

EPSU position on the EU's Western Balkans

Strategy: strengthen collective bargaining, build independent high quality public administrations and institutions and invest in public services



(16 May 2018) The Western Balkan strategy of the European Commission is a significant step in providing positive prospects for the workers and people of these countries agreed the EPSU Executive Committee 8-9 Mai 2018. Based on the experience of EPSU and the affiliated trade unions in the countries concerned, the European Union and the Western Balkan countries need to develop comprehensive strategies if the ambition is to establish closer links with the European Union. This should include the active participation of trade unions, recognising that they play a central and key role as acknowledged in the European Treaty and the EU Pillar of Social Rights. EPSU adopted policies which are key for successful reforms focused on social and economic development for people both in the Western Balkans and in the Eastern Partnership countries. This is the message of EPSU ahead of the Western Balkan Summit talking place 17 May. The European Commission and the

governments of the Western Balkans are to integrate the following in the Western Balkans Strategy:

- Workers' Rights need to be implemented and protected and collective bargaining developed ensuring that all workers are covered by negotiations, agreements and social dialogue. Respect for trade union rights and for collective bargaining from employers and governments is fundamental to a successful social dialogue as well as to building democratic states. The promotion of a functioning, effective and transparent social dialogue must be part and parcel of all EU initiatives in relation to our Eastern and Western neighbors.
- The European Pillar of Social Rights should serve as an additional benchmark next to the respect for the Treaty and its values, the Fundamental Rights Charter, the European Social Charter when assessing a country's readiness for accession and for guiding relations with third countries.
- All efforts must be made to help build open, transparent and democratic institutions and policies, which aim to create a sustainable welfare state with adequate social protection.
- There should be a Marshall-type plan of investment for the Western Balkans and the Eastern Partnership neighbourhood. It should focus on enhancing social cohesion, decent employment, well-functioning, people-centered public administrations, developing adequate social protection systems and quality public services. Such a plan could serve, inter alia, to support specific programmes for faster social convergence. The European Commission should not promote Public Private Partnerships and persuade the countries concerned to refrain from them. The [European Court of Auditors](#) has been the last in a long row of organisations to reject PPPs as viable solutions for public services.
- Structural reforms should aim to render the State sector more democratic, transparent, accountable, efficient, and a reliable provider of public services. Much more needs to be done to fight organized crime, rampant corruption, money laundering and tax avoidance. Building up democratic institutions, a fully independent judiciary and media are fundamental for effectively fighting these scourges. Such institutions are corner stones of well-functioning democracies
- Trade unions should be meaningfully involved in the reform programmes representing workers, their families and communities. As such, they must be at the centre of national dialogues around European integration. Unions are well-

placed to promote a public dialogue on employment, economic development, social security and the improvement of living standards.

- Capacity of trade unions to engage in the development processes must be strengthened.
- Advancing gender equality must become a top priority at all stages of accession negotiations. We want that the European Commission and the governments on the countries concerned by the Western Balkan strategy do more to improve the situation of women in the regions, focussing on the gender gaps, particularly the gender pay gap, that need to be addressed in the strategies of the European Commission.
- Educational and health systems need to be improved as to their effectiveness and efficiency. More and sustained financial support is needed in these areas.
- Inter-regional mobility must be strengthened in order to make it easier for people to interact with one another across ethnic lines thus supporting reconciliation efforts.

EPSU has sent its position to the European Commissioners responsible. For the full position in [EN](#) and in [Serbian](#).

On the Western Balkan Summit and Strategy

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