

Welcome Address

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Ladies and Gentlemen,

The topic of your conference is very close to my heart: **the importance of appropriate representation of executives at all relevant level of the European Social Dialogue.**

I very much welcome, encourage and support CEC's initiative to organise a European conference on "European work councils" (EWC). This theme is highly topical, since more and more companies become truly European, operating across borders within the Single Market. The discussion about the reform of the relevant EU-directive is important, because managers like you should be properly represented in a company, whose strategic decisions and output you shape.

In your role as managers, you represent a special group of employees and have an important role to play in your companies. You build bridges between the top-management and its decisions and the workforce. The challenge is to motivate the team from the bottom to the top and explain why strategic decisions are taken and what these decisions entail in practice. Because such decisions often have a wide impact and sometimes unforeseen consequences, managers play an important role in society overall as role-models for others. You bear the responsibility for decisions and you are expected to lead by example.

The European Parliament has already recognised the specificity and the potential of the managerial staff in the early nineties, in the so-called Gil Robles Resolution adopted in 1993. In this resolution, the European Parliament:

"calls on the Commission to take steps where necessary to guarantee managerial staff in companies and groups operating at European level the right to information and consultation and to a form of representation enabling them to participate and act effectively within existing consultative bodies or those to be set up which represent all of the workforce, particularly within the framework of the European company" (Gil-Robles Resolution 18.6.1993)

Executives are a particularly crucial group in companies. Apart from the expected flexibility and mobility, they have valuable insights into the processes and trends of a company that neither the top-level nor the regular workforce has. Thus, there is an evident need and a right for adequate representation of their interests.

In the majority of the Member States, managers are under-represented in European works councils. The challenge is to harmonise a system of representation at the European level. Taking into account the diversity of information and consultation rights for different categories of employees in 27 different Member States in such a system is difficult, but necessary. The EU ought to ameliorate this situation by i.e. guaranteeing a seat for executives and managers in the European work council or by ensuring a place to executives in the delegation of every country counting at least three representatives for each country.

In addition to this, European companies, so called "Societates Europaeae" (SE), are currently set up all over the EU. The introduction of European companies will and already has repercussions across the EU and affect the EU's competitiveness. Especially in the context, the representation of managers' interests would be very valuable.

One excellent opportunity to exchange your ideas is the CEC Managers Network (www.cec-managers.info). It enables managers to exchange each other's knowledge or experiences in one or the other country or company.

The European social dialogue is another option to give employees the possibility to make their voice heard on problems that otherwise may be difficult to handle. The agreements negotiated assure workers – including managers – a greater degree of protection. The reaching of these agreements is the proof that social dialogue is a precious tool, if one knows how to handle it.

Concluding my remarks, I would like to take the opportunity to emphasize once again how important it is that you get involved with Europe. The European Union can only function if people like you suggest improvements and - wherever necessary- criticize. All of us in Brussels, whether in the Commission, the Council or Members of the European Parliament need your invaluable knowledge and experience to make the European Union function more smoothly and effectively