



Government of the Republic of Estonia
Prime Minister Mr Andrus Ansip
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Estonia

Sent by email to valitsus@rk.ee;

Cc Employment and social affairs Ministry Jaak.Aab@sm.ee; ROTAL;

ref:CFP/NS/solidarity-

Contact person: Nadja Salson T 00 32 2 250 10 88

Re: Fundamental trade union rights in Estonian state sector

Brussels 06 July 2006

Dear Prime Minister,

On behalf of EPSU – the European Federation of Public Service Unions - representing 8 million public service workers and civil servants in Europe, I wish to reiterate our support towards our affiliated union ROTAL regarding the persistent non-compliance with workers' fundamental trade union rights in Estonian civil service.

These concerns have now been raised many times by ROTAL as well as by the Nordic State Workers Council with whom your services held a meeting on 8 May 2006. Despite continuous protest by ROTAL and its International and European federations, the following causes of concern have yet to find a satisfactory solution:

- Civil servants' wage evolution continues to fall behind inflation and below average wages across the economy (notably in occupations such as police, rescue service, prison and customs officers, and care workers); in cases where civil servants' wages are above national average wages this results from a high level of overtime working. This situation has a direct knock-on effect on decreased purchasing power, pension entitlements and increased risks of corruption.
- Opaque wage system and increasing wage differentials between low and high-ranking civil servants. This contradicts EU objective to reduce the gender pay gap, as recently reconfirmed by the EU Council's adoption of a European Pact for Gender Equality on 23 March last, while high pay dispersion between workers is known for impacting badly on staff morale and thus efficiency of any organisations;
- Unresolved issue of civil servants' right to strike, collective bargaining and information and consultation, as provided for by the EU charter of fundamental rights.
- The ETUC recently confirmed that your government is in breach of its obligations with regard to the transposition of the EU directive on workers' information and consultation rights and is denying any role for the trade unions as the representative voice of employees.

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- The Council of Europe's European Committee of Social Rights has stated that the current situation on strike rights for civil servants in Estonia contradicts the principles of the European Social Charter. Estonia has yet to ratify the ILO Conventions 151 on labour relations and public services and 154 on collective bargaining.
- Low tax regime policy seriously affects the quality of public services and undermines Estonian citizens' access to fundamental rights to healthcare, social services, education, fair judicial system and good administration as recognised by the EU Charter of fundamental rights.

As part of the European Social model and good governance objective, the EC Treaty provides for social dialogue at cross-sectoral and sectoral level, with no distinction between the public and private sectors.

As representatives of unionised civil servants at EU level, we are currently engaged in developing a European sectoral social dialogue in national and European administrations with the EPAN – European Public Administration Network.

Substantial progress has recently been achieved both in terms of procedure and content, notably the recognition by the EU 25 Public Administration Ministers of the central role social dialogue plays in improving the quality of national administration. The Ministers also formally recognised the EPSU-led trade union delegation, called TUNED, representing civil servants in the EU, including Estonia, in a resolution in June 2005 (Luxembourg). If only for the sake of coherence and credibility, these improvements at EU level must be mirrored at national level. As part of our mandate we will keep informed the EPAN of developments with trade union rights in EU civil services and implementation of EU social legislation.

As much as well-trained and decently paid civil servants was an essential factor in the process of Estonia's preparation for EU membership it will remain central to your country's ability to deepen EU integration and ensure that Estonian citizens can reap benefits from the European project.

I therefore urge you to give further consideration to ROTAL's resolution dated 2 March 2006, as supported by the Nordic Trade union Council, which includes the following basic demands to your government:

- 1) to fulfil international and European obligations with regard to workers' fundamental right to strike and develop a social dialogue including information, consultation and negotiation at all levels in civil service;
- 2) to ensure basic wage of civil service workforce amounts to at least 70% of total remuneration'
- 3) to increase minimum wages of workers in childcare, social services, police, fire-fighters, tax customs and prison officers;

I trust you will take these demands into account for the benefit of Estonian citizens and residents,

Yours sincerely

Carola Fischbach-Pyttel
EPSU General Secretary