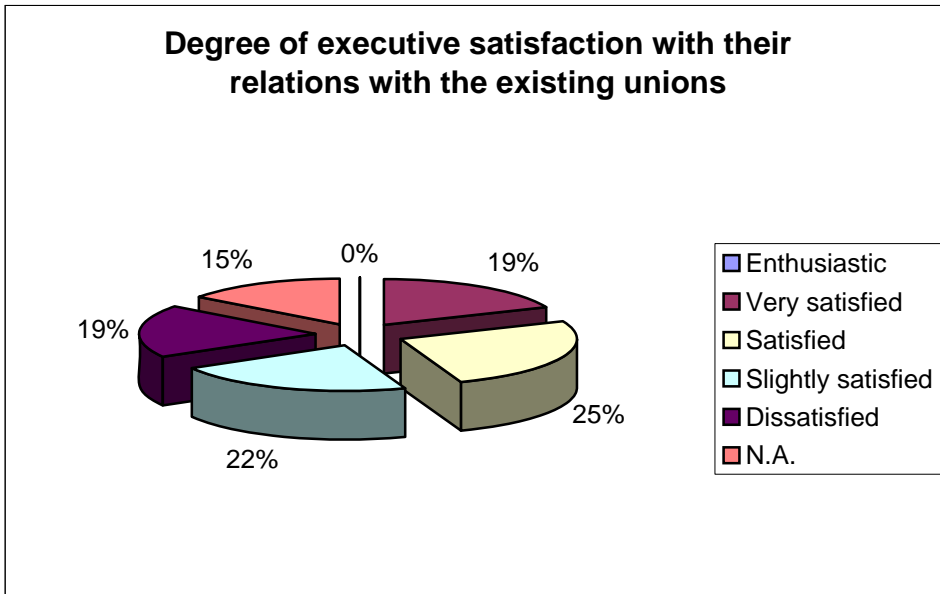


Diagram 8.3.

8.3.4. Degree of executive satisfaction with the goals and effectiveness of the unions where they work.

Diagram 8.4 shows the degree of satisfaction of the executives participating in the survey with the goals and effectiveness of the unions where they work. We can see that only 26% say they are very satisfied or merely satisfied. The majority is of the opposite opinion (59% say they are slightly satisfied or dissatisfied). This is an indication of fundamental problems in the relationship between executives and unions and in the effectiveness of union actions taken on behalf of executives in the banking sector.

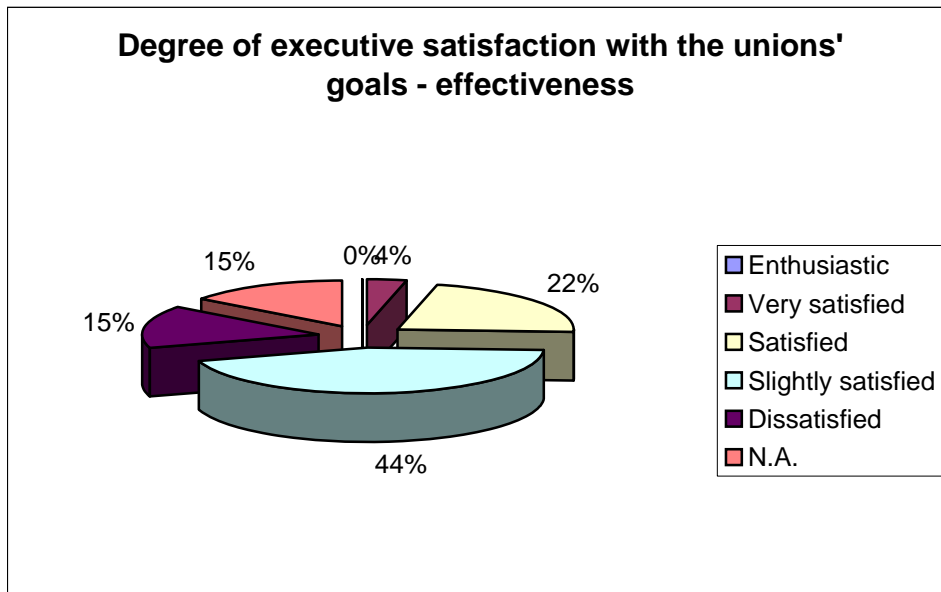


Diagram 8.4.

Although they only give a rough idea, these results show that there is a fundamental problem of executive representation by the existing unions in the sector. In order to resolve this problem, the existing unions must take a much closer look at the role and problems of concern to executives, on the enterprise as well as the sectoral level.

The establishment and operation of special Secretariats for executives within the existing unions may be a means of helping the unions get closer to them and deal with their special problems in a really collective manner.

8.3.5. Should executives become involved in trade unionism?

Before we single out some basic features of the relationship between executives and the unions in present-day conditions, not as conclusions, but rather as points to be explored further by the unions in the sector, it would be interesting to see what is the general attitude of executives taking part in the survey to the pivotal issue of their union membership. The indicative results are shown in Diagram 8.5.

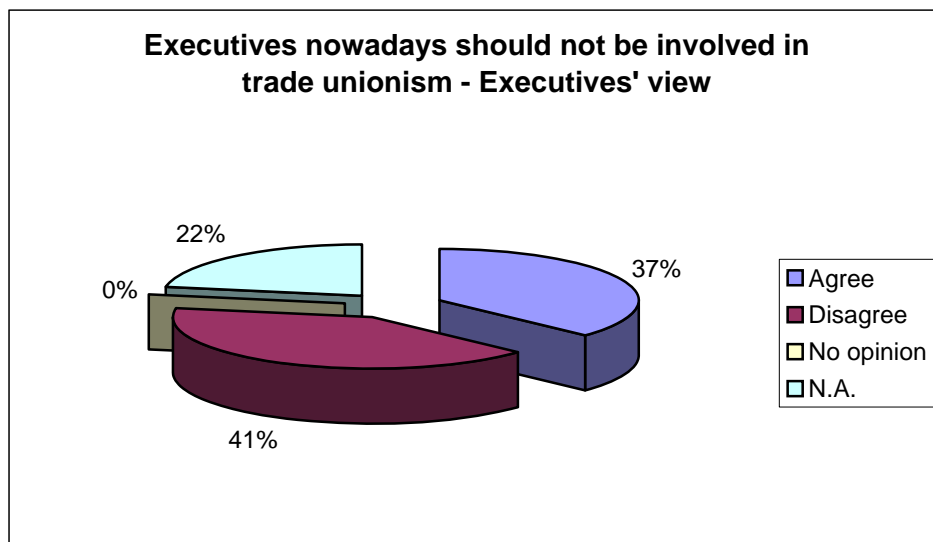


Diagram 8.5.

We believe that the results should be of concern for the trade union movement in the sector, insofar as 37% of the executives appear to think

- either that it "is not worth the effort" to organise in trade unions,
- or that union membership will have adverse effects on their career and on their earnings in general,
- or finally that their role and special interests do not lend themselves to collective organisation and representation, an attitude which is sometimes

also cultivated by the employers' side, which promotes individualism as the most appropriate and acceptable attitude or as proof of an executive's loyalty to the company.

If we disregard those who did not answer the specific question (22%), there is a significant share of executives (41%) who continue to have faith in the role and importance of organising in unions, although, as we saw above, they may not be satisfied with the effectiveness of the unions where they work.

This group of executives must retain its confidence in the usefulness and reliability of trade unionism in the particularly difficult conditions existing today in the sector and to grow accordingly.

By what means and under what conditions (organisational, political, etc.) this will be done is a vital question and a subject demanding serious effort and systematic examination by the unions in the sector.

8.4. Basic findings and issues to be explored.

It would be premature to try to draw any definite conclusions from the data available to us from our survey's initial examination of the relations between executives and the sector's unions.

However, it is obvious that unions need to make special efforts to approach executives, no longer in the form of doing occasional favours to isolated executives who are union members on an individual, case-by-case, if not clientelistic basis, but rather:

- By setting up and operating special divisions – Secretariats within the existing primary and secondary unions, to systematically monitor, study and achieve a really collective solution to executives' problems
- By stepping up efforts for executives to join and effectively participate in the unions, by systematically making sure that there are demands and collective regulations to meet their specific needs on issues such as working hours, pay, mobility, training, etc.
- By eliminating the serious disincentives to executives' organising in trade unions (available time, objective effects on career, access to extra pay, etc.) through suitable action by the unions involving the relevant systems of evaluation, promotion, executive advancement, pay, etc.

- By continuing to do research, in the sector and in every workplace, on the terms and conditions of pay and employment and the special part played by executives, to enable the unions to put forward credible, documented demands with regard to these issues
- By systematically taking action to eliminate the real – and serious – disincentives to equal advancement of executives, which, as we have found, present serious problems for female bank employees, with regard to working hours and conditions of mobility at the very least

Finally, by changing their attitude towards executives. Rationales such as “they don’t need our help, they can work it out with the employer” or “they are better paid and at any rate their interests are different from ours” literally “hand over” to the employers’ side a whole group of employees who, as we saw earlier on, have a pivotal role to play in present and future changes. As a group, executives have many common problems and are of importance for the successful outcome of the demands of the sector’s employees as a whole.