***PERC REGION AND PRESENT CHALLENGES***

***PERC, ETUC AND ITUC PERSPECTIVE***

The PERC Women’s Conference takes place in very difficult and challenging times for trade union movement as such.

Europe is at a crossroad of political choices and critical stage of in their development.

EU’s employment and economic situation is worrying: the Eurostat figures for June this year show over 25 million unemployed people; the situation in the southern Europe is particularly severe with deepening recession in Greece; Spain, Italy and Portugal; but economies in the Nord are also affected: contraction in Belgian and Finish economies and slowing growth in other countries, including Germany.

The policies aimed to secure exits from the crisis have in fact shifted the burden of recovery on the shoulders of the workers; reduced or cut public sector wages, jobs, and pensions; generated a wave of official assaults on social and trade union rights in violation of the ILO conventions, Council of Europe and EU standards; threaten the European social model.

In this context the ETUC Day of action and solidarity for a Social Compact for Europe approved by the last ETUC Executive Committee will take place on 14 November; there are panned strikes, demonstrations, rallies.

The PERC, which is a structure of the ITUC, is called to respond to the common challenges, to the impact of the crisis in the region.

PERC gathers a wide diversity of types of economies and societies with their respective industrial relations systems, labor and social protection policies. This makes the mission of PERC extremely difficult; but at the same time we can see a clear trend of increasing **interdependence** between countries and their perspectives for development across Europe and beyond.

PERC aims to facilitate debates and joint initiatives, bring over the diversity and prevent fragmentation of action in Europe; it contributes to build solidarity and collective action in the region; it is guided by ITUC and ETUC programs and policy orientations.

**The 2-nd PERC General Assembly** last year established the main areas of priority:

**The first one**: the consequences of the on going crisis in the field of employment, distribution of wealth and social cohesion; working in the direction of a new model of sustainable economic growth;

***Challenges :***

-the continuing austerity measures leading to a second deep recession;

-danger of jobless growth particularly hitting young people

-expansion of precarious work and shadow economy with consequences especially on women and young people

-privatizations and assault on public services

-mounting pressures on the family and community cohesion due to rising levels of poverty; rising violence particularly against women

PERC response on these challenges: develop further the TU networks- economic experts; SEE and NIS; discussion Forums like PERC Summer School; SEE TU Forum; the PERC Women and Youth Committees to work on gender specific and youth consequences of trade union policies and actions

**Second:** the consequences of the crisis on human and trade union rights, on functioning of social dialogue; advancing trade union unity of action

***Challenges:***

-rising wave of anti-union policies both in EU member states and more to the East; the governments have followed the advice of IFI, external interests (American Chamber of Commerce) despite agreements reached with the social partners, despite the ILO opinion.

PERC response: develop further the PERC HTUR network; develop the TU legal experts’ network close collaboration with ETUC/ETUI

**Third:** confronting the multiple lines of inequalities

***Challenges:***

-growing inequalities in the field of: employment, incomes and wealth distribution; access to social protection; health and safety policies at the workplace; informal/shadow economy

 The result is wider income gap, polarization in society – some very rich /some extremely poor;

-increase of different forms of discrimination

Response of the PERC : economists and legal experts networks will lead the way with their expertise; role for PERC Women and Youth Committees

**Fourth:** defending democracy

***Challenges:***

-growing inequality and differentiation of social-political base opens new opportunities for populist/nationalist/extremist political forces

Response of PERC: work together with the European Institutions Council of Europe and European Social Charter

**Fifth:** strengthening trade union organizations at the workplace, sector and national level.

This last priority comes together with the decision of the last ITUC General Council meeting in Amman on **building workers power**.

The research made by ITUC shows that 7 % workers are unionized in the world.

How to have the power to react, to influence government policies with very low percentages of unionization?

To do this we must organize. We must organize workers in the formal sector and in the informal sector with a view to creating decent formal work with freedom of association, social protection, a minimum wage and collective bargaining rights as starting points.

This is the strategic focus of the ITUC for 2013 and 2014. It will provide a framework for reporting to the 2014 Congress and the foundation for a practical mandate from the Congress regarding the strategic future for the labor movement.

To do this all our work will seek to realize one or more of three central objectives:

**• Union growth**

**• Sustainable jobs, secure incomes and social protection**

**• Realizing rights**

There will be three thematic areas of focus:

• **Global injustice, inequity and inequality**

**• Global threats to peace, democracy, rights and sustainability**

**• Decent jobs, minimum wages, social protection, collective bargaining and poverty reduction**

**Organizing in the workplace and political organizing will be at the core of our strategy.**

All our activities need to be strategic. They must:

• Be directly associated with organizing;

• Frame and facilitate organizing opportunities; or,

• provide the necessary scaffolding for organizing through the realization of rights, essential policies and effective labor market institutions.

There is a need to provide hope with a vision for an alternative future and empower people with a global labor movement for change.

We must grow the union movement and build the power of workers.

Task force groups have been established in the ITUC with this purpose.

The PERC Women’s Committee has to reflect to all these challenges and priority directions of the PERC and ITUC and give its specific response. The action plan of the PERC Women’s Committee will have to take into consideration the policy orientation of ITUC for next two years.

The Executive Committee of PERC will take place on 4 of March 2013. The program and action plan of the PERC Women’s Committee will have to be prepared and presented at the Executive Committee.