



European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)
Confédération européenne des syndicats (CES)

Brussels, 20 October 2011
BS/lw

To the EU Heads of State and Government
To Mr José-Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission
To Mr Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council

[Letter sent by e-mail]

Dear Heads of State and Government,
Dear Presidents,

Europe's response to the financial and economic crisis is back on the agenda of the 23 October meeting of the European Council. Banks bail outs are once again the order of the day – the necessary regulation of financial market is still missing. Markets and not democratic processes are in the lead.

The ETUC has declared its support for EU initiatives to overcome the crisis as it spreads to the real economy, and we continue to do so.

However we are greatly concerned at the recent attacks of the ECB, the IMF and / or the Commission on free collective bargaining and trade union rights. These attacks undermine or even contradict fundamental social rights that are the basis of our constitutional settlement. This, coming at a time when we celebrate the 50th anniversary of the European Social Charter, makes it additionally shocking.

The Troika for instance is urging Greece to suspend all national collective agreements. In Italy and Spain there are calls for a decentralisation of collective bargaining. We are also deeply worried about developments in Hungary, Romania, Slovakia, the Baltic countries and the Czech Republic, where we are seeing massive cuts in labour and union rights.

The ETUC fought long and hard for the inclusion of the Charter of fundamental rights in the Lisbon Treaty. Challenging fundamental rights, especially in times of crisis, is unacceptable. Exploiting the crisis to weaken workers and trade union rights will trigger social unrest.

The financial sector is at the origin of the crisis. Citizens are paying for it. They are the ones creating growth and pay taxes. They are the ones rescuing the euro and the banks. Instead of recognising the value of their efforts, their rights are under attack.

Workers expect European leaders and institutions to act for more democracy to support and not undermine social Europe, trade union and labour rights, including collective bargaining.

The only way for Europe to overcome the crisis lies with all sides working together with the backing of the whole population and especially workers.

The ETUC Executive Committee is bringing to your urgent attention the declaration adopted on 19 October in this respect (attached).

I would request you to put the defense of fundamental social rights on the European Council and Commission agenda and to stop measures encroaching on free collective bargaining and the autonomy of social partners.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'B. Ségol', with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Bernadette Ségol
General Secretary