

Date: 25 March 2020

Highlights for the PERC region in 2020:

The COVID-19 pandemic has severely touched the European continent. Countries have introduced strict measures to contain further dissemination of the infection. These measures have economic impact, particularly in transport, tourism, entertainment and other sectors, and the union movement calls for taking equally bold steps in protecting workers, including those workers in the most precarious conditions. The ITUC and the ETUC are monitoring the measures taken by the government or negotiated by national social dialogue^[1].

The PERC has opened a web page on COVID19 measures to compliment ETUC and ITUC information (<https://perc.ituc-csi.org/PERC-updates-re-COVID-19>).

International trade union indoor activities, including those of the PERC, have been cancelled until at least mid-April.

The EU is in the process of debating the minimum wage legal instrument, with the ETUC and its members taking part in the formal consultation process. The escalation of the conflict in Syria and the opening of the border to Greece by Turkey sets up a new turn in the refugee and asylum seekers' challenge for the European Union.

The EU Commission issued the revised vision for the Eastern Partnership. While the outlined strategy is an improvement (<https://perc.ituc-csi.org/Statement-on-Renewed-Eastern-Partnership>), workers' rights and social dialogue still are not properly reflected. That should be addressed by the ETUC/PERC and Eastern Partnership affiliates in preparation for the Eastern Partnership Summit in June.

The DISK President was acquitted and KESK leaders were acquitted; meanwhile, the trial of the KESK organisers of the women's march has been postponed to 3 June.

The GSEE in Greece was able to finalise its Congress, disrupted twice by radical groups in earlier months, and confirmed mandate of its leadership.

Main actions:

The **SEE minimal wage campaign** ("to eat, to live, to stay") is in further development: the policy brief was prepared, and a more elaborate report is in the pipeline for national and EU-related lobbying activities, in relation to the EU enlargement processes.

The campaign for ratification of **ILO Convention 190** is accelerating with a growing number of actions taken by the affiliates. Most of PERC women's networks organised "Stop violence at work campaigns" to lobby governments for the urgent ratification of ILO Convention 190; national action plans have been initiated on lobbying strategies and training activities for the application of the ILO Convention in collective bargaining.

The ITUC, PERC and ACTRAV-EUROPE synchronised **planning for 2020**^[2], including the Wage campaign in SEE, Just transitions Summer School, Women's Conference, Building project activities (as part of the workplan) with ILO-ACTRAV, U2U, and FES, reporting to the ILO-ACTRAV and U2U projects.

PERC received nominations with candidates for regional representation in the **ILO Governing Body**. Consultations are under way.

Ukrainian authorities introduced a set of legal initiatives that would infringe upon international obligations of the country under the ILO and EU Association Agreement. The PERC coordinates international legal and political assistance to affiliates, in particular the visit of leaders of Ukrainian affiliates to EU institutions, provision of legal overview of the draft amendments, liaison with the ILO and the EU, and the high-level ITUC-ETUC-PERC mission to the country.

North Macedonia: Provision of the legal support (legal clinic) to the KSS – North Macedonia – that is preparing an ILO CFA complaint about discrimination against trade unions and the government's interference in trade union affairs.

Activities:

Ukraine trade union leaders' visit, 22-23 January, Brussels: risks of noncompliance of the labour and trade union legislation amendments with the ILO standards and the EU-Ukraine Association Agreement.

ETUI Eastern Partnership countries trade unions' research discussion, Brussels, 28 January: The Central European Labour Studies Institute is releasing a report on trade union representation in Eastern Partnership Countries. PERC provided comments to the draft texts and contributed to the public discussion organised by the ETUI.

OECD supply chain discussion, Paris, 12-13 February had on the agenda the reconciliation of due diligence with actual trade tensions; transparency and traceability in the supply chains; the circular economy; forced labour and child labour in supply chains; re-thinking business models; strengthening regulation in supply chains; Global Deal conference and importance of social dialogue in tackling due diligence; and including ILO Convention 190 in analyses of risks.

The EU-Moldova Civil Society Platform, 13 February, Kishinev: During the meeting, a debate was held assessing the state of play of the implementation of the EU-Moldova Association Agreement. Social aspects of the implementation of the Association Agreement were presented by CNSM, and Moldovan initiatives in the justice sector, as well as fighting corruption, were discussed.

Ukraine mission, 25-27 February, Kiev: Coordination of the high-level ITUC-ETUC mission to the country that visited Kiev and met with the Ukrainian authorities to get commitments that planned new labour laws will comply with ILO standards and EU labour law, and that trade unions will be consulted in the process of drafting the legislation (<https://www.ituc-csi.org/ukraine-government-promises-new>).

ETUI Baltic unions training: The Baltic region has specific challenges and advantages. Massive emigration, the brain drain, structure of economy and also the considerable loss of membership are among several that can be mentioned. The training addressed ways and preconditions for the renewal of the Baltic region trade union organisations, and reinforcing the role and the need for trade unions in modern labour markets.

The PERC Youth Committee met on 2 March to discuss the challenges of lack of balanced youth representation in the PERC region and how to develop possible solutions for the PERC leadership's consideration. Youth also discussed how to improve cooperation with ETUC youth and attract more activists as well as how to achieve these goals if willing to take part in active work.

ETUC NETLEX, 4-5 March, Brussels: The SEE office facilitated participation of non-ETUC affiliates in the ETUC NETLEX Conference and focused on the following: protecting human rights by and within the EU; labour and internal market legislation; social dialogue and promotion of collective bargaining; and the future of the EU.

ETUI OSH forum, Skopje, 4-5 March, provided the participants with the opportunity to compare the most effective and efficient systems in organising and supporting workers' health and safety representatives including training strategies. The meeting strengthened regional cooperation and networking and supported implementation of national trade union action plans in OSH. Challenges for labour inspection and new strategies for OSH in Europe were discussed.

ACTRAV Migration from Ukraine to EU conference, 10-12 March, Lviv: The conference participants discussed the situation of migrant workers from Ukraine and beyond in the Baltic countries and Poland, and a proper response and needed tools. Good practices and plans were discussed on international/national/sectoral levels. A follow-up strategic planning meeting should be organised in the early autumn in Lithuania.

UNECE SDGs regional consultations, 18-19 March (limited to online meeting): Despite a clear call from civil society to postpone the discussion, the forum was held in a scale-downed approach, with limited participation possible. The main PERC demands were included in the civil society declaration to the Forum, including the COVID-19 response.

The spread of COVID-19 has led to cancellation or postponement of several PERC activities.

PERC Steering Committee, 1 April, Brussels (virtualised).

PERC pre-ILC meeting, 6 April (limited to virtual CAS discussion).

PERC Summer School, 16-18 June, Vilnius (decision to be taken mid-April).

Postponed: PERC Women's Committee, 25-26 March, Brussels; SDGs in Central Asia meeting, Tashkent, 18-20 April; SEE Wage campaign lobby meeting, April, Brussels.

Other activities within the workplan cannot be scheduled at this point.

Part 2. NIS Sub-region of PERC:

COVID-19 has further affected the economies of NIS countries and trade union workflow, underlying weaknesses of the healthcare systems. Moreover, it has become a pretext (in rare cases reasonable, in other cases far-fetched) to refuse to hold trade union meetings and rallies as well as ordinary trade union gatherings in response to serious concerns of human and trade union rights breaches.

Ukraine: On 27 December, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine submitted to the Verkhovna Rada a new draft law on labour that would strip workers of legal protections, and unions of their ability to protect them. Other draft laws have been introduced by members of the Rada that will erode fundamental rights in breach of international standards. These legislative amendments were developed behind closed doors and without full and frank tripartite consultations with representative trade unions. (https://perc.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/ituc_etuc_to_ukrainian_authorities_re_draft_labour_law_0120.pdf). Ukrainian affiliates had to mobilise to take to the streets with protest and publicity actions. On the 16th of January,

an all-Ukrainian trade union meeting took place to form the strategy to combat the new set of labour laws. On the 25th of February, the ITUC announced a day of action to support Ukrainian unions. The ITUC and PERC encouraged solidarity actions for their Ukrainian affiliates, and this was responded to on a massive scale. On the 4th of March, following the resignation of the government, the draft law was withdrawn, but reintroduced later by the new government.

Russia: On the 15th of January, the Russian government resigned following the address of President Putin, when he announced coming social moves, mainly aimed at tackling poverty and demographic issues, but also changes in the Constitution. The newly appointed labour minister does not have any labour background. Among potential changes supported by the unions are introducing indexation of pensions and fixing the minimum wage to the subsistence level. However, there are controversial points: introducing priority to national legislation over international. FNPR representatives are in the working group. The people's voting on the proposed changes is scheduled for the 22nd of April, but that is pending the evolution of the pandemic and will probably be postponed to June.

Moldova: The government has introduced changes to the labour legislation, and, while the issues were discussed within the national social dialogue framework, no compromise was found, and the CNSM continues opposing those changes that weaken the guarantees for workers. Certification of the hazards' assessment laboratory of the CNSM labour inspection is an important milestone for the unions.

Kyrgyzstan: The new trade union law that breaches C87 passed two hearings. FPKg opposes this, but has limited capacities. It is torn by internal conflict between the current president and his opposition, conflict which worsened in March.

https://perc.ituc-csi.org/IMG/pdf/ituc_to_president_sooronbay_jeenbekov_re_draft_law_on_trade_unions_29102010.pdf

Kazakhstan: The head of FPRK was appointed vice prime minister. The congress is planned for October. The amendments to the labour and trade union law were voted by the lower chamber of the Parliament and submitted to the Senate. It is still premature to assess whether that will make the environment for independent unionism more conducive. Erlan Baltabay, who served five months in prison, was released on 20 March.

Azerbaijan: AHİK Chair Sattar Mehbaliyev was re-elected deputy in the Parliament.

Uzbekistan: The General Agreement for 2020-2022 was signed. The changes to the organisation of the agriculture (cotton) industry were taken that should eventually end "quotas" that incentivised the forced mobilisation of workers.

Georgia: Assisted by the GTUC, fifty-six former employees of a nitrogen factory in Rustavi have won back their jobs after a three-year legal battle with their employer, Rustavi Azot.

Publications:

ITUC Safeguard in MDB guidelines – publication in Russian

<https://perc.ituc-csi.org/Trudovye-standarty-v-mnogostoronnih-bankah-razvitiya-rychag-dlya-ukrepleniya>

“One belt – one road” FES publication in Russian

<https://perc.ituc-csi.org/SHelkovyj-put-Evraziya-i-Drevnij-Mir>

Part 3. SEE Office:

The western Balkan countries are facing COVID-19 in a way that all the capacities are in function in the current situation, primarily with the adoption of various strict measures aimed at protection of the health of the population, while trade unions prioritise protection of workers, jobs and the economies in their countries. The majority of trade unions have made the decision to protect their human resources and work from home. The activities planned within the U2U Project are postponed for a later time.

The western Balkan countries are waiting in the wings to join the EU. Croatia is the only country that has become an EU member, and in early 2020 began its EU presidency; the countries that are candidates expect the support from Croatia on their way of joining the EU. Based on Croatian national priorities, in line with the EU Strategic Agenda 2019-2024, Croatia has prepared its six-month presidency programme built around four pillars: a Europe that develops; a Europe that connects; a Europe that protects; and an influential Europe. The other Balkan countries have been told they can join the EU one day if they meet the “acquis communautaire”.

North Macedonia: On request of KSS bodies, the ITUC-PERC organised a legal clinic on 10-12 February 2020 in Skopje, with the aim to provide legal assistance related to the following: the violation of trade union rights to its work, the dismissal of the KSS president, the dismissal of several shop stewards; mobbing and pressures on the work of trade union representatives; and hindering KSS from participating in the work of ESC. KSS decided to file an appeal with the ILO CFA. The general situation in North Macedonia is marked by the forthcoming political elections, scheduled for April 2020.

Albania: In November 2019 Albania was hit by a strong earthquake and was affected by severe consequences, and trade unions experienced certain damages to their working premises. Even at that time, they began solidarity actions to help their citizens and trade union members.

Bosnia and Herzegovina: KSBIH, an affiliate of ITUC and PERC, functions, though in difficult circumstances, whereas only SSRS conducts significant trade union activities (wage campaign, improvement of OHS legislation implementation, collective bargaining, etc.), while two opposing groups in SSSBiH are still focused on the matter of who the SSSBiH president is.

Serbia: The general collective agreement is still not signed, while the government of Serbia fails to consult trade unions on social and economic policies.

Montenegro: Montenegro is making good progress in opening new chapters and is harmonising its legislation with EU standards.

Croatia: A strong earthquake shook Zagreb on 22 March. While no casualties were reported, the damage is serious and brings additional challenges to the city in the current COVID19 pandemic.

[\[1\]](#)The list of resources is available.

[\[2\] Prior to COVID19 outbreak; hence, will have to be adjusted.](#)