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Objectives

The Electronic Papers published by the Portuguese Observatory for Good Labour Practices (OPBPL) main goals are to confer the accessibility and high-speed readability of essential information and good practices in regards to work organisation, collective bargaining, human resources management, labour relations, inclusion and sustainability, corporate social responsibility, and labour market statistics.

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Labour Relations Specificities (I): independent trade unionism

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Abstract

The model of independent trade unionism is very close to that of Nordic trade unionism.

This OPBPL e-dossier firstly describes the factors that distinguish independent trade unions from others.

It also presents statistical data on the development of trade union membership in the independent trade union confederations in Portugal and the European Union.

1 | What is the distinguishing factor in Independent Trade Unions?

The model of independent trade unionism is very close to that of Nordic trade unionism.

In Nordic countries, matters of social and labour policy are generally regulated by means of negotiations between the social partners rather than by law. It may be noted that in this trade union culture – which is balanced and widely considered a benchmark of good practice and social justice – a minimum salary is a specific aspect of labour regulations that does not exist in Denmark, Finland, Norway or Sweden; in these countries, sectoral negotiations among the social partners determine the rules.

Nordic countries register a high rate of trade union membership, generally above 85% of the working population.

Their workers also want and accept trade unions and the services they provide, in particular social and financial protection during unemployment, health insurance, low-interest loans, and the support provided in individual pay negotiations.

In concrete terms, the services that independent trade unions in Nordic countries offer their members include:

- the negotiation of collective labour agreements;
- legal protection and individual counselling for employees;
- social and financial protection for employees in periods of unemployment;
- opportunities for occupational training and lifelong learning;
- advisory services for individual pay negotiations;
- health insurance and retirement plans; and
- the provision of digital and printed publications on matters of interest to the workforce.

From a more global perspective, we may take the four specificities given below to sum up the independent trade union movement:

- (1) independence from the state, employers and political and religious associations;
- (2) a level of consultation and social dialogue, in articulation with the management of enterprises and organisations, on the principle of protection of the continuity and economic and financial health of those enterprises and organisations;
- (3) a set of European ideals with a negotiating range that works on two levels: global and local; and
- (4) emphasis on the provision of services to affiliates and beneficiaries, by means of a mindset focused on the workers and their interests, trajectories and careers.

2 | A description of Independent Trade Unions

Free, independent and democratic trade unionism has been gaining increasing importance and a larger role in advanced democratic societies. In Portugal, too, this movement has been acquiring more visibility and a greater capacity to intervene in society.

In Portugal, the USI (Union of Independent Trade Unions, a trade union confederation) was created in 2000. It is widely recognized that its development over the years has won it a space of its own.

In accordance with its ideals, the USI's differentiating factors are: action governed by constant contact with all its members, as a whole or individually, on the basis of the rejection of any kind of top-down trade unionism, which is generally removed from trade union realities; policy banners in its social and labour activities, combined with ethics, quality and integrity in trade union work (thus restoring the credibility of trade unionism as a noble function in Portuguese society); a prime objective of constructive and responsible intervention in the community that gives precedence to positive and effective dialogue in its relationship with all agents in society, in particular the authorities and other social partners; and rejection of the hegemonic intentions of the present trade union confederations (CGTP and UGT) to divide the representation of Portuguese workers among themselves.

According to the data for 2011, USI has 12 affiliates, representing around 40,000 members and covering a geographical area that stretches from continental Portugal to the islands of Madeira and the archipelago of the Azores. On this basis, USI is committed to establishing itself at the national level. It should also be noted that, between 2000 and 2011, its membership grew at a rate of over 40% in the first four of those years and more than 14% in the subsequent period (Table 1).

Table 1: USI (Union of Independent Trade Unions, a trade union confederation): representativity and total membership

Year	Number of Organizations	Total Membership	Growth Rate
2000	5	25000	-
2004	9	35000	40%
2011	12	40000	14,3%

Sources: USI Congresses; Secretariat of the USI Coordinating Council; www.usi.pt .

Independent trade unionism is also present in the European Union (EU). The various trade union organisations of the 27 EU member states are represented in the *Confédération Européenne des Syndicats Indépendants* (CESI) and *Confédération Européenne des Cadres* (CEC).

So let us analyse both of these international trade union confederations in detail.

With reference to the mission, goals and strategic position of CESI (a trade-union confederation with a wide-ranging area of institutional intervention), we may note three specific points:

- (1)CESI is a trade union confederation that brings together union organisations in various European countries. It was founded in 1990. As a European umbrella organisation, it can accommodate a membership of both national and European trade unions, whether – in either case – they are sectoral and/or supra-sectoral.
- (2)At the European level, CESI is active in the different EU institutions, in particular the European Commission. It represents positions relating mainly to social policy issues and, through the work of its committees, contributes to decision-making in the fields of employment and European social policy.
- (3)CESI defends the principle of trade union pluralism and sees itself as an interlocutor in the European social dialogue. Its influence as a political association must be strengthened through dialogue and partnership on a European level. In both the private and public sectors, CESI defends the interests of independent trade unions, where they

respect democratic principles, in compliance with human rights. As an independent European association, CESI is not tied to any ideology or political power whatsoever.

CESI's representativity and membership numbers are also important. According to the data for 2011, CESI has 42 affiliates. They represent around 8 million members and cover a geographical area that includes the whole of Europe. It is also worth noting that between 1992 and 2011 CESI recorded membership growth rates of over 12% (Table 2).

Table 2: CESI (Confédération Européenne des Syndicats Indépendants): representativity and total membership

Year	Number of Organizations	Total Membership	Growth Rate
2000	28	5 605 000	21,4%
2004	35	7 000 000	19,9%
2011	42	8 000 000	12,5%

Sources: CESI European Congresses; Secretariat of the CESI Governing Council; www.cesi.org.

With regard to the mission, goals and strategic positioning of CEC (a trade union confederation oriented more towards executive and managerial trade unionism), we may note three specific aspects:

(1) European managers were among the first to understand the importance of organising themselves on an international level. Accordingly, in 1951, the French, German and Italian executive confederations set up the International Confederation of Executives and Managers (CIC). Driven by a desire for more active participation in the European social dialogue, this international confederation took on a European hue in 1989 and gave place to the European Confederation of Executives and Managers (CEC – Confédération Européenne des Cadres).

(2) Today, CEC is one of the six European social partners. Through its national affiliates, professional organisations and federations, it represents 1.5 million managers in Europe. At the European level, the social partners are: ETUC, EUROCADRES and CEC, on the workers' side; and BUSINESSEUROPE, CEEP and UEAPME, on the side of the employers' associations.

(3)CEC promotes and protects the interests of managers in Europe, presenting the specific viewpoints of managers to the European institutions. It is an independent social partner in the European social dialogue. It also maintains its independence of the lobbies representing managers' opinions and interests and co-operates with all the social partners to construct a free Europe and promote the principles of dynamic social order in a globalised world.

With regard to representativity and membership – according to the most recent data, from 2011 – CEC has 27 affiliates, who represent one and a half million members and cover a geographical area that takes in the whole of Europe (Table 3).

Table 3: CEC (Confédération Européenne des Cadres): representativity and membership

Year	Number of Organizations	Total Membership	Growth Rate
2000	23	-	-
2004	26	-	-
2011	27	1 500 000	-

Sources: Secretariat of the CEC Governing Council; www.cec-managers.org .

3 | Further reading

SITE: <http://opbpl.cies.iscte.pt>

BOOK: Almeida, Paulo Pereira de (2009), *O Sindicato-Empresa: uma nova via para o Sindicalismo; The Union-Enterprise: a new way for Trade Unionism*, Lisboa e São Paulo, Editora Bnomics, [ISBN 978-989-8184-44-3].



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