

Europe's trade unions commit to Pay Rise Campaign at launch event

(15 February) Speaker after speaker hammered home the message that Europe's workers need a deserve pay rise, at the ETUC's campaign launch event, 'Europe needs a Pay Rise – It's time for Our recovery' conference, which took place in Brussels on the 14th and 15th of February. Leading trade union figures presented a resounding and irrefutable case that pay increases are essential if Europe's fragile economic recovery is to be sustained, if social inequalities are to be reduced and if citizens' trust in a meaningful social Europe is to be regained.

Luca Visentini, ETUC General Secretary said that the economic response to the great depression was 'wage cuts, a general dismantling of collective bargaining and attacks on minimum wage systems', which only worsened Europe's economic and social malaise. He noted that after almost a decade of pain for workers, this austerity ideology had not produced any real positive results.

The head of the ETUC is convinced that: 'A pay rise would boost economic recovery by supporting demand, productivity and competitiveness; and make growth more sustainable and inclusive through more equality and fairer wage share and wealth redistribution'.

The campaign will actively promote reviving collective bargaining, 'which is the foundation of efficient social dialogue and democracy at work, and the fundamental tool to make sure wage increases benefit labour and the economy,' stated Visentini. The best way to get a pay rise for workers is strong trade unions who can get employers to agree to higher wages, particularly for sectors with high levels of women workers, who still earn on average 24% less than men.

Among the many trade union speakers from across Europe, Jozef Strudela, President of Czech and Moravian confederation of Trade Unions, told delegates that the Pay Rise campaign is for better, more sustainable life for all workers. He believes that improved social dialogue mechanisms are an excellent way to bring social partners together to create a better social Europe. Strudela, along with other speakers from the newer EU member states in Eastern Europe, underlined the need

for wages in these countries to go up faster to bring them more in line with the European average. The massive wage difference is unfair on workers who can work just as hard as their counterparts in the west but be paid sometimes only a fraction of the wages.

In wrapping up the launch event the Visentini said that the social pillar if properly implemented presented an excellent opportunity to create a more social Europe. 'In the last seven to eight years workers have suffered incredible wage cuts', and massive decreases in social protection systems and pensions. It is workers alone who have paid the price for Europe's ills'. Unless serious action is taken to 'raise wages, support collective bargaining and reduce inequalities', then Europe will not have a meaningful future, hence the vital need for this pay rise campaign, right now.

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