Whither Organised Business? The Development and Transformation of Employer and Business Associations

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Abstract. In many countries, especially within Europe, organized business in the form of employer and business associations is part of the wider system of collective interest representation, mediation and participation. The representativeness of organisations is one key element for the functioning of this system. The representativeness of employer and business associations is challenged by the socio-economic development even though it is of central importance not only to enforce the needs of companies but also for the ‘functioning’ of any form of social dialogue. Using a cross-national approach, in this paper we investigate how employer and business associations faced these challenges. It is argued that these socio-economic changes have also offered opportunities. The results show that by adapting the organisational structure as well as their activities to the changing needs of companies, representativeness can be secured. This is done in particular, by shifting activities away from engaging in binding collective wage-agreements and more towards non-wage agreements and involvement in training and active labour market programmes.

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