

EPSU concerned about lack of progress on crucial social reform in Georgia

(1st December 2016) The EU–Georgia Association Council will take place on 2 December 2016 in Brussels. It evaluates progress in the relations between the EU and Georgia and in particular with the implementation of the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement.

EPSU General Secretary Jan Willem Goudriaan “We expect the Association Council to give a new stimulus for social progress, addressing poverty and inequality, improving protection and rights for workers and people in Georgia. The trade agreement should not benefit corporate elites and leave workers behind. ”

On this occasion EPSU has the following concerns:

- Violence against women remains high in Georgia. It has not ratified the [Istanbul Convention](#) on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence. (There are [several other European countries](#) that have not ratified this convention) Georgia has not made progress to prevent sexual harassment at work. It has not created the legal prevention mechanism of the issue. Unions do fight against violence against women and domestic violence and PSI has been active in the ILO to set a standard to [confront violence and harassment at work](#) Georgia can benefit from this work. The implementation report notes that the process of ratification of the ILO Convention N183 on Maternity Protection has not started.
- Georgia has a recent history of union-busting and persecution of labor activists. Discrimination based on union affiliation remains a common practice both in private and public sectors. Such acts are often not punished. Labour inspection and prosecution mechanism do not prove effective. Changes to the Georgian Labor Code to comply with ILO conventions has stalled. It is important that the labor inspection gets more resources and staff, and that it can do its work. Labour inspectors should be free to visit and have unrestricted access to workplaces. They should be able to take reactive and preventive measures;
- This lack of compliance shows with regard to the legal minimum wage. This is

one of the lowest in the world with less than 44 Euros per month for public service workers and 7.50 Euros for others. The subsistence level is around 100 Euro and the average salary 360 Euros per month. The relevant ILO convention 131 convention stipulates that setting the minimum wage should be based on needs of workers and their families, taking into account the general level of wages in the country, the cost of living, social security benefits, as well as economic factors. This low minimum wage has been tabled in the tripartite Commission of social partners but faces delays and opposition. [Improving the minimum wage](#) is an important measure to deal with the very large poverty and inequality in Georgia. Youth unemployment is over 30%.

- The government should ensure that the Tri-partite Commission for Social Partnership works and can be effective, and the EU should have more comprehensive support for establishing proper working social dialogue and effective collective bargaining structures at all levels. Now this Commission does not meet frequently, is not effective and does not elaborate proposals. And this despite the demands of workers to deal with excessive overtime work, ensure fair remuneration, and deal with exploitation. The ILO Convention 144 on Tripartite Consultations offers a first framework to make it work.
- A more positive development has been that the government has increased social spending to deal with “persistent high levels of poverty and inequality.” The debt has increased but is manageable and low compared to many other EU and other European states. We are concerned that the EU and supported by the IMF are executing a pre-emptive austerity policy. This will derail much of the progress that is being made. The country prides itself on having the world [10th lowest tax rate](#). That is not sustainable. It will not permit the country to invest in public services, address income inequality and redistribute wealth to deal with poverty. Georgia should not become a low-tax competitor. We expect the Commission to be vigilant on this.

The EU-Georgia summit deals with political, security and economic cooperation and assesses progress with the Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement (DCFTA). It is chaired by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Mrs. Federica Mogherini and the Georgian Prime Minister Giorgi Kvirikashvili.

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