

Declaration of the ETUC and PERC General Secretary ahead of the 5th European Eastern Partnership Summit

The European Trade Union Confederation values the Eastern cooperation process and contributes to it by taking part in established bilateral and multilateral platforms and joint work with its Eastern trade union partners via the Pan-European Regional Council of the International Trade Union Confederation.

As the 5th Eastern Partnership (EaP) summit will take place in Brussels on 24 November 2017, Heads of state or government from the EU member states and the six Eastern partner countries will look forward to strengthening cooperation in the four priority areas: stronger economy, stronger governance, stronger connectivity, and stronger society. This action plan requires public investment in the EU and the countries of the Eastern Partnership to make it work.

We strongly support facilitation of economic development and promotion of job creation, good governance, contacts between people, the fight against corruption, climate commitments, economic and trade cooperation, gender and youth empowerment and employability, strengthening public administration capacities and education, conflict resolution and resilience in the Eastern neighbourhood. These priority cooperation areas are generally well covered by the twenty deliverables developed to benchmark progress to be achieved by 2020.

Regretfully, other European principles and achievements are not among priorities in the Eastern Partnership context, and sustainable development goals are not referred to in the text as guiding frameworks. While the economic and trade cooperation would contribute to employment creation, the deliverables say little about the quality of jobs and decent work agenda promotion in the countries or reduction of poverty and the need for social protection. The Eastern Partners have a very poor record of workers' rights implementation in law and practice as the ITUC annual index shows, with Belarus and Ukraine being in the worst category of "no rights guaranteed", while attacks on trade union rights are widespread. This has to be addressed.

Gender equality and non-discrimination is a cross-cutting priority; however, the plan does not address gender pay gaps in the countries or growing income inequalities.

Development of technologies and its effects on labour markets, and creation of digital jobs, can prevent brain drain, but they also bring the risk of stimulating unregulated and "no-workers'-rights" sectors. The deliverables include eHealth, eLogistics, eTrade, eCommerce, but don't address employment-related Acquis, and in particular the Framework agreement on teleworking. Nothing is said about data protection, which is an imperative for citizens.

Climate change targets' deliverables include creation of green jobs and the necessity to develop national and sectoral adaptation plans, but no specific benchmarks or support are set up for fossil fuel and energy sectors, which require Just Transition strategies, vocational and education training opportunities for workers and related regional development.

Investment in young people's skills and employability that includes a better match of the VET systems and labour market needs is an important deliverable. Yet, without sound employment policies and creation of decent work opportunities, young people from the Eastern Partners will continue to face the choice between unemployment, precarious and informal economy engagement or emigration, regardless of their skills.

The Eastern Partnership countries are committed to fighting corruption, tax avoidance and other fraud. This requires dedicated, highly qualified and motivated staff and other resources. More and quicker progress can be made. People are fed up with double standards and abuse of power.

Public administration reforms that result in providing high quality public services for the people in the Eastern Partnership countries are welcome. They require the active involvement of the workers and their unions concerned, and investments in capacities and qualified staff.

We support that public administrations improve people's rights to good administration, access to information and administrative justice. Strong institutions that are "responsive, inclusive, participatory and ensure representative decision-making at all levels" are a key element in building our societies.

Although the role of civil dialogue and the role of civil society organisations as necessary for the success of the reforms is recognised, the deliverables totally ignore the role of social dialogue and social partners in balancing economic and social development and building inclusive, sustainable and democratic policies and governance. Tripartite social dialogue and collective bargaining with autonomy of the social partners are crucial for the success of the reforms. This core value of the European Union seems to be sacrificed in the process.

We call on all the partners involved to promote genuine social dialogue as a necessary tool to achieve the Eastern Partnership mission to build a common area of shared democracy, prosperity, stability and increased cooperation.