



# PERC Pan-European REGIONAL Council

## PERC NEWSLETTER

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### The second General Assembly of the Pan-European Regional Council



## PERC ACTIVITIES

### The second General Assembly of the Pan-European Regional Council

The second General Assembly of the Pan-European Regional Council took place in Brussels end December 2011. It brought together some one hundred unionists from across the European region.

The delegates debated the PERC activity report the and PERC programme for the next period. They agreed to amend the PERC constitution and elected the new PERC leadership. Mikhail Shmakov, FNPR President, was re-elected as PERC President, while Erich Foglar, OeGB President, Mariana Kniesner, BNS, and Joanna Szymonek, Solidarnosc, were elected Vice-Presidents.

The main focus of the meeting was the economic and social crisis in Europe and attacks on workers' rights that many governments and financial circles are exercising as their "crisis exit" policies.

More information about the meeting and the conclusions on the PERC web site [http://perc.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?article673&var\\_recherche=PERC%20General%20Assembly%202011](http://perc.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?article673&var_recherche=PERC%20General%20Assembly%202011)

## Health and Safety



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*<<< In most countries in CIS, the former regulations are still in place; main role is given to labour inspection and prevention measures are not always developed enough>>>*

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The Health and Safety workshop for the NIS region took place from 19 to 20 December 2011. The workshop was organised with the support of the LO/TCO and logistic support from the Ukrainian unions. Twenty participants from NIS countries and CEE took part in the workshop: Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Georgia, Kazakhstan, Moldova, Romania, Russia and Ukraine. The seminar was organised as a follow up activity after the one held last year and had the purpose to debate and exchange experiences on the health and safety situation in the region and proposals for future action. The following presentations were made during the workshop: ILO perspective on Health and Safety; standards, mechanisms, technical assistance; the ILO representative in Ukraine, Vasyly Kostritza presented the situation about tripartite cooperation on OSH in the country, and the role unions play; Olga Lytvyniuk made a presentation of the projects the ILO is developing on Health and Safety both in Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova and the ETUI senior researcher, Viktor Kempa, presented the EU perspective on occupational health and safety, the EU policies on Health and Safety; role of trade unions; workers' Health and Safety representatives and current priorities in health and safety at work. The EU dimension was further enlarged by Emilia Dimitrova from CITUB Bulgaria and Corneliu Constantinoiaia from CNSLR Fratia Romania. They referred to the specific situation in their countries and the challenges unions are facing. Presentations were made also by AHK Azerbaijan, Georgia, Russia and Moldova. In most countries in CIS the regulations in place still stress the central role to labour inspection while prevention measures are not always developed enough.

More information and conclusions of the meeting on PERC web site: <http://perc.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?article678>

## Belarus

In Belarus, ruled by totalitarian regime of A. Lukashenko, the workers are not afraid to voice their discontent and to join independent unions. The situation of RUPP “Granite” company in Mikashevichi town in southern part of Brest region is symptomatic. Nearly 3200 are employed by the company. 600 workers at one time have announced their disaffiliation from the FPB. More than 200 workers, mainly quarry dump truck drivers, wrote applications for membership of the Belarusian Independent Trade Union (BNP), a member of the ITUC affiliate BKDP. At the founding general meeting they set up a primary-level BNP union organisation.

Not surprisingly, the harassment of leaders of the newly organised independent union soon started. Union leader Oleg Stakhaevich and Liudmila Litvinko, wife of another union activist, were dismissed. Other workers and union activists were threatened to have problems during the workplace assessment test certifying their professional competency and fitness. Yet, the workers would not tolerate that and announced their intention to strike to get union leaders reinstated and the union recognised.

PERC General Secretary Bernadette Ségol protested to the Belarus authorities and the ITUC is also calling on its affiliates, union activists and human rights defenders to join the solidarity campaign with RUPP “Granite” company workers.

Belarus has been continuously criticised by the ILO for non-compliance with the international labour standards. The Commission on Inquiry produced 12 recommendations, which have not been implemented by the state so far, despite some cosmetic moves on the side of the government. One of these recommendations specifically refers to the obligatory registration of unions by the authorities.



*<<<The ITUC is calling its affiliates, union activists and human rights defenders to join the solidarity campaign with RUPP “Granite” company workers>>>*

## Consultation on Eastern Partnership for the coming Civil Society Forum meeting

AT the end of October the PERC organised consultations on Eastern Partnership in view of a coming Civil Society Forum meeting. The meeting was financially supported by the FGTB and by the Belgian Labour Ministry.

The PERC Executive Secretary introduced the perception of the Eastern Partnership by the PERC. The concern of the PERC members lies in the fact that while the EU association envisage transfer of the EU practices and frameworks in economic and trade areas, particularly through development of Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreement, the transfer of social and industrial is not part of the story so far. The social partners and other civil society organisations do not have access to policy decision-making and often are consulted for the sake of the consultation process itself. The Civil Society Forum is basically functioning as a closed club of think tanks and non-representative NGOs, while social partners do not find a proper place in its structures. The same is replicated at the level of the national platforms: the agenda is dominated by the NGOs, which in many cases have project-driven interests towards the European Union. Then participants shared experiences of national platforms work. An European Economic and Social Committee proposal to structurally change the Civil Society Forum was presented and debated. It was agreed to ensure trade union support for it, as well as to introduce it to the national platform (where a coordination meeting is still to take place).

The consultation mechanism opened by the European External Action Service was introduced to the participants.

In conclusion the participants brainstormed several ideas about follow-up activities in the countries, including on-going initiatives.

See the general remarks in conclusions on PERC Web site: <http://perc.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?article696>



## Regional Tripartite Conference under the title “Contribution of Trade Unions in the Pension System Reforms in the Western Balkan Countries”



The Regional Tripartite Conference under the title “Contribution of Trade Unions in the Pension System Reforms in the Western Balkan Countries” was held on 13 – 14 December 2011 in Zagreb- Croatia. The Conference marked the end of the 3-year project implemented in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, Macedonia, and Serbia with the support of the Kingdom of Norway, and together with the Norwegian trade union LO Norway, Pan European Regional Council of the International Trade Union Confederation, and the legal and economic experts from the SEE trade unions. The Conference was organised by the Pan European Regional Council in coordination with the International Organisation of Employers and the Centre for Employers of the Adriatic Region. The representatives of the Ministries of labour and social policy from the Western Balkan countries participated in the Conference and they, along with the employers and trade union representatives from all the Western Balkan countries including Albania and Kosovo, presented their positions and participated in the debate. Also present at the meeting was H.E. Henrik Ofstad, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Norway to the Republic of Croatia.

During the morning Conference session, chaired by Marija Hanževački, the participants had an opportunity to learn more about the new pension system in Norway, which was presented by Eystein Gjelsvik, Advisor in LO Norway.

Following this presentation, Martin Hutsebaut, European advisor to the Project, reported briefly about the activities conducted at the regional and the national levels, and analytically compared the pension systems in this region and EU.

The afternoon Conference session, chaired by Lidija Horvatić – Croatian Association of Employers, was mainly marked with discussions of the participants – representatives of governments, employers, and trade unions from Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Croatia, Macedonia and Serbia.

During the second day of the Conference, chaired by Eystein Gjelsvik, Martin Hutsebaut presented the main conclusions of the project and possible actions in order to make the pension systems sustainable, adequate and modern. This presentation was followed by an animated and fruitful discussion between the representatives of governments, employers and trade unions.

More information and conclusion of the meeting on <http://perc.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?article692>

## PERC Women's Committee meeting

The PERC Women's Committee met on 7 February in Brussels with the participation of both ITUC Equality and ETUC representatives. The agenda of the meeting had as a main point the discussion on the program and action plan for this year. Taking into consideration the importance of the ratification campaign on domestic workers, Marieke Koning presented an update of the ITUC campaign: the work of domestic workers is undervalued, underpaid, invisible, not recognised, and not respected. The majority of domestic workers are women (82%) – many are migrants or children. (...) In many countries domestic workers are excluded from labour legislation and social protection schemes. Many are denied the right, either in law or in practice, to form or join a trade union. As a result, mistreatment, exploitation, violence, and physical and sexual abuse are frequent and often go unpunished. In June 2011 the UN body that deals with labour issues, the ILO (the International Labour Organisation), adopted Convention 189 (C189) and Recommendation 201 (R201) on Domestic Workers. Convention 189 recognises the right of domestic workers to join and form trade unions, which is still forbidden in many countries. It also protects the right to the minimum wage in countries where it exists, and protects monthly payments and access to social security including in the case of maternity. In essence, the Convention guarantees that domestic workers are treated as any other worker under labour legislation. This Convention will enter into force once two countries have ratified it. The ITUC had launched the "12 by 12" worldwide campaign on getting 12 countries to ratify Convention 189 by the end of 2012. The PERC Women's Committee fully supports the campaign and an increased number of organisations are joining it. Supporting the domestic workers campaign is one of the priority dimensions in the work plan for this year. Other issues on the agenda: the organisation of the Women's School and Conference this year; the election procedures; changes in the terms of reference; information on the projects the committee is developing this year; contribution of the PERC Women's Committee to the general work plan of the PERC; preparation of the 8 March Survey on women's representation in trade unions



*<<<Women's Committee fully supports the "12 by 12" campaign and increased number of PERC organisations is joining it>>>*

The program and action plan for this year will be presented by the PERC Women's Committee members for approval during the PERC Executive Committee to take place on 5 March in Brussels. See the documents on <http://perc.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?article725>

## PERC Youth committee meeting

The first meeting of the second PERC Youth Committee took place in Brussels on 14 February. The meeting of the Committee was chaired by its President, Tugba Balci. Philippe Gousenbourger, ITUC Youth coordinator, informed the Committee about the ITUC youth agenda, including prioritising youth employment issues by the ITUC and by the ILO. The ITUC is going to organise its Youth Committee meeting on the occasion of the G20 meeting in Mexico, which will concentrate on youth employment issues. The ILO will be organising a high level meeting on youth employment prior to the International Labour Conference and the ITUC seeks to ensure solid participation of young trade unionists in it. He also invited the PERC youth to apply for small funding for youth organising projects that is available at the ITUC. Grigor Gradev, PERC Executive Secretary, presented the policy platform of the PERC as approved by the PERC General Assembly and informed about the challenges the European trade union movement is facing. The austerity measures pushed by the governments include violation of international labour standards; however, the protests organised by unions in the countries concerned are not heard or taken into account by the officials and the parliaments. At the same time, spontaneous public actions most often spearheaded by young people can topple the government. Radical extremist forces are using union organised protests to bring chaos and violence to the streets. In some cases populist governments enjoy impressive popular support, even when their actions violate EU principles. And governments of countries that are not experiencing debt crisis, even outside EU, are often using the crisis as a pretext to liberalise labour markets and to undermine workers' rights and workers' organisations.

Currently youth in Europe is facing a rising danger of being "a lost generation". Their chances for decent employment are shrinking as the labour market is sinking as a result of austerity measures and economic hardships. New movements are born from these "lost youngsters", movements that do not trust or think to associate with unions, which are considered as a part of the institutional order they have no place in. They are built on horizontal democracy principles in opposition to the vertical democracy that unions and political society are built upon. Unions need to search for ways to communicate with these movements, and unions cannot just witness the new trends. This will be an issue for PERC Youth Committee and for PERC as a whole.



*<<<Present youth in Europe is facing a rising danger of being "a lost generation", their chances for decent employment are shrinking as the labour market is sinking as a result of austerity measures and economic hardships>>>*

## News from the organisations: Georgia



The Georgian Trade Unions confederation and CGT-France have signed a memorandum of cooperation.

According to the agreement the French Trade Union will assist its Georgian partner in the protection of the rights of workers, share its experience and expertise in the fields of organising, research of labour market and etc.

The parties will actively collaborate in order to safeguard the rights of migrant workers. The French trade union will provide legal aid to Georgian migrants residing in France. The Cooperation will also play an important role in the approximation process of Georgia with EU standards about social-economic rights, social dialogue that are the vital aspects of the ENP and EaP programs.

An official ceremony of signature of the agreement took place at the office of Georgian Trade Unions Confederation. This event was attended by the representatives of Georgian Government, Diplomatic Corp, Non-Governmental Organisations, and the senior workers activities specialist of the International Labour Organisation.

This process was supported by the ILO-SRO in Moscow as part of the EU project "Increasing the Protection of Migrant Workers in the Russian Federation and Enhancing the Development Impact of Migration in Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia".



## You may be interested

### Pension reforms research document



The PERC has released a project research document  
PENSION REFORMS IN THE COUNTRIES OF THE  
WESTERN BALKANS FROM A EUROPEAN PERSPECTIVE

This document is the result of a three- year project supported by the Norwegian government and carried out with joint efforts of LO Norway, the Pan European Regional Council and experts from SEE trade unions. More on <http://perc.ituc-csi.org/spip.php?article683>

## Upcoming events

***PERC Executive Committee meeting, 5 March, Brussels***

***Play Fair Russia meeting, 16 March, Moscow***

***International secretaries meeting, 28 March, Brussels***

***ILC preparatory meeting, 29-30 March, Brussels***

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