

## Solidarity with Ukrainian workers and Trade Unions - as EU-Ukraine cooperation Council meets



(Brussels, 28 January 2020) Europe's trade unions express their solidarity with the Ukrainian trade unions fighting against the labour law reforms introduced by the new Ukrainian government on the occasion of the EU-Ukraine Association Council, 28 January 2020. These changes violate national and international standards. No social dialogue has taken place with the unions. We demand the withdrawal of the draft legislation and the start of a genuine process of discussions and negotiations with trade unions.

### **Background**

The amendments to the labour laws were introduced by the Party of President Zelensky just before New Year, and immediately led to protests in Ukraine. Workers decried them as unfair, in favour of the employers by weakening the trade unions and allowing for other interests to take control of the unions. The proposed changes would lead to: the unilateral termination of employment contracts, an increase in

precarious employment, a reduction of overtime pay and at the same time reduction of existing limitations to overtime work. Other changes are in breach of ILO Conventions on freedom of association and collective bargaining. In retaliation against the trade union protests, state officials have started attacking and waging defamation campaigns against trade union organisations and their leaders in public.

A large trade union meeting of the All Ukrainian Trade Union Assembly called for further actions on 16th January and a large protest is foreseen for the 30th January.

**Ukraine is faced by many problems** – the changes to the labour laws address none of these

The Ukrainian economy is in disastrous shape. Wages are the lowest in Europe and people are leaving the country in search of a different and better life. Companies face bankruptcy and external debt payments are a third of the budget. Inequality and poverty are rising, many workers do not get paid and wage arrears are billions of hryvnia. The situation is worsened by rampant corruption. The changes to the labour laws do not address these problems. They weaken the one force in Ukrainian society that criticises the government for its lack of commitment to addressing these problems – the unions. The Ukrainian and European trade union movements condemn this approach of the government. It is only through social dialogue and negotiations that these problems can be addressed.

## **European solidarity**

EPSU participated in a mission of Ukrainian trade union leaders and ETUC/ITUC to explain our concerns to the European Commission and European Parliament on 23rd January. Our key message is that the social dialogue is a key EU principle. By not having proper consultation with the social partners, the Ukrainian government is violating its obligations under the EU Association agreement. This message was also addressed to the chairwoman of the Social Affairs Committee of the Ukrainian Parliament Mrs. Halyna Tretaiakova by Valerie Matov, President of the Nuclear Workers Trade union and Member of the EPSU Executive Committee, and by EPSU General Secretary on 24th January in Kiev. EPSU General Secretary Jan Willem Goudriaan met with the Ukrainian affiliates and discussed the various actions.

Many EPSU affiliates have addressed the Ukrainian government demanding the withdrawal of the legislation and several trade union leaders have expressed their solidarity with the unions.

We support the unions' demands that the government:

- Withdraw the draft law on labour and begin work on a new draft Labour Code of Ukraine in cooperation with the All-Ukrainian Representative Trade Union and Employers Association, in full compliance with the Constitution of Ukraine, the ILO Convention and the EU principles, and with the participation of experts from the International Labour Organization;
- Stop any revision of legislation regulating trade union activities, trade union rights and guarantees, and make sure that freedom of association is fully respected in the country, and that unions and their democratically elected leaders are protected from defamation, intimidation and violence;
- Relaunch national level tripartite social dialogue on labour reforms and other pressing economic and social policies, and immediately implement obligations under the present tripartite General Agreement on the regulation of basic principles and norms of social and economic policy and labour relations in Ukraine in 2019-2021; and
- Resume social dialogue at all the levels of collective regulation of social and labour relations where state executive bodies are parties to collective agreements. We call on EU leaders to make sure that the EU values and principles are placed at the heart of any dialogue with the Ukrainian authorities.

For more on the concerns and proposals to move forward see the statement of the ETUC, the Pan-European Regional Council of the ITUC and the Ukrainian confederations [FPU](#) and [KVPU](#)

On the [EU-Ukraine Association Council 28 January 2020](#). This Council reviews the implementation of the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and in particular the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Area. It is the first time it will be chaired by the new Prime Minister Oleksiy Honcharuk of President Zelensky's party. Josep Borrell, the EU High representative and Commissioner for Neighborhood and Enlargement Oliver Varhelyi will represent the EU.

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