

Document on the role of the ETUC for the next mandate 2015-2019

Adopted at the ETUC 13th Congress on 2 October 2015

Foreword

This paper is meant to set priorities and proposals for action, in order to renew and strengthen the role of the ETUC. It will be discussed in the last panel of the Congress on 'the ETUC of the future'. At the end of the panel, the document will be submitted to the Congress for endorsement.

On the basis of this document, a concrete action plan will be discussed and adopted by the Executive Committee after the Congress. The Executive Committee will also adopt any necessary resolutions linked to it. A Spring School, to be organised in 2016, will discuss further actions for implementation, and in particular the need for possible changes to the ETUC Constitution and/or for adoption of an internal Regulation for its enforcement.

The Executive Committee will decide to set up, if needed, a specific 'ad hoc' working group, to go through such possible changes and/or Regulation, and submit them to the Mid-Term Conference in view of the 2019 ETUC Congress.

The present paper concentrates on issues linked to the ETUC's role and possible challenges to it. Some political priorities already set in the ETUC Action Programme and Manifesto are briefly summarised, when they have an impact on the ETUC's role.

A renewed ETUC for a better Europe

During the current mandate, since the crisis, the ETUC has faced increasing difficulties in:

- a) Influencing EU and national policies, particularly in response to the challenge of deepening economic governance;
- b) Preserving and strengthening social dialogue, workers participation and industrial relations from austerity and neoliberal interventions; and
- c) Setting common internal priorities and actions, due to the growing divergence between different countries.

Key challenges for the next mandate are: how to improve the ETUC's role and outcomes, how to renew the European trade union movement, how to be more on the offensive, and how to deliver concrete results for workers.

Key priorities are to be selected, linked to workers' needs in the short and long term, and to European added value and available resources. To make ETUC action more effective and recognised, we have to consider our members' expectations, communicate that another Europe is possible and we can contribute to it. Instead of mainly reacting to institutional initiatives, vital though this work remains, the ETUC should set its own agenda of priorities and actions.

Three top priorities for a renewed ETUC

The Paris Congress Manifesto and Action Programme set the ETUC's priorities and commitments for the future. Among them, there are challenges, which require changes in the way the ETUC operates.

Economic recovery and ETUC influence on Economic Governance

Our first priority is economic recovery and quality job creation. The tragedy of unemployment and poverty in Europe needs to be tackled through stronger public policy, and access to quality employment has to be a right for all. To vitalise the economy, an end to austerity and a significant change in current macroeconomic policy are needed. Investment, industrial policy, sustainable development, quality public services, education and training, innovation and research, stronger industrial relations, workplace democracy and a pay rise to support aggregate demand, are pillars of the ETUC strategy.

The ETUC has to strengthen its action and campaign for economic recovery and investment. We have to demand the significant and regular involvement of trade unions in concrete negotiation and monitoring of investment plans and macroeconomic policy. It has to be done in all countries and sectors, with strong coordination at European level.

In recent years, all relevant and mostly negative decisions influencing workers' lives have been taken in the framework of economic governance and austerity policies. The ETUC wants this to change, and it has to influence the process, find room for negotiation, and make its voice louder and heard.

Proper trade union involvement in the Semester process has to be ensured, structural reforms must be negotiated and, if necessary, opposed. Success needs stronger coordination! New internal voluntary methods for cooperation and information exchange should be explored, as for instance the recently established Toolkit for Collective Bargaining Coordination in the Framework of the Economic Governance. The ETUC should support its affiliates, when requested, in addressing tripartite dialogue at national level.

Industrial relations and social dialogue

Social dialogue, industrial relations, and workers' participation have been undermined, and it is our responsibility to revive them, putting working people first. A pay rise through strong collective bargaining institutions and coverage, higher statutory minimum wages where they exist, better working conditions for all: to achieve such objectives a strong European strategy to restore industrial relations is needed, if we want to preserve and increase trade union power for the future.

We have to explore new ways to strengthen the role of the European social dialogue, and explore strengthened coordination practices for collective bargaining and wages, by setting common goals and standards. Equally we have to put in place flexible actions, in order to match different national and sectoral needs and preserve and spread national best practices and traditions.

Trade union presence and action in multinational companies and their supply chains should be reinforced, in particular through transnational negotiations, to be handled by the ETUFs together with national trade unions, in the framework of ETUC coordination. The role of EWCs has to be recognised and strengthened, while better integrating them within trade union life.

We have to explore possible European frameworks¹ and targeted initiatives to support more democratic and fairer industrial relations and effective social dialogue. In particular, we need to launch a more in-depth internal discussion, also taking into consideration the participation of ETUC affiliates, to find ways to overcome the enormous difficulties European social dialogue is currently facing, as well as to tackle the obstacles trade unions meet in developing a social dialogue able to deliver results at national and sectoral level. Stronger involvement of the sectoral trade union organisations is needed.

The European social model and workers' rights

All elements linked to labour market and employment, social protection, equal working conditions, workers' and trade unions' rights, labour law and regulation, gender equality, non-discrimination, fair mobility and migration, quality public services and education and training, health and safety, etc, are part of the European social model. This model takes different forms according to national contexts, but in general it has been weakened in most countries by structural reforms, cuts, privatisation and deregulation processes led by a neoliberal ideology (especially when they have not been negotiated with trade unions), instead of being considered as an added value for competitiveness.

Through its Social Compact and Social Progress Protocol, the ETUC has launched comprehensive initiatives to strengthen and revive the European social model, on the principle that fundamental social rights must never be undermined by economic freedoms and that social progress should be pursued in all countries. Combating social dumping, poverty and social exclusion, strengthening workers' rights and social progress and cohesion, are fundamental ETUC goals.

To achieve these objectives, we have to consider the transnational and cross-border dimension of social rights. Structural reforms and deregulatory interventions have to be tackled through enhanced trade union cooperation at all levels; social standards set at European level should be considered; and the ETUC should launch specific initiatives in this field, in cooperation with its affiliates. Particular attention should be paid to emerging initiatives such as Better Regulation, REFIT, and on-going negotiations on TTIP.

How to enhance ETUC role and functioning

To tackle such challenges we need a stronger and renewed ETUC, able to deliver added value for all its member organisations. This should be pursued on the basis of a strengthened mutual commitment between the ETUC and its affiliates. Our internal unity should be based on stronger cooperation, coordination and solidarity.

We need to reach more progressive compromises between ourselves, instead of sticking to the lowest common denominator. This means adopting flexible strategies and proposals, according to and in full respect of the different situations in the various countries and the different needs of our affiliates. Specific and strengthened cooperation between trade unions from countries sharing common problems should be discussed, as should further cooperation at sector level across borders, without affecting the interests and traditions of others and the unity of the ETUC.

This applies to the Eurozone, where we should consider forms of strengthened cooperation, to be shared with the other parts of Europe, where economic

¹ *Internal discussion on the nature of such frameworks (legal, optional, voluntary, etc.) to support and foster collective bargaining, minimum wages, social dialogue, is still open, and should be further developed during and after the Congress.*

governance and/or monetary policy have an impact, for example on the labour market.

We need broad alliances to strengthen our action, with relevant actors that can share our policy. The balance between the power and influence of EU institutions and national governments fluctuates and currently the initiative appears to be with the latter. At the same time the Better Regulation Package aims at changing this balance by influencing EU law-making procedures and the role of the social partners. We therefore need to consider how we develop our European Trade Union power to influence these developments. Affiliates have a range of party affiliations, and none, giving the ETUC a unique independence. But that independence should not mean non-engagement with politicians across the acceptable political spectrum. It means that the ETUC can be in a position to help lay the foundations for a new political consensus that advances working people's interests.

ETUC should strengthen its impact on the European Commission, the Presidency and in particular the European Parliament –last but not least through the trade union intergroup– in order to gain back the necessary influence for the European trade union movement. A member of the ETUC Secretariat will be in charge of relations with the European Parliament, European Commission and European Council.

Cooperation with the EESC, notably the Workers Group, should be fostered, in order to get mutual advantage on core issues of common interest and reinforce the respective lobbying activities on EU institutions. This objective can be met through periodical meetings and joint actions. A member of the ETUC Secretariat will be in charge of it.

The ETUC should take action to support trade unions in countries affected by Troika interventions, and special attention should be given to Central and Eastern Europe and the Baltic States, as well as the Balkans and EU enlargement areas, to boost improvements in wages, social protection and working conditions. Solidarity and the exchange of best practices between countries are fundamental.

The same applies to youth, sectors particularly affected by precarious and atypical jobs, gender equality, and specific categories of workers, which should be better targeted by ETUC action. Furthermore, the ETUC should consider new and emerging priorities, such as new areas of EU policy like the digital economy, Energy Union, sustainable and innovative industrial policy or tax coordination (with particular reference to actions aimed at ensuring tax justice/redistribution and countering tax dumping/evasion). This requires in-depth discussion between the ETUC and its national and sectoral affiliates.

Pensioners and elderly people in Europe are over 90 million, and demographic change and consequent sustainability of pension and health care systems, as well as pensioners' rights, purchasing power and role in the European society, are of increasing importance. Intergenerational solidarity and active ageing becomes every day more relevant. The ETUC should therefore strengthen its strategy in this respect, and further discuss the role of FERPA in the ETUC.

All affiliates must be involved in ETUC policies and actions: big and small trade unions, all sectoral federations, and also trade union networks and institutes. The ETUC has to give its support to national and sectoral initiatives, when its affiliates seek it, and the ETUC secretariat should be alongside national and sectoral trade unions in actions on the ground, when needed and possible. Reinforced internal coordination between the ETUC and the European Trade Union Federations should be pursued.

Cooperation should be strengthened with trade unions from neighbourhood countries, which share similar problems with European and EU countries. The role of the ETUC in the PERC has to be enhanced, as the political and active role of PERC, by moving from exchange of information and best practices to concrete actions, to be put in place in particular fields of common interest, for instance migration or dumping phenomena. The ETUC should improve its relationship with the ITUC, TUAC, ILO and other international institutions and networks in order to strengthen its international role.

Particular attention should be devoted to social dumping and exploitation linked to migration and mobility and the free movement of services, as well as to obstacles to free movement of workers, and specific trade union coordination and tools have to be considered to tackle them. Cross-border and transnational agreements between trade unions for membership and assistance to migrants and mobile workers should be encouraged and monitored by the ETUC.

Trade union growth and increased union density must become a political priority. A strong membership base is a prerequisite for a powerful and representative trade union movement. So we need to grow again in terms of membership, improve the coverage of our bargaining and thus make our demands carry more weight. The ETUC can be engaged in providing a platform for exchange and coordination of national organising and membership campaigns, and should support affiliates' requests and initiatives in this field and share best and innovative practice. Specific meetings and a working group on organising should be considered. The trade union movement has to become more attractive for all workers. Young, female, precarious, atypical, undeclared and migrant workers should be specifically targeted for better protection and unionisation actions, as well as new professions and highly skilled workers.

ETUC should reach workers, not only trade unionists, through more focused diverse and targeted communication and campaigns. Grassroots trade union members should be better informed about the ETUC and its actions, which is seldom the case now. The language barrier has to be considered and as much as possible reduced, but at the same time our messages should be sharper and more understandable. In the current digital and social media landscape, the ETUC have to make better use of the opportunities that this gives to reach out our members and potential members, especially young. The ETUC should include national and sectoral campaigns and actions in its communication strategy and website, and the same should be done by affiliates for ETUC messages and initiatives. The current functioning of the ETUC Communication working group, and/or the setting up of a specific task force on communication and campaigns, will be considered.

A renewed communication and mobilising strategy should consider a wide range of options and methods, but also address and reflect the diverse identity of different groups of trade union members. In this context, demonstrations can play an important and 'identity-building' role to keep the trade union movement together, but they have to be better focused and thoroughly rooted in the specific needs and initiatives of the affiliates, serving above all to support concrete negotiations and demands. ETUC support to national actions, as well as simultaneous demonstrations in a number of countries linked to European demands, are best practices to be reinforced.

The ETUC should reconsider the functioning of its statutory bodies, to make them more effective and better involve trade union leaders in ETUC life:

- a) The Executive Committee should be a strategic body. Discussions in the Executive Committee should mainly deal with top political priorities, leaving to permanent committees and working groups the task of delivering resolutions and positions on specific topics for endorsement by the Executive Committee,

after well prepared discussion. Trade union leaders will be encouraged to attend the meetings if the first day will be devoted to discussion on relevant political decisions.

b) This option obviously implies more commitment from the affiliates to ensure and mandate their representation in ETUC committees and working groups. Minutes of working groups' discussions and conclusions have to be delivered. The distribution of topics and the scope of committees and working groups should be revised according to the priorities set by the Congress.

c) The Steering Committee's role should be improved, by focusing on emerging political and internal topics, in order to properly prepare the meetings of the Executive Committee in advance and to involve trade union leaders in open discussions on particularly relevant and critical matters. Steering Committee meetings should be convened also to deal with extraordinary/urgent issues that arise between scheduled Executive Committee meetings.

d) External speakers can be invited to ETUC bodies, and particularly to Steering Committee's and permanent committees/working groups' meetings. Specific trade union seminar/schools can be convened for free and more in depth discussion on significant topics.

Gender equality and mainstreaming, as well as the adequate representation of women and youth, must be fostered within the ETUC, by introducing specific mechanisms to be proposed by the Women's and Youth Committees. Collective bargaining, internal training and organising are relevant fields to be considered, in order to address discrimination and insufficient representation of women and youth in the labour market and within the trade union movement.

We should also consider rebalancing our internal geographical representation. In particular, voting rights and voting procedures of the Executive Committee have proved not to be effective and really representative of affiliates' membership. They should be reassessed, according to the rules set by the ETUC constitution for representation in Congress and the existing different categories of contribution. This should be done in the view of possible revision of the ETUC Constitution and/or adoption of an internal Regulation for its enforcement.

The ETUC has to make full use of its means and networks, including improving the added value of the ETUI, which should autonomously contribute to trade union policy and priorities. The ETUC, with ETUI support, should promote national and European trade union training, particularly on Europe and European issues, in order to bring forward a new generation sharing a common vision of European trade unionism. Furthermore, specific training should be provided to increase mutual knowledge of national systems and contexts, in order to boosting exchange of practices.