

Supporting trade union rights and democracy in Turkey - at the Genel-Is Congress



(26 August 2019) Against the background of the dismissal of mayors and the imposition of trustees in major towns in the South East of Turkey, delegates of the municipal services union Genel-Is gathered for their 17th Congress. The union is concerned about the state of public services and democracy in Turkey. It organized an international conference on *Trade Union Rights and The Future of Public Services in A Global Economic and Political Context*. Moderated by Prof. Gamze Yücesan Özdemir of the Ankara University, delegates went into debate with Rosa Pavanelli, PSI General Secretary, Professor Aziz Çelik, Head of Department of Labour Economics and Industrial Relations, Kocaeli University and the EPSU General Secretary. He underlined the importance of trade union rights and especially the right to strike for public service workers. This right is denied or severely curtailed for public service workers in Turkey. Quoting the UN Special rapporteur on freedom of peaceful assembly and association Mr. Maina Kiai, “...protecting the right to strike is not simply about States fulfilling their legal obligations. It is also about them creating democratic and equitable societies that are sustainable in the long run” he underlined how the Turkish government is violating international and European

standards.

Both General Secretaries met with a delegation of the dismissed workers of the Aliğa Municipality of Izmir. These workers were sacked without legal grounds. EPSU and PSI expressed their continued support for their struggle. Genel-Is is further involved in a local battle to save the drinking water of the town of Canakkale – relying on water of the Kaz mountains stored by the Atikhisar dam. It is the town's sole source of drinking water and risks being polluted by cyanide spills. The government however prefers the goldmining interests.

The General Secretaries were briefed on the state of the negotiations to ensure the millions of public service workers a pay increase and better conditions. The KESK president and leadership of the unions explained the low pay offers made, far below inflation. Workers would lose out. To underline the union is serious to get a better pay offer a walk-out is foreseen for 27 August.

The Congress was addressed by several speakers including the Presidents of DISK and KESK, political parties and human rights organization. They were unanimous in their condemnation of the interference in the results of the local elections. It undermines democracy and impacts on the working men and women in the municipalities. Speakers were frequently interrupted by the delegates. They shouted slogans for democracy and peace, in defense of working people and trade unions, against fascism and oppression. Other international delegates came from Germany, Netherlands, Norway, Roumania and Sweden

The Congress took place 23-24 Augustus 2019, Ankara.

Concerns for the situation in Turkey remain high on the agenda. Apart from expressing solidarity with the dismissed workers in Aliğa Municipality of Izmir, EPSU also sent a letter to the government over the interference in the composition of the bargaining delegation of KESK, to the mayor of the town of Bolu who dismissed workers belonging to the Hizmet-Is trade union and to the President and government over the arrest of nurses in connection with assisting children and wounded people in Cizre (2015)

For background:

- To support the dismissed workers of the Aliğa Municipality of Izmir, Turkey, [please sign the petition](#)
- Statement of [DISK](#) on the dismissals

- The Public service workers confederation [KESK](#) expressed its position
- [Reactions of the European Commission and the European Parliament](#)
- For a statement on the dismissal of the mayors and the impact on local democracy of the [Council of Europe](#)
- For the reaction of [Human Rights Watch](#)
- On [the protests](#) against the goldmining and the [Genel-Is reaction](#)
- On the [background of the strike](#) called by the public service workers confederation KESK
- For more [on the right to strike in Turkey](#)
- [In Support of Hizmet-Is](#) dismissed members in Bolu
- On the [situation of the Turkish unions from Professor Aziz Celik](#)
- On the recent arrests of nurses and doctors [from SES](#), from the [World Medical Association](#), EPSU sent a letter of protest. The case is similar to [an earlier one that led to the acquittal of the nurses](#). Following the letters of protest the nurses were released but others have been arrested.
- For [previous articles](#) of EPSU on Turkey

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