



European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)
Confédération européenne des syndicats (CES)

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(Check against delivery)

Madam Minister,
Dear friends,

I have followed with great attention and great pleasure the debates of the day. I would like to pay tribute to our hosts who made us feel comfortable and made sure that the discussion could develop in a positive and friendly atmosphere. We are indeed very grateful that they gave the right and recognised place to our ASEM social partners' forum.

In organising this meeting you have recognised the importance of social dialogue between trade unions and employers. We might not always agree with employers but we encourage them to be fully engaged in this forum.

In order to be a lively one social dialogue needs to be listened to. The points that we made today should be heard and, as far as possible, integrated in the conclusions of the ministers tomorrow.

One thing is for us totally certain: we are all interdependent. The economic and financial crisis in Europe does not affect only European citizens and workers. It affects populations in Asia who see their export capacity reduced and consequently, perspective for further development and employment affected.

When we, in the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) make proposals to end the current crisis we have also this interdependence in mind.

Our discussions concentrated on essential issues for workers and employers: decent jobs and sustainable growth, corporate social responsibility, health and safety, social protection and skills development. The Vice President of the ITUC, Luc Cortebeek has summarised our views in his inaugural comments, these views have been developed during the round tables. All these subjects are key to the daily life of workers and must contribute to shaping companies' and governments' policies on employment and social matters.

I hope that our views can still be reflected in the conclusions of the ministers meeting tomorrow.

In my concluding remarks, I would like to insist on four points.

First, it is very clear to us that the social dimension of economic policies is not taken sufficiently into consideration.

Economic policies are not a game in mathematics. Decisions from the EU troika and errors from IMF civil servants translate into jobs lost, despair, lives broken. Economists must be called to order in this respect. The right solutions have not yet been implemented. These solutions would necessitate a political will to stop casino capitalism which is making billions of euros or dollars for itself and no longer serves the real economy, and real people. We should never forget that so called innovative financing degenerated into an extremely risky and untransparent system which collapsed in 2008. This system must be completely overhauled.

Employment is crucial indeed, decent employment. This is our focus. Employment creating initiatives must be supported. To do that, we need investments, particularly investments towards sustainable infrastructures. We need investments for sustainable growth. My colleague from employer side spoke about jobs without quality of jobs. I would remind here that the number of working poors is increasing. A job that does not give a person the possibility to have a decent life with his wage is not a decent job.

To overcome the crisis we are told that structural reforms are essential. We should define what we mean through structural reforms. If structural reforms are summarised in word flexicurity, turn to be capacity to hire and fire without rules, then governments will face heavy resistance. If structural reforms are meant to adapt rules to current need, to have active labour market policies then these structural reforms should be the subject of dialogue and negotiations between social partners.

Second. Social policies should not be just an addition to economic policies. On the contrary decisions on economic policies should be made according to social values, including the fight against inequalities and improved social protection for all.

If an economic policy is not fostering more equality, but promoting more inequalities, it cannot be a good economic policy. If an economic policy considers that wages are simply an economic burden, rather than a means of improving the quality of workers' life, then these policies are wrong.

If an economic policy sees the cost of health and safety and social protection as a luxury and an impediment to competitiveness, then this policy misses the point: the point is health and safety is a primary human right. The point is also that workers who feel protected and confident in their future are more committed, more confident and more productive.

It is because we believe that economic policies should be made on the basis of social values that the European Trade Union Confederation calls on European policy makers to adopt and implement not only a growth pact but a social compact for Europe.

This social compact we want to apply is made of social dialogue and negotiations, it is made of economic governance directed towards sustainable growth and jobs, and it is made of economic and social justice.

Third people and workers in particular should not be played against each other. Core labour standards must be respected if a fair trade is to exist. When we speak about core labour standards we speak of the ILO ones. They are there to be implemented, not to be interpreted according to national circumstances.

As you will know, the EU is currently involved in trade and investment discussions with a number of countries in the region, including with our hosts today – Vietnam.

The ETUC believes that trade and investment can help relaunch growth, so long as the deals are equitable, reciprocal, and aim towards development for people on all sides.

We have in particular been supportive of inter-regional agreements that bring trade within the wider context of cooperation agreements. However, EU discussions with ASEAN as a whole - that had been proposed initially - have not gone forward for a number of reasons, including the diverse nature of the ASEAN group, as well as the Burma-Myanmar issue.

Though the first aspect has changed little, recent developments in relation to the second, Burma, have been welcome by us - though we must remain cautious. We believe that the reinstatement of the EU's Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) should be linked to the adoption of business and human rights legislation and tangible progress in implementation. New business in Burma should support the long-term economic and social development of the nation. We believe that the EU should *require* corporations doing business there to apply the UN's Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises. This recommendation on CSR should certainly be implemented by all companies in all countries.

So far as bilateral Free Trade Agreements are concerned, the ETUC has insisted that Sustainable Development Chapters covering labour and environmental concerns should be included in each FTA. In regard to labour issues, we want to see binding commitments by all parties to ratify and fully implement ILO standards, notably the core conventions covering freedom of association and collective bargaining, non-discrimination and child labour. At the same time there should be monitoring structures including independent civil society representatives – notably from the social partners – to follow the implementation of those provisions. A similar approach should be taken towards the stand-alone investment treaties that are being mooted.

The EU-Korea FTA was the first to move in that direction. It is early days but we think that it can show the way, if each side engages in good faith. We are concerned that the monitoring process in Korea is leaving important stakeholders aside. In the current and forthcoming negotiations with countries in the ASEM region, including our host country Vietnam, we are looking forwards to a similar approach, including respect of core labour standards and monitoring processes.

Finally I would like to remind all of us that humanity is made of men and women, that equality between us is a fundamental right.

Equality goes through education, through the possibility of having a family and a job, through capacity to have economic independence, and the capacity to take part in all decision making processes, including at the highest level. Trade unions, in Europe, still have a job on their hands. Our statistics show improvement, but certainly no perfection. We know for sure that equality is easier to put on paper than to implement. Equality requires good public services, good

jobs, constructive dialogue and political will. We also know that equality is not only right but it is beneficial to the economy. Equality should not be the victim of the world economic crisis.

Friends, we will not solve all these questions in one day, not in one month, not in one year, but we all contribute through our daily work to guiding processes and solutions towards certain aims and we should continue to cooperate for a better future.

Once again, we welcome the ASEM social partner' forum and ask for the establishment of an ASEM Labour forum, operating on an equal footing as the existing ASEM Business forum.

We welcome the reference to our debates that ministers will make in their own conclusions tomorrow.

On behalf of the International and European trade union movement, I would like to thank the organisers, The European Commission, the ministry of labour and the Vietnamese social partners to have invited us here to discuss ahead of the ministers' meeting. I hope that we will have further opportunities in the future.

Thank you for your attention.