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Onderwerp: The ETUC Executive Committee calls on the EU to change course

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European Trade Union Confederation [ETUC]
 Confédération européenne des syndicats [CES]

The Executive Committee of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), which met from 24 to 25 June, is taking a tougher stance in light of the lack of progress being made towards achieving a social Europe. Recent decisions on the Working Time

Directive and the European Court of Justice's verdict on the Luxembourg case have set the European Union (EU) on a dangerous course. European citizens have the image of a Europe that systematically attacks workers' rights, a Europe where markets are prioritised above all else, and this notion is doubtless one of the main reasons behind the Irish 'no'. The EU urgently needs to change direction, at the risk of pillorying the European project and alienating its citizens.

ETUC has already made clear its opinion on these subjects, but the European Council for Employment and Social Affairs' recent decision on the Working Time Directive and the ruling on the Luxembourg case are evidence of further erosion of European labour law. The Luxembourg case was particularly edifying for more than one reason: the European Commission turned on one of the Member States, Luxembourg, because it protected its workers too much. Previous cases (Laval, Viking, Rüffert) had paved the way for this, since the verdicts effectively outlawed national collective agreements. It is now absolutely imperative for the EU to move in a different direction – people currently believe Europe is regressing, lacking legislation to protect its citizens.

Moreover, these decisions were taken in a rapidly worsening socio-economic climate, where the situation is being exacerbated by rising food and oil prices, both of which hit lower-income households the hardest. Inflation also has a part in the crisis. Deregulation policies at European level sometimes make their way to national level, where they erode the social *acquis* and increase the overall feeling of insecurity.

In such a context, where policies work against social progress and social considerations are seen as a burden, the 'no' of the Irish referendum should be taken very seriously indeed, especially since a majority of workers voted against the Treaty. And yet the Eurobarometer shows that the overwhelming majority of Irish people are pro-European. The populations of other countries would certainly have voted 'no' had there been referendums.

The European trade union movement therefore calls on European decision-makers to change course if they do not want to create a rift between themselves and Europe's citizens. It is also in favour of a protocol for social progress. ETUC is planning European action days for the start of the new session (a world day of action will take place on 7 October, and dates for actions directed at Parliament regarding working time will be fixed according to the schedule).

The Irish Referendum: the ETUC Initial Assessment

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