

Tirana Memorandum

Trade Union Memorandum on Health and Safety at Work

The Pan European Regional Council of the International Trade Union Confederation together with the ILO organized the regional OSH Network Meeting for the Balkan countries on 4-7 of October 2016 after country reports had highlighted a worsening in conditions of health and safety in the workplace in their region.

The OSH Balkan Regional Network Meeting, which was composed of trade union representatives from Albania, BIH, Croatia, Hungary, Macedonia, Kosovo, Montenegro, Romania and Serbia, discussed the recent developments in health and safety policies and practices, and the challenges and the steps that would be necessary to improve the situation and totally supports the Budapest Memorandum issued in August 2016 with the occasion of the ETUI Regional OSH Forum.

The reports indicated that the deterioration of health and safety practices ran parallel to changes in forms of employment and growth of precarious employment, while at the same time labour legislation had been amended in many countries, reducing workers' rights. They also showed that growing number of workers had been victims of work-related accidents and diseases, while the number of fatal accidents had increased - bringing not only misery and pain to many families but also exacting a high price for society as a whole.

The reasons for these trends are manifold, however the effects and cutbacks following the years of crisis, and a decline in political interest and the will to secure safe and healthy working conditions for all, are seen as major root causes. Trade unions find OSH-related cutbacks unacceptable and consider more investment in prevention and the development of hazard-free workplaces as vital for all stakeholders.

With this in mind we consider it imperative that trade unions not only play a greater role as supervisors on OSH matters, but must also strengthen their role through appropriate legislation if progress is to be achieved.

The downsizing of national OSH protection and inspection systems has greatly contributed to these negative trends. Some of the widely

seen discrepancies between the countries are caused by the lack of concrete strategies for prevention; the weakening of labour inspectorates and their role in the enforcement of OSH legislation and the non-transparent role of preventive and protective health services. This not only translates into worsening working conditions but also harms wider interests, leading to unfair competition as well as providing an ideal environment for social dumping.

We call for the strengthening of social dialogue and partnerships in the field of health and safety at work – following the best examples of other European Union countries. We call for the political will to fully implement the articles of the Framework Directive 89/391/EEC regarding “workers' representatives with specific responsibility for the safety and health of workers and prevention”. Vigorous systems of inspection, and enforcement of legislation through the cooperation of authorities, employers and trade unions are crucial to any sustainable improvement, and the potential for trade unions to promote workplace health and safety should be used at all levels, especially in times of shrinking resources. We consider the strengthening of the institution of workers’ safety representatives, to whom trade unions provide wide support, to be of key importance here.

However, to achieve these aims OSH has to first, be more accountable and second, eradicate the high level of underreporting of accidents and work-related illnesses. In particular, trade unions in the region see critical failures in risk assessment at SMEs. The exposure of workers to psychosocial risks, work-related cancers and MSDs is enormous. Therefore, we call for action!

- We need a genuine evaluation of the implementation of EU laws in OSH in these countries.
- We need an action plan for improvements in OSH working conditions in the region.
- We request political action to bring our workplaces into the 21st century!

Talking about decent work is not enough!

We need concrete action now!

Tirana, 7 October 2016