



ETUC Resolution on Developments in Europe's Southern Neighbourhood The Arab Spring

Adopted at the Executive Committee on 8 March 2011

The ETUC Executive Committee has followed closely the turmoil around the Southern and Eastern shores of the Mediterranean. In different ways, according to their own circumstances, people in the region are making a welcome call for deep change and for the full respect of their political, social and economic rights.

The ETUC condemns the state violence unleashed against legitimate protestors and supports those demands. It insists that the EU should respond with determination. The ETUC is concerned that the EU has been late in its expressions and actions of support, which reflect little more than the lowest common denominator of the positions of Member States and fall far short of the duties set down in the Lisbon Treaty under which the Union seeks to advance in the wider world: "democracy, the rule of law, the universality and indivisibility of human rights and fundamental freedoms, respect for human dignity, the principles of equality and solidarity, and respect for the principles of the United Nations Charter and international law". The Union, led by the High Representative, should take a lead unfettered in pursuit of those aims.

Overshadowed by concerns about security (terrorism, energy, migration) as well as about securing markets, the policy of many Member States has often been self-seeking and cynical. While the ETUC shares the aim of protecting our people, it questions whether making deals with dictators is the way to ensure their safety. The revolutionary process in the Arab countries is a wake up call for the International Community as a whole and a lesson for Europe. A policy that sacrifices in the name of economic interest and security the right of the people for democracy and human rights is not acceptable. In the long term, there is no stability without democracy. Europe should not export lessons but offer partnership and support predicated on the respect of universally recognised human and trade union rights, including the protection of minorities.

The ETUC condemns in the strongest possible terms the massacre of civilians by the Gaddafi regime and calls for all possible measures under international law to be taken against it and to support the Libyan people in their fight for freedom.

Currently, mass migratory movements are taking place mainly between Libya and neighbouring African countries. The EU should maximise humanitarian aid and assistance in resettling workers in their home countries. EU countries bordering the Mediterranean are most likely to experience the repercussions of changes close to them. Responsibility for policy and activities relating to our Southern Neighbourhood, as indeed other regions worldwide, should be undertaken jointly and proportionately by all members of the Union in a spirit of fairness and solidarity.

The ETUC notes the commitment expressed by the Foreign Affairs Council meeting on 21 February to “a new partnership involving more effective support to those countries in the Southern Neighbourhood which are pursuing political and economic reforms while drawing, where appropriate, on European experience of transition, including support to civil society, youth and economic cooperation”. It welcomes the Commission Communication of 8 March *A Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity with the Southern Mediterranean*, notably its statement that “Social dialogue between trade unions and employers plays an important role in sustaining reform efforts. New trade unions and employers associations are now emerging. This provides an opportunity for more effective social dialogue.” The ETUC will play a full part in related initiatives and calls for adequate resources to be provided to support them.

The ETUC recalls the role it played in assisting in the transition process in Central and Eastern Europe and is ready to help in our Southern Neighbourhood, in response to real needs expressed by our trade union colleagues there. We have grave doubts that the Union for the Mediterranean in its present form can provide an adequate framework for action. Nevertheless, its social dialogue initiative has been one of the few areas where some progress has been made, particularly in promoting cooperation in the fields of education and training. This should be adapted and reinforced.

We recall the suicide by fire of a young street vendor in Sidi Bouzid in Tunisia and other desperate acts by young people in the region driven by a lack of jobs, social injustice, poverty and lack of freedoms. Those cries for help must not remain unheeded. The instauration of properly functioning and regulated labour markets to deal with massive unemployment, particularly among young people, must be a priority for EU assistance. The ETUC repeats its request that the new European External Action Service should include labour and social affairs attachés – draw from people with expertise in the field - to maintain links with and encourage the development of independent social partner organisations and to inform the development of policy and concrete projects. Such attaché posts should initially be created in Tunis and Cairo.

The ETUC will work closely with the International Trade Union Confederation, notably its Amman Office, in the design and implementation of projects to assist independent trade unions in the region on the basis of the needs defined by them. It underlines the necessity for a coordinated and joint approach that should be organised through the Euromed Trade Union Forum ETUC-ITUC where all relevant partners are represented. The Forum, by decision of its Coordination Committee, ended early in 2010 any cooperation with the International Confederation of Arab Trade Unions and its affiliates not members of the ITUC (Egypt and Syria). The Forum will invite the new independent trade union federation initiated by the Egyptian Centre for Trade Union

and Workers' Services (CTUWS) to join it. We recall that Histadrut is a member of the Forum.

In Tunisia, the UGTT continues to play an essential role. The Tunisian Trade Union Movement proved its capacity to mobilise and to help to structure the political and social protest. The ETUC and its affiliates will support trade union unity and cohesion in Tunisia. That country was the starting point of a process that now covers most of the Arab countries and that has to be considered as a first step for regime and democratic changes. It is essential to underline that the process for change in Tunisia and other Arab countries was from the very beginning home-grown and not driven externally. The success of the Tunisian transformation is crucial as a reference for the Arab world.

In Egypt, the regime-controlled Egyptian Trade Union Federation (ETUF) is still in place, though morally bankrupt and without any credibility among working people. The ETUC is deeply concerned at the continued close support for the current ETUF leadership by the authorities and their decision to "keep on hold" the issue of trade union rights. The continued denial of those rights is unacceptable, particularly against a background of ongoing strikes and sit-ins in workplaces throughout the country. Egypt must now fully comply with international standards, notably freedom of association. The ETUC reaffirms its support for the new independent trade union federation, initiated by the CTUWS, that brings together existing independent trade unions in the health sector and tax collection, as well as representatives of the workforce from the country's principal manufacturing sites, civil servants and workers from other sectors.

The ETUC urgently calls for positive movement to resolve the Israel / Palestinian conflict on the basis of United Nations Security Council Resolutions. Now is not the time for the EU to enhance political and economic relations with Israel bilaterally, so long as human rights, the rule of law and fundamental freedoms, good governance and international humanitarian law are not fully respected, and in particular that settlements continue. The EU should draw up a coherent strategy including corresponding advances in relations with Arab states and the Palestinian Authority. The EU continues to be by far the largest donor of humanitarian assistance in Palestinian territories, notably Gaza, and it must ensure that this is not used in any way in the crucial process of reconstruction to provide succour to the extremists, but rather to help the population out of the dreadful poverty that provides the fertile ground for their activities.

The ETUC will continue to keep developments under close review, extend whatever assistance it can to independent trade unions in the region through the Euromed Trade Union Forum in cooperation with the ITUC, and press the EU Institutions to act resolutely in line with this resolution.