

Romania: EPSU joints ETF in condemning attacks on metro workers



Metro workers protest

EPSU and ETF joint statement on anti-union tactics by Metrorex in Romania

(19 July 2021) The European federations representing transport and public service (ETF and EPSU) condemn the actions of the Romanian government in what appears to be an orchestrated attempt to intimidate ETF and EPSU affiliate USLM with union busting tactics, in response to the union working to protect workers in the Bucharest metro.

In the past 48 hours, prosecutors from Romania's national anticorruption direction (DNA) have searched USLM headquarters and detained the union leadership launching immediate legal hearings. Meanwhile USLM leader, Ion Radoi has been placed under judiciary surveillance, impeding his ability to perform union activities.

We are gravely concerned at the deteriorating situation.

We condemn this unjustified action – and believe the behaviour of the government is illegitimate, targeting USLM for lawful union activities to support metro workers. Police actions to this extent against a union have not been seen in an EU member state for many years and raise serious questions the Romanian government must answer, over respect for social dialogue and the EU social model, as well as respect for the rights of unions.

All of this comes as the EU releases it's 'Fit for 55' package – a landmark initiative to move the EU to a sustainable future. While the EU works to advance the greening of transport and share of public transport, in a blow to the trade union movement, in Romania, workers in one of the most sustainable modes of transport are subjected to this unjustified attack by their government and employer.

This questionable action by the Romanian state is in response to a complaint by the Ministry of Transport over a protest in March this year organised by metro workers in the Bucharest metro. This legitimate protest saw workers stop work spontaneously to complain about poor conditions in the metro and the failure of the authorities to engage in social dialogue.

This search of our affiliate's offices appears to be the latest episode in an orchestrated attempt to undermine the trade union movement in Romania. Workers in the Bucharest metro system have legitimate concerns over their working conditions, yet Metrorex and the government respond with union-busting tactics! The search comes as an ETF and EPSU petition to urge an end to these unacceptable tactics has received over 7400 signatures.

Livia Spera, ETF Secretary General said: "The continued union-busting and intimidation tactics used in Romania against the legitimate concerns of USLM and metro workers in Bucharest are unacceptable. We call on the Romanian authorities and Metrorex to drop these tactics and engage in social dialogue, respecting the European model."

Penny Clarke, EPSU Deputy General Secretary, added: “We join with the ETF in condemning the actions of the Romanian authorities and Metrorex. While the EU is trying to make progress on collective bargaining and social dialogue through the European Pillar of Social Rights and draft directive on adequate minimum wages, the situation in Romania seems to be heading in the opposite direction.”

The operator of the Bucharest metro, Metrorex has been running a union-busting campaign since the start of this year, implementing pay cuts, layoffs and revealing plans to put the subway system into insolvency. USLM’s repeated attempts to engage in social dialogue with Metrorex and the Romanian government continue to be rejected. Instead, the union leadership has faced death threats, while employees who protested in March are being sued by the government.

Police have raided the USLM headquarters before, and Metrorex refuse to collect monthly membership fees, is demanding annulment of the collective bargaining agreement and has told the USLM to vacate its offices.

ETF and EPSU believe the situation in Romania is without precedent and represents a huge blow to social dialogue and the EU’s fundamental rights and values. The situation in the Bucharest metro continues to deteriorate and the Romanian government continues to attack labour rights and refuses to meet with unions in social dialogue. We have written to the European Commission warning them about this attack on EU social values, and continue to urge the Commission to meet with us to discuss next steps.

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