



Ensuring security: New impulse for peace needed

Adopted at the Executive Committee meeting of 24-25 June 2024

In line with its Constitution and with its Charter of Values, the ETUC recalls that peace is a precondition for the full exercise of human rights and stable democracy and that there is no peace and security without social justice.

Peace has always been at the centre of the European project. The Schuman Declaration begins with: "*World peace cannot be safeguarded without the making of creative efforts proportionate to the dangers which threaten it. [...] The contribution which an organized and living Europe can bring to civilization is indispensable to the maintenance of peaceful relations*". The importance of the European Union project and its success in ensuring peace in the last decades in Europe cannot be overstated.

The ETUC is gravely concerned with the increasing number of wars and violent conflicts in Europe and the world. The issue of ensuring security in a context of rising threats and challenges is increasingly at the centre of the discussions of the European Union and national institutions.

In March 2024, the European Council Conclusions focused strongly on security and defence. They included – amongst others – the commitments to "*substantially increase defence expenditure, and invest better and faster together*", to promote joint procurement and defence investments, to support European defence industry and increase its resilience, including through better access to finance, further integration, addressing bottlenecks in supply chains, investing in skilled labour. Also, Commission President von der Leyen asked former Finnish President Sauli Niinistö to prepare a report on how to enhance Europe's civilian and defence preparedness and readiness.

The European institutions have opened a reflection on security and defence, mostly in response to armed conflicts at its doorstep, challenges to the multilateral system and new geopolitics. Trade unions need to engage with these developments with a strong call for our trade union approach to security.

Ensuring security: New impulse for peace needed – Trade union demands

The ETUC calls for an expanded concept of security that does not focus exclusively on military threat scenarios, but also takes into account threats to information, communication, supply, transport and trade networks, the security of raw materials and energy supplies, cybersecurity, misinformation, scapegoating of minorities, as well as the effects of climate change and global pandemics.

Resources for initiatives on defence or security must not come from a reduction of resources for social objectives. EU funding for social objectives, including social dialogue, social cohesion and just transition, and for industrial policy must be significantly increased and not undermined. Strong social conditionalities must apply to funding for the defence sector as for any other sector in receipt of public funds.



It is urgent to take action at European level to ensure quality jobs and social progress, as well as the improvement of living and working conditions. More security means also developing a fairer and more equal society, with good living and working conditions, and the necessary investments in high-quality public services and quality jobs. Also, effective European industrial policy and open strategic autonomy policy are essential. These aspects are of paramount importance to ensure resilience and crisis preparedness. They are also key foundations to allow the EU to fully play its role in the world as a force for peace, social justice, equality and full respect for human rights, including trade union rights. In this regard, the European trade union movement asks the EU to use its trade and commercial leverage to promote the highest labour and social standards in third countries.

The ETUC urges EU institutions to prioritise peace. This requires:

- the EU security policy to be enshrined in a broader and coherent European foreign policy. Such foreign policy should be based on the EU values and take stock of the great influence and leverage the EU, as a whole, can play at international level;
- the security policy to prioritise the use of the wide range of diplomatic, trade and conflict resolution tools to promote peace and the full respect of human rights, including workers and trade union rights;
- the EU to play a significantly more prominent role in peace building as part of the European External Relations Services' mission and strengthen the EU development cooperation policy with the SDGs at its center, including the SDG16 on peace, justice and strong institutions;
- a reinforcement of the EU's role in actively supporting the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery and in reinvigorating the arms control architecture in Europe and at international level. All nuclear-weapon states must establish a firm 'no first use' policy;
- a strict control of EU exports of dual-use goods and prohibit autonomous weapons command and control systems and ensure the human-in-control principle;
- Member States and the EU to fully involve trade unions and social partners in peace processes and conferences; women's participation and gender perspectives in peace processes are extremely important as well, also on the basis of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security;
- guarantees that any EU initiatives on defence or security do not come at the expense of social progress, human rights, workers' rights and working conditions, and that trade unions are involved through social dialogue and collective bargaining
- actions to ensure better employment and working conditions in the defence and security sectors;
- a stronger and effective support to the Rule of Law, including free and diverse media, and tackling disinformation, malevolent intervention in democratic processes and the politics of hatred which run counter to peaceful coexistence;
- the right to quality and inclusive education with stronger support to public education services.

The ETUC also underlines the importance of working towards a **new approach for security in Europe**, including on the basis of the concept of common security (see for example the [2022 report Common Security: For Our Shared Future](#) - ITUC and others). The objective is to work to create a long-lasting peace based on social justice that reflects the necessary values of human security and human rights, multilateralism, and cooperation. Together we can ensure the security of Europe and prepare in the long-term for a peaceful and just Europe.

The ETUC reiterates its strong condemnation of the Russian war against Ukraine. Trade unions call for the withdrawal of Russian troops, reject war and are committed to



restoring dialogue, cooperation between States and the social consensus essential for lasting peace. The ETUC calls on the EU and governments to partake in an international peace conference for the resolution of the war of aggression on Ukraine and a post-war international peace conference for the prosecution of the war-crimes. The ETUC also supports the Environmental Compact for Ukraine.

The ETUC reaffirms the importance of international and regional bodies in ensuring peaceful relations between states. Beyond the EU, the ETUC is convinced of the value of the Council of Europe in bridging gaps between people and societies in the search for peace, in line with its original mandate. The United Nations has underlined the need for new responses to the overlapping crises we face and has outlined strategies forward with the **New Agenda for Peace**. The ETUC supports this process. We also call for the full respect by the EU and by national institutions for the international human rights and justice system, including the full respect for the rulings of the International Court of Justice and the International Criminal Court.

The ETUC supports a stronger geopolitical role of the EU in the world, in support of a rules-based multilateralism with the United Nations at the forefront and the ILO as global leader in social regulation. However, the debate on security cannot be reduced to one about expanding the defence industry without tackling the root causes of instability, insecurity, inequality and injustice. As the ILO's Philadelphia Declaration, marking its 80th anniversary makes clear, "*lasting peace can be established only if it is based on social justice*", which strongly implies that a lack of social justice is a threat to security.

Instances of violations of human rights and crackdown on trade unions are increasing in several countries, including in Europe. The European Union must step up its initiatives to guarantee the full respect of human rights, including the right to organise and the freedom of association and assembly, freedom of expression and media freedom. In its external relations, the EU must be consistent with this approach and address said violations with equal determination, by deploying all the policy tools at its disposal. Trade, association and cooperation agreements of the EU with third countries must include enforceable provisions on the rule of law and human rights, including ILO fundamental conventions.