

Welcome Address

Bernard VAN CRAEYNEST, CFE-CGC President



Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am happy and proud to be able to welcome this conference. I would like to thank the local section of CFE-CGC for its commitment as well as the management team of the Airbus site for accepting to welcome this event.

I am even prouder to be the trade union host the conference that the theme of the conference talks about employee participation through the information and consultation of their representatives and is precisely based on the values of CFE-CGC, the organization that represents and unionizes managers in France.

CFE-CGC was created in 1944 to raise the awareness about the fact that those employees who manage teams or who are engineers are in a special professional situation different from the one from top management and from the one of blue-collar workers and white collar workers, and to make people realize that the only way to push for the aspirations and needs of this group of the population and to have them recognized was for managers themselves to take their destiny in their own hands and choose to have a specific trade union organization to exercise their freedom to organize.

A company is a community where people work and have different interests but its success, its development and its growth depend upon the ability of its entire staff to reconcile these different interests. Involving wage earners in the proper economic functioning of the company through their trade union representatives or elected shop stewards, who are informed and consulted with on the major decisions of the company is one of the ways of guaranteeing the success of the company in question. Now, could you tell me who was and still is the best person to understand and express the need? Well, no one else but those wage

earners who manage teams and relay the decisions made by top management giving them meaning; those wage earners who inspire and manage the most sensitive or important technical projects.

A European works council represents all of that and it is also true for the different European directives on worker's participation and, more recently, the latest documents on the European Company.

The place of managers in information and consultation structures of European and global multinationals is legitimate and necessary. The role of managers, what they bring or can bring to the company's performance, is absolutely indispensable and I'm sure today's conference will rightly recall it.

The contribution of European legislation on information and consultation of employee reps is undeniable. In 1994, the European works council was and it still is today to a large extent a body that allowed employees from different countries to meet, to get to know other staff representation practices, to become familiar with management practices elsewhere and to understand other ways of thinking. The EWC is also a structure where information is passed on whereas in some countries, little information is provided to staff representatives. And it would seem that the Council of the European Company might follow the exact same route.

However, the environment in which companies do business has evolved; restructuring, the globalization of capital or even investing in CSR have all had an impact on existing EWCs and on their practices, and have developed strong employee expectations vis-à-vis a European structure for the representation of their interests.

The regulatory framework deserves being adapted, and so should European and international trade union practices. There are tools which have been analyzed with more or less insight. The question is: "what do we do with such tools?"

The bumpy revision of the 1994 directive on EWCs seems to have no end. What the European social partners will have to say to us will be enlightening. The development of international framework agreements is changing business and managerial practices and has an impact on the trade union movement just like the EWCs, which regularly partake in this type of framework agreement.

The opinion of executives and managers – because of the role they play and because of their positions in businesses – may not be absent from such development.