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Onderwerp: ETUC Position on the social dimension of the European Union

ETUC Press release

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ETUC position on the social dimension of the European Union

23/04/2013

At its meeting in Brussels on 23 April 2013, the Executive Committee of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) adopted the following position on the social dimension of the European Union:

In June 2012 the Executive Committee of the European Trade Union Confederation unanimously called for a “social compact for Europe”. That social compact made clear that Europe’s social dimension must be an integral part of economic and fiscal governance and given equal attention; it also made clear that the overriding objective of economic and fiscal governance should be to generate sustainable growth and employment. ETUC key concerns and priorities regarding the social dimension of the European Union are clearly set in that document : <http://www.etuc.org/a/10049>

Social achievements and policies at national and EU level have been greatly harmed by macro-economic and labour market policies implemented so far. We need a change of course if social Europe is to become a reality. Without this change ETUC support will be in doubt.

We view the European Council examination of a roadmap for the social dimension of the EMU, including social dialogue, as a step in the right direction because coordinated economic and monetary policies prevailing within a single monetary zone have a direct and powerful impact on labour and social framework conditions.

However the ETUC considers that the proposal to discuss a social dimension of the EMU is too restrictive. The EU as a whole aims at full employment and social progress. Therefore a discussion on the social dimension of the EMU is only acceptable if it triggers social progress in the whole of the European Union.

The EU social dimension must be grounded in the respect of fundamental social rights and the improvement of living and working conditions. It must be directed towards the fight against unemployment, poverty, inequalities, wage and tax dumping. It must promote our successful European social model made of strong social protection, quality public services and social dialogue. The EU social dimension must be real and effective.

Democratic processes and the accountability of EU institutions must be considerably strengthened. The European Parliament should be included on an equal footing in the design of new economic governance instruments. This is indispensable to restore citizens' and workers' trust in the European project and in its future potential.

We recall that the social dimension of the EU is rooted in the Lisbon Treaty, including the Charter of fundamental rights, and international instruments^[1].

Our priorities are therefore to:

- Stop cuts in public spending, social protection and wages. They are unfair, they increase unemployment, inequalities and poverty and they worsen recession.
- Stop competition on wage and working conditions. Stop tax competition, tax fraud, tax evasion. The EU is not only a free trade zone. It aims at full employment, and economic and social progress.
- Put the emphasis on investments for sustainable growth and employment.
- Promote social dialogue and collective bargaining at all levels.

ETUC demands are in line with those priorities:

- A major investment programme – a new “European Recovery Programme” – amounting to one to two per cent of European GDP is indispensable to restore sustainable growth and tackle unemployment.
- Wage setting is to remain a national matter and be dealt with according to national practices and industrial relations systems. Negotiations between social partners at the

relevant level are the best tool to secure good wages and working conditions. The statutory minimum wage in those countries where trade unions consider it necessary should be increased substantially; in any event all wage floors should respect Council of Europe standards on fair wages.

- The ETUC supports the introduction of a social minimum income in every Member State on the basis of common European principles.
- Implementation of youth employment initiatives, with particular reference to the youth guarantee, the European quality framework for internship and the alliance for apprenticeship. Means should be mobilised to this end. Restructuring processes leading to massive unemployment must be tackled through anticipation of change.
- Country specific recommendations must promote the European social model. They must not challenge or undercut existing national social standards. The ETUC will engage in discussions on the general criteria and principles set up for country specific evaluations and their consequences. At national level Country Specific Recommendations must be negotiated with social partners. The ETUC will support its affiliates in this process.
- Industrial democracy is an integral part of democratic rights. The Commission must explicitly require Governments and/or social partners to report on social developments, social dialogue and industrial relations. EU social partners and European institutions should follow if and how social dialogue and industrial relations are respected and promoted at national level. Adequate tools should be available to this end.
- Social partners must be included and fully involved on an equal footing in the debate about the design of new instruments, such as automatic stabilisers that mitigate the social effects of asymmetric shocks.
- Growth and the fight against unemployment must be the EU priority. As an immediate step, austerity measures must be stopped; and the fiscal flexibility allowed for in times of economic downturn must be fully used.
- Trade imbalances between countries need to be reduced, in countries with trade deficits as well as in countries with trade surpluses, using increasing demand and imports in surplus countries.
- Contractual arrangements, such as existing Memorandums of Understanding, have been put in place undemocratically and have imposed the wrong policy mix. They infringe collective agreements, industrial relations and social dialogue. The ETUC is opposed to

any contractual arrangement of this kind.

- The ETUC recognises the need for policies leading to sound accounts. If certain requirements are met, e.g. full involvement of social partners at national and EU level at all stages of the process and monitoring of the impact on labour standards and social protection, ex-ante evaluation and coordination of national reforms could be positive.
- The economic governance process must include the setting and respect of structural social indicators as well as benchmarking of active labour market policies. The ETUC should be involved in this process.
- Legally binding measures must be taken to stop downward competition on wages and working conditions. Equal treatment must be the rule for all workers. The ETUC reiterates its demand for a Social Progress Protocol to be appended to the Treaties with the aim of securing respect of fundamental social rights.
- Tax competition, tax evasion or avoidance tax fraud have shown their devastating impact and must be stopped. ETUC demands a strong and binding action plan to tackle this. The corporate tax base and minimum rates of taxation for companies should be harmonised, possibly with the introduction of a minimum rate of 25%, the current average level of imposition in Europe.

[11](#) Values of democracy and equality (Art. 2 TEU)

Objectives of social progress, social justice and protection (Art. 3 TEU)

The recognition of the rights, freedoms and principles as set out in the Charter of Fundamental Rights (Art. 6 TEU)

Promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion, and a high level of education, training and protection of human health (Art. 9 TFEU)

The promotion of employment, improved living and working conditions, so as to make possible their harmonization while the improvement is being maintained (Art. 151 TFEU)

The European legislator does not have competence on pay (Art. 153 TFEU)

Promoting the role of social partners, taking into account the diversity of national systems, respecting their autonomy (Art. 152 TFEU)

The European social partners have to be consulted on all matters that concern them (Art. 154 TFEU)

ILO Conventions, the European Convention of Human Rights and the (revised) European

Social Charter

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) exists to speak with a single voice, on behalf of the common interests of workers, at European level. Founded in 1973, it now represents 85 trade union organisations in 36 European countries, plus 10 industry-based federations. The ETUC is also on [Facebook](#), [Twitter](#), [YouTube](#) and [Flickr](#).

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