



**10th PERMANENT CONFERENCE  
OF THE EUROPEAN CAPITALS'  
TRADE UNION  
16<sup>th</sup>, 17<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup> SEPTEMBER 2010  
ATHENS**

**CONCLUSIONS ON OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH AND SAFETY  
(OHS)**

**OHS a challenging issue for the European Capitals' Trade Unions**

The 10<sup>th</sup> Permanent Conference of the European Capitals' Trade Unions held in Athens from 16-17 September 2010 had as its main topic the OHS, in order to highlight the specific aspects of working conditions in the European Capitals, due to the fact that the Capital cities play a special role in the countries' development.

1. Major occupational health problems include not only traditional questions such as physical, chemical and biological hazards, but also modern challenges, like physical and psychological stress, musculoskeletal disorders etc. The situation is worsening under the pretext of the economic crisis, which has led to new forms of work organization neglecting workers' health and safety, worsening industrial relations, creating unemployment and introducing flexible forms of work, precarious work etc. The cost in terms of human lives, health and physical integrity of workers is unbearable for them and their families.

## **2. All these happen because:**

3.1 Governments<sup>1</sup> do not pay the necessary attention and severity to the observance of the law and the implementation of measures for the prevention of professional risk, considering OHS as a marginal issue.

3.2 Employers do not undertake their responsibilities according to the legislation, seeing that they consider measures for the prevention of professional risks and workers protection, not as an investment but as an extra cost.

3.3 Social dialogue within companies is insufficient.

## **4. For the above reasons the 10<sup>th</sup> Permanent Conference of the European Capitals' Trade Unions, asks national, regional Governments and EU Authorities, to put OHS among the issues of first priority on their political agenda and to act accordingly.**

## **5. Common aspects of OHS at the European Capitals**

5.1 Despite legislation and the improvement made during the last decades at scientific and technological level, the situation in terms of OHS ranges from mediocre to alarming.

5.2 Liberal and conservative policies have contributed to a weakening of OHS and deregulation of the relevant legislation.

5.3 Employers do not undertake their responsibilities according to the law.

5.4 Despite the fact that the role of Labor Inspectorate in improving working conditions and reducing professional risks is decisive, is not adequately supported by the state.

5.5 Constructions, industry (chemical, mine, metallurgic, ship repair and shipyard, transports, slaughterhouse), are sectors with the most serious problems.

5.6 In the services and the public sector apart from traditional problems new factors of deteriorating working conditions appear, such as: stress, musculoskeletal disorders, psychological problems etc.

5.7 Workers of all sectors are exposed to physical and psychological stress.

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<sup>1</sup> Governments of any level

- 5.8 Commuting workers are exposed to additional risk of accidents as they move daily from home to work and vice versa.
- 5.9 Workers in SME' s and Micro Companies are usually exposed to poor working conditions, due to the lack of resources dedicated to OHS and due to weak or inexistent trade union representation.
- 5.10 Young and aged workers, immigrants and women are more exposed to professional risks, labor accidents and professional diseases.
- 5.11 Subcontracting, outsourcing, part time work, flexible timetables, precarious work etc deteriorate working conditions and increase professional risks.
- 5.12 Bad working conditions affect all those involved in the working process regardless of the hierarchy.
- 5.13 Both public and private sector workers have problems related to OHS.
- 5.14 Domestic workers constitute a marginal group concerning their labor rights and their working conditions.
- 5.15 European Capitals face the question of undocumented workers, who work with very low wage, in conditions sometimes inhuman and, the most of the time without any respect of their rights. Such workers one can meet facing heavy working conditions in sectors such as: construction, cleaning, agriculture, HORECA<sup>2</sup> etc. It should be useful to reflect on how trade unions could defend these workers.

## **6. Effects of the economic crisis on working conditions in European Capitals**

Using the crisis as a pretext and aiming at low labor cost, Governments and Companies deregulate labor relations, disregard labor law and abolish the social state. Under the same pretext of the crisis, they cut funds for OHS and the prevention of professional risks, introducing restructuring, changes in the organization of work, which modifies working conditions and worsens them.

Various companies downsize their personnel, obliging the remaining workers to have with fewer people the same productivity as previously. Others have to execute works

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<sup>2</sup> HORECA: Hotel, Restaurant and Catering

without having the necessary qualification. This creates stress at work which leads to labor accidents and other problems at the work place.

All the above leave workers in the European capitals unprotected, worsening their working conditions.

## **7. Tools to improve working conditions**

7.1 Permanent inclusion of OHS issues in the social dialogue and collective negotiations.

7.2 Launching of awareness campaigns dealing with prevention of labour accidents and professional diseases, as well as with issuing of publications to inform workers of the new risks and risk prevention.

7.3 Creation of open access points where workers are offered assistance and help, particularly about work-related diseases (mobbing, burn out, stress etc.)

7.4 Organization of informative meetings in schools, as a way to send the message to future workers before they begin their labor activity.

7.5 Organization of training courses to update the relevant information on legislation and good practices for all trade unionists and all workers' representatives.

7.6 Promotion of the elections at all workplaces of the Committees for OHS and Safety Representatives. Special attention must be given to SME' s and Micro Companies.

7.7. Agreements with the Local and Legislative Authorities to address the prevention (safety courses and information) and to improve controls and enforcement particularly in construction.

7.8 Promotion and support of scientific research on the topics of health and safety at the workplace carried out by public bodies, universities etc.

7.9 Creation of networks of workers in charge with OHS.

7.10 Social, moral and economic rehabilitation of victims of labor accidents and of professional diseases.

7.11 Employers and companies who break the law on OHS should be punished and their names publicized.

7.12 Elimination of public lowest bid tendering which usually is at the expense of preventive measures for workers protection.

7.13 Green technologies should be examined also from the workers' safety point of view.

7.14 Workers' representatives should control the creation of a register for the prevention of professional risks which should be public and regularly updated.

7.15 To indicate in the list of workers affected by professional diseases and pshycological risks those who are the more exposed.

7.16 To consider OHS issues from the gender point of view.

7.17 To vindicate obligatory replacement within companies of the workers who are under medical restrictions or they are affected by professional diseases. These costs must be undertaken by the company.

7.18 To raise the question of funding of the development of a new health policy within companies and a new credit policy with the involvement of the ECB and the central national banks.

## **8. Perspectives of cooperation**

8.1 Participation in European projects relevant to OHS.

8.2 Co-operation in relation to forthcoming OHS initiatives from the EU and creation to this end of bilateral or multilateral partnerships.

8.3 Co-operation in the international workers Memorial Day (28<sup>th</sup> April) and in the European Week of Action in autumn each year.

8.4 Sharing of best practices, safety initiatives, surveys on risk perception in European Capitals using the site: [www.workandsafety.eu](http://www.workandsafety.eu)