

# [ ETUC newsletter ]



## Contents

- 2 ETUC in action
- 3 Trade Union Agenda
- 4 Interview with Veronica Nilsson, Confederal Secretary of the ETUC
- 6 Focus on the EU and trade union positions
- 7 EU Agenda

## Figure of the month

# 115 millions people in Europe were at risk of poverty or social exclusion

In 2010, 115 million Europeans – around 23% of the population – were at risk of poverty or social exclusion.

(Source: Eurostat)

## Note

**ENOUGH  
IS ENOUGH!  
TROP C'EST TROP !**



Dear Readers,



On 29 February, ahead of the European Summit on 1 and 2 March, the European Trade Union Confederation called for a European day of action to say that 'enough is enough', and that alternatives to austerity do exist. Some 30 countries heeded the call. European workers gave voice to their disagreement in the face of an austerity programme which is exacerbating social unrest and threatening the future.

The European trade union is sounding the alarm about the gravity of the social situation in Europe. According to the latest Eurostat estimates, 24,325 million men and women are unemployed. 115 million citizens – that is one person in four – are under threat of poverty and social exclusion. Inequalities are becoming more entrenched and the feeling of injustice is growing.

Austerity is not working. Greece is the stark proof. We need to take measures to support sustainable growth, through investments that create jobs.

We deplore the fact that the crisis is also being used as a pretext for cutting wages, weakening social protection, undermining the social dialogue and collective bargaining, making the labour market more flexible and attacking trade union rights. We roundly condemn any ideological posturing, such as that by the governor of the European Central Bank, who recently announced that the European social model was dead in the water. Comments like this are unacceptable. Our need for a social model has never been greater.

With the European Council in early March, Europe's leaders are set to institutionalise austerity and sanctions for those countries failing to abide by budgetary orthodoxy. We oppose this approach. Youth employment is an absolute priority and must be part of a wider employment strategy. The focus must be on the development of new sectors based on a European industrial strategy, on tools for solidarity such as a tax on financial transactions and euro-bonds as well as fairer taxation.

That is the message behind our mobilisation on 29 February, which we reiterated at the Tripartite Social Summit.

A change of direction is urgent.

**Bernadette Ségol,**  
General Secretary



**European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)**

Boulevard du Roi Albert II, 5 | B-1210 Bruxelles (Belgique)

Téléphone: +32 (0)2 224 04 11 | Fax: +32 (0)2 224 04 54

E-mail: [media@etuc.org](mailto:media@etuc.org) | [www.etuc.org](http://www.etuc.org)



## [ETUC in action]

### European Trade Union Day of Action: 27 countries in action for employment and social justice

29/02/12 – On the eve of the European Summit of 1 and 2 March, dominated by the themes of austerity and budgetary discipline, the ETUC sent a clear message to the EU leaders: **this imposed austerity is going to plunge Europe into a recession!** On 29 February, ETUC members mobilised to denounce and condemn this type of governance and to propose alternatives for employment and social justice. Demonstrations, rallies, work stoppages and information campaigns took place in the EU 27 countries and beyond. *“Enough is enough. In mobilising on the same day everywhere in Europe for the first time, the European trade unions are reacting with the same level of anger and exasperation in the face of injustice! We want to say it loud and clear, on the eve of an important European summit, that there are alternatives to this Europe without solidarity and without prospects”* said Bernadette Ségol, ETUC General Secretary.

ETUC press release:

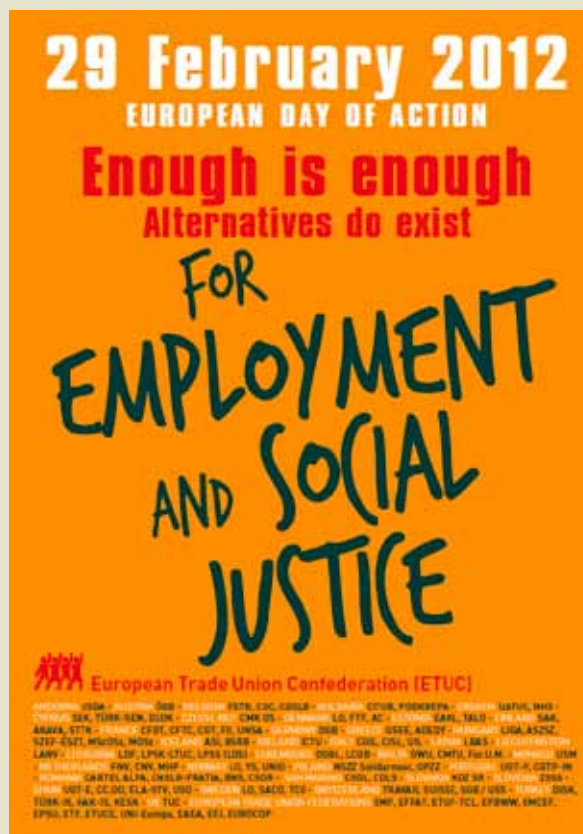
<http://www.etuc.org/a/9723>

Pictures of the Day of Action:

<http://www.flickr.com/photos/etuc-ces/>

Videos of the Day of Action:

<http://www.youtube.com/user/etucces>



### Urgent meeting of ETUC General Secretary with GSEE President Panagopoulos

14/02/12 – In the light of the recent critical developments in the country, Bernadette Ségol went to Greece to meet urgently with Greek General Confederation of Labour (GSEE) President Yannis Panagopoulos. Mr Panagopoulos gave her an update on the new austerity package imposed on Greece under relentless pressure and intimidation by the Troika. **The ETUC General Secretary deplored the new unacceptable austerity package that**

**dismantles labour institutions and uproots the entire collective bargaining framework** depriving workers of minimum protections. She confirmed the **ETUC's continued solidarity** for GSEE in all its actions to defend workers rights and income against the devastation being imposed on Greek families.

ETUC press release: <http://www.etuc.org/a/9659>



# [ ETUC in action ]

## MAJOR MEETINGS

### Greece: The ETUC supports the general strike against tighter austerity measures

07/02/12 - The ETUC Steering Committee expressed its **support for the general strike held on 7 February** under the leadership of the GSEE and ADEDY, the two Greek trade union organisations affiliated to the ETUC. The strike was called in response to the **new budget austerity measures demanded by the European Union and the International Monetary Fund**. For Bernadette Ségol “Greek workers and citizens have been pushed to the limit of what is acceptable in terms of restrictions. Successive austerity plans have plunged the country ever deeper into crisis. The new measures being considered are simply not defensible: reduction in the minimum wage, cuts in supplementary pensions and immediate job cuts in the public service. Workers cannot take any more.”

ETUC press release: <http://www.etuc.org/a/9625>



# [ Trade Union Agenda ] February – March 2012

07/02/2012	ETUC Steering Committee (Brussels)	
22/02/2012	Meeting of the Group II ‘Workers’ of the European Economic and Social Committee (Brussels)	
29/02/2012	European Day of Action (Europe)	<a href="#">More information</a>
05/03/2012	Executive Committee of the Pan-European Regional Council (PERC) (Brussels)	
06/03/2012	ETUC Steering Committee (Brussels)	
06–07/03/2012	ETUC Executive Committee (Brussels)	
24/03/2012	CGSLB Congress (Brussels)	<a href="#">More information</a>
28/03/2012	Meeting of the Group II ‘Workers’ of the European Economic and Social Committee (Brussels)	





## [Interview]

### Interview with Veronica Nilsson, Confederal Secretary of the ETUC, notably responsible for legal matters

*What are the major legal changes which flow from the “Treaty on stability, coordination and governance in the economic and monetary union”?*

**Veronica Nilsson (VN):** The main problematic aspect is the democratic deficit which has characterized the whole negotiation process. Despite the aim of incorporating this new treaty into the existing ones, EU member states have negotiated it without calling for a Convention which is the normal procedure for an EU treaty change. The Convention means that Member States must involve the European Parliament as well as national parliaments in the negotiations, with a clear and transparent democratic system of control. In this case, on the contrary, Member States have rushed it through, without giving a proper role and status to the parliaments. The European Parliament was just invited as an observer, which is not enough to ensure democratic accountability. It resulted in a treaty which has been agreed by 25 EU Member States out of 27.

From the outset, the ETUC has criticised the undemocratic negotiation process and we demand that all further changes follow the Community method. Another key issue is the role given to the European Court of Justice (ECJ). In fact, according to this new treaty, a member state that considers that another member state is infringing the new rules can bring it before the ECJ, which may lead to financial sanctions in case of non-compliance. This process can be launched on the basis of a previous assessment from the European Commission. Normally, the European institutions cannot be invoked in an agreement which is between a limited number of member states. Although they have found a technical solution for dealing with this problem, by adding a reference to the EU Treaties, in my view, the spirit behind the treaties has not been respected.

*Why is it called an “international treaty”?*

**VN :** It is true that one of the previous versions of the new treaty was called “international treaty”. Now they have changed the title to “treaty on stability,



coordination and governance in the economic and monetary union”. The word “international” was quite strange in a context of negotiations between EU Member States. Perhaps the negotiators were not sure about how many member states that would take part and opted for this title.



---

## Interview with Veronica Nilsson (following)

---

***Do you believe that the European Union really needs this treaty? Why is the ETUC opposed to it?***

**VN :** The European Trade Union Confederation does not think that the European Union needs this treaty. We oppose it. The first problem is the process and the democratic deficit. Secondly, it is the wrong response to the crisis. The proposals made in this treaty cannot solve the crisis. In terms of content, the treaty does not provide any solutions, just more austerity, more sanctions, and more budgetary discipline. The rules defined by this treaty will push the European Union further into recession. In fact, according to the treaty, national budgets should be balanced or in surplus and structural deficits should be limited to 0.5% of GDP. The treaty forces governments to incorporate these rules into their national legislation. This means that governments will have limited possibilities for taking action in a recession. In a crisis like today's, how can they increase public spending in order to stimulate the economy? They



will not have any room for manoeuvre! These rules will deepen the crisis, not fight it! Another problem relates to the new role given to the ECJ. In case of breaches of the fiscal compact, the ECJ will be able to judge member states and force them to pay sanctions if they do not follow the rules on budget deficits. This is simply not the best solution for helping a country to get out of the crisis. In times of crisis, we need to stimulate the economies, not the reverse.

***Was the European trade union movement involved in the negotiation of the treaty?***

**VN :** Not at all! The European Parliament was just an observer and the social partners were not involved or consulted. The ETUC Steering Committee adopted a declaration on 25 January 2012 opposing the treaty.

***What are the alternatives proposed by the European trade unions? Is the debate on the social progress clause still a topical issue?***

**VN :** The ETUC wants a different European economic governance, with a strong social dimension. We believe that the mandate of the European Central Bank (ECB) must change. The ECB should become the "lender of last resort" in the same way as central banks work at national level. We have proposed Eurobonds, because they could be a way to mutualise the debt, a key aspect which could help to solve situations like the current one in Greece. We need an investment programme for Europe to stimulate the economy, focusing on sustainable and quality jobs. At the same time, we demand the introduction of a Financial Transaction Tax (FTT) in order to make the financial sector contribute to the solutions to get us out of the crisis. It was the financial markets that triggered the sovereign debt crisis in the first place. Last but not least, Europe must accompany those measures by combatting tax evasion, tax fraud and tax havens.

The issue of the social progress protocol (SPP) is crucial. It would ensure that fundamental rights are fully respected within the European Union. According to this clause, in case of a conflict between fundamental rights and economic freedoms, fundamental rights would take precedence. It has been the ETUC's position that the next change of the EU treaties would be an opportunity to demand the introduction of this protocol. However, this new treaty has excluded any possibility of having social concerns – like the SPP – taken on board. But of course we will continue to demand it and we will not give up.



# [Focus on the EU and trade union positions]

## White Paper on Pensions: a disappointing and inadequate response

15/02/12 – The European Commission published its [White Paper on Pensions](#). For the ETUC, **the proposals in the White Paper do not meet the challenge of having pension systems that meet the expectations**. By underlining in particular the growing weight of expenditure for pensions, the two responses contained in the White Paper are the increase in pensionable age in public pension systems and the development of private pensions. **The ETUC deplores that nothing is said about how to strengthen public pension systems which, based on inter- and intra-generational solidarity, are the ones most capable of guaranteeing the income of pensioners.** “*The strengthening of public pension systems entails an increase of their resources, that is to say giving priority to investments to promote growth and developing quality employment*” said Claudia Menne, ETUC Confederal Secretary.

ETUC press release: <http://www.etuc.org/a/9670>

## Council of Europe upholds the right to strike

08/02/12 – In 2009, the ETUC, together with its three Belgian affiliates (CSC, FGTB and CGSLB), complained to the European Committee of Social Rights of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg **against the practice of judicial intervention into the exercise of the right to strike**. In its [decision](#), the Council of Europe agreed with the trade union movement stating that Belgian law does not respect the Revised Social Charter. **The ETUC urges the European Committee of Social Rights to ensure that the effective exercise of the right to strike is even better protected in the future.**

ETUC press release: <http://www.etuc.org/a/9635>

## Greece: bailout with drastic conditions for the population

21/02/12 – The € 237 billion rescue plan for Greece does admittedly save the country from defaulting on its payment, **but it does nothing to resolve definitively and positively the plight of citizens and workers**. The ETUC regrets that **this aid has been granted at the price of an unbearable burden on the Greek population**. “*There can be no solution in the absence of solidarity. For the European trade union movement, such solidarity requires determined action, direct or indirect, by the European Central Bank, and the creation of Euro-bonds*”, said Bernadette Ségol.

ETUC press release:  
<http://www.etuc.org/a/9712>



## International news

- (23/02/12) Support independent unions of Belarus:  
<http://www.etuc.org/a/9721>
- (22/02/12) ETUC expresses alarm at attacks against the General Labour Union of Tunisia (UGTT):  
<http://www.etuc.org/a/9715>
- (21/02/12) Burma: the time is not yet ripe for total revision of EU sanctions policy:  
<http://www.etuc.org/a/9706>





## [EU Agenda] February – March 2012

01-02/02/2012	Mini-Plenary Session of the European Parliament (Brussels)	
10/02/2012	Education Council (Brussels)	<a href="#">More information</a>
13-16/02/2012	Plenary Session of the European Parliament (Strasbourg)	
14/02/2012	Energy Council (Brussels)	<a href="#">More information</a>
17/02/2012	Employment and Social Affairs Council (Brussels)	<a href="#">More information</a>
20/02/2012	Eurogroup meeting (Brussels)	
20-21/02/2012	Competitiveness Council (Brussels)	<a href="#">More information</a>
21/02/2012	ECOFIN Council (Brussels)	<a href="#">More information</a>
22-23/02/2012	Plenary Session of the European Economic and Social Committee (Brussels)	
27/02/2012	Foreign Affairs Council (Brussels)	<a href="#">More information</a>
28/02/2012	General Affairs Council (Brussels)	<a href="#">More information</a>
01/03/2012	Tripartite Social Summit (Brussels)	<a href="#">More information</a>
01-02/03/2012	European Council (Brussels)	<a href="#">More information</a>
08-09/03/2012	Justice and Home Affairs Council (Brussels)	<a href="#">More information</a>
09/03/2012	Environment Council (Brussels)	<a href="#">More information</a>
10/03/2012	Informal meeting of Ministers for Foreign Affairs (Copenhagen)	<a href="#">More information</a>
12/03/2012	Eurogroup meeting (Brussels)	
12-15/03/2012	Plenary Session of the European Parliament (Strasbourg)	
13/03/2012	ECOFIN Council (Brussels)	<a href="#">More information</a>
16/03/2012	Foreign Affairs Council (Trade) (Brussels)	<a href="#">More information</a>
22-23/03/2012	Transport, Telecommunications and Energy Council (Brussels)	<a href="#">More information</a>
23/03/2012	Foreign Affairs Council (Brussels)	<a href="#">More information</a>
26/03/2012	General Affairs Council (Brussels)	<a href="#">More information</a>
28-29/03/2012	Mini-Plenary Session of the European Parliament (Brussels)	
28-29/03/2012	Plenary Session of the European Economic and Social Committee (Brussels)	
30-31/03/2012	Informal meeting of Ministers for Economic and Financial Affairs (Copenhagen)	<a href="#">More information</a>

**Editorial team:** MANAGING EDITOR: **Bernadette Ségol** • EDITOR-IN-CHIEF: **Patricia Grillo** • EDITOR: **Daniele Melli**

**Please pass this newsletter on to your colleagues and contacts**