



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

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**European Action Day**

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## **European Action Day**

Greetings from the European Trade Union Confederation. These three Spring Days, the trade unions of Europe are on the march.

From the north to the south, from east to west, the unions are demonstrating their will, their determination to fight the crisis.

We originally planned 4 major European demonstrations. Now it is up to seven, as Bucharest, Luxembourg and Birmingham today join the protests:

- the protests against the greed, the sleaze and looting of money by some top executives;
- the protests against the bonuses of the bankers;
- the protests against the selfish short-termism of far too many in the boardrooms.

All this bad behaviour is just not down to the conduct of individuals, although there is plenty of bad conduct by individuals.

And it is just not down to a system which permitted bad practices to thrive in the margin.

No, this has been a system expressly designed to make rich people richer and trade unions weaker; a system designed to make welfare states cheaper and inequality greater; a system of shareholder value designed in the Reagan–Thatcher era but continued ever since; a system centred in the English-speaking world in New York and London but infecting every where.

Well now this system has had a heart attack. And it is workers who are paying the price – with their taxes, with their wages, and worst of all, as unemployment soars, with their jobs.

I used to call it casino capitalism but then I realised that casinos are more honestly run than many banks – and more effectively regulated.

We are saying today that the European authorities, including national governments, are too timid in the face of the crisis, too nervous to respond with the ambition and imagination that is required.

We want a real recovery plan coordinated across the EU. The European Union is like a European trade union; whenever we do things together, we are more effective, more powerful and more impressive than if we act separately.

And together, we can fight the ultranationalists and extremists who are emerging to push national solutions at the expense of neighbouring

countries, immigrants and minorities. We are all vividly aware of the disaster of the 1930s when the dictators pushed democracy aside and went to war. The European Union was designed to make impossible a repeat of those mistakes. But it will now be tested and we must think and act in a European way, not just protecting ourselves and our own.

So, as part of a New Social Deal, we propose European-wide investment in green technologies, in public transport and energy, innovation and research and development; we want quick acting help for workers – subsidies and *Kurzarbeit* to stop them becoming unemployed; help with training and education; top class public employment services. We want to stop free movement of services in the EU sweeping aside collective agreements; and equal pay for work of equal value in every country.

And we want the rich and comfortable to pay their fair share of the rescue and recovery plans. Did you see the news from London recently? The top rate of tax was increased and a long list of businessmen said they were moving to Switzerland.

Well, as far as I am concerned, Switzerland is welcome to them. We can do without their lack of civic values, of community spirit and of interest in helping solve the problems which they themselves helped to create.

For trade unions and workers, this crisis is a disaster and there is no exit or exile option for them. But it is also an opportunity. This heart attack of neo-liberalism, of financial capitalism, gives us a new chance to rebuild the social market which has been retreating for years. Now it can advance again. As Roosevelt said in 1933, ‘never waste a good crisis’.

But it will be a battle between those who say ‘back to business as usual’ and those who say ‘never again’. We urgently need European leaders who, like President Obama, support trade unions as part of the solution! We need more social Europe, less (neo)liberal Europe!

We say never again. We say yes to recovery, yes to a renaissance of trade union influence, yes to the social market economy, and yes to fight the crisis. We will not suffer in silence. We will fight.

Thank for your support. And thank you to the DGB and all its affiliates.