

Brussels / November 22 2023

MANIFESTO OF THE EUROPEAN CONFEDERATION ON INDEPENDENT TRADE UNIONS (CESI) ON THE EU ELECTIONS 2024

**ADOPTED BY THE
PRESIDIUM OF CESI**

The European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CESI) is a confederation of more than 40 national and European trade union organisations from over 20 European countries, with a total of more than 5 million individual members. Founded in 1990 and a European sectoral social partner, CESI advocates improved employment conditions for workers in Europe and a strong social dimension in the EU. Most of CESI's affiliates are employed in the different fields of the European, national, regional & local public services, and in privatised services of general interest. CESI also represents private sector unions.

CESI encourages all affiliates and citizens to vote in the upcoming EU elections in June 2024.

The benefits that the EU has brought to citizens, consumers, workers and business far outweighs any drawbacks.

In 2023, as it needs to master a perma- und polycrisis, the EU stands at a crossroads. The management of inflation which compromises the purchasing power of citizens and their families, the continued public health and financial fallout of the Covid pandemic, the ongoing need to integrate migrants in society and labour markets, permanent threats to internal public order, and most recently a war in Ukraine require a decisive pro-European vote that will enable the EU to deliver. There must be no room for populism or political extremism, which offers seemingly easy solutions to very complex challenges.

During its term from 2024 to 2029, the EU will need to continue crisis management, and it will need to continue to work for rule of law and values of liberal democracy in all its Member States. It will also face further developments in its enlargement of EU accession candidate countries, which would require first an internal reform of the EU's institutional and decision-making architecture. The basis for all is a strong EU that can defend its security. Without military security, economic and social security are not possible.

In June 2024, the EU requires a strong pro-European backing from all citizens in the EU.

Specific policy priorities of the European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CESI) on the occasion of the EU elections in June 2024

1. Build inclusive social dialogue and trade union pluralism

CESI positively notes the European Commission's communication of January 2023 on strengthening EU level social dialogue and the Council's Recommendation with suggestions for the Member States to reinforce social dialogue at the national level of June 2023. However, to further strengthen inclusive social dialogue:

- **The European Commission must revise its take on social partner autonomy and its Decision 98/500/EC** to ensure that all organisations that are found to be representative in Eurofound representativeness studies can become recognised EU social partners and accede to the relevant EU social dialogue committees. The current practice of letting established social partners decide on the entry of new representative organisations does not work.
- **The EU institutions must offer equal access to funding for capacity building of European social partner organisations.** The current practice of the European Commission to offer different levels of funding for social partner organisations is arbitrary, discriminatory and violates the EU Treaties. In the context of the upcoming MFF, it is imperative that available EU funding for the capacity building of trade unions is expanded rather than slashed.
- **The EU institutions should ensure an equal access for all trade union organisations to employment and social policy-making consultations, hearings and conferences.** The current practice of offering a two-tier level of involvement of trade union organisations is discriminatory and violates the EU Treaties. It also hinders the quality of legislative output of the EU when only some trade union organisations are heard and the views and ideas of other not.
- **The EU must to take decisive action to ensure that no measures are taken by governments against trade unions and social partners** that are not line with the European Social Charter and the EU's Council Recommendation on strengthening social dialogue, especially when it comes to taking measures, when both trade union representatives and elected worker representatives are present in the same undertaking, to ensure that the existence of elected worker representatives is not used to undermine the positions of the trade unions concerned or of their representative. Trade unionism and trade unions have been under attack for different reasons in several Member States countries, including Hungary. Towards EU accession candidate countries, the EU should insist that compliance with EU acquis on trade union rights and social dialogue is unconditional to become a Member State.

2. Build the EU acquis in employment and social affairs

The EU legislative term 2019-2024 has seen important social and employment legislation to improve the working conditions of employees in Europe. This include new directives on minimum wages, women on boards and pay transparency. While no new EU initiative should be regarded as an excuse for lacking action by governments at the national level, the EU should further build its acquis in employment and social affairs. Most notably:

- **The EU should set up a New Social Deal to attain the objectives of the European Pillar of Social Rights**, equivalent to the legally binding New Green Deal that the European Commission envisages. A New Social Deal must ensure effective measures to fight poverty, promote decent employment and fair wages, end precarious work in traditional and new forms of work, and ensure that digitalisation processes and green policies will not bring adverse effects to workers and their families.
- **The EU directives on fixed-term work, part-time work and temporary agenda work should be revised**. Currently, they still feature loopholes that provide for discrimination vis-à-vis permanent employees which goes beyond aspects of a time-wise restriction or limitation of contracts. Precarious work contracts concern the private sector as well as parts of the public sector.
- **The EU directives on public procurement and concessions and the EU regulations on State Aid should be updated** to make the application of criteria for decent work in public procurement procedures obligatory. No public money should be handed down to a company that does not respect the right of workers to join trade unions, that does not pay its staff minimum wages and apply an adequate collective agreement, and that does not respect further core social and labour rights including in the area of occupational health and safety. This is a major instrument to improve employment and working conditions especially in the private sector.
- **The EU should pursue further sectoral regulation to ensure decent working conditions in specific evolving economic sectors**. This includes the adoption of an ambitious new EU directive on fair working conditions in the platform economy which is currently under negotiation.
- **The EU needs to develop a directive on the digitalisation of working environments**, to complement national level efforts by Member States. This directive should ensure that digitalisation processes are done with workers and not to workers. The directive needs to ensure minimum standards on mobile working and home office, a right to disconnect, the use of worker-friendly artificial intelligence on the job, and the protection of privacy from undue digital surveillance. It should be complementary to the EU's new Digital Services Act and Digital Markets Act, which defines legal liabilities of online platform companies but does not directly touch on worker rights. The existing European social partner agreement on digitalisation in central government administration (see below) can serve as inspiration to this end.

- **EU information and consultation rights of workers should be further enhanced** by a revision of the European Works Council (EWC) Directive, with a view to strengthening their role. EWCs must be empowered to make a meaningful contribution to restructuring processes in cross-border companies. The EU should also review its information and consultation framework directive to assess if it is still fit for purpose or should be strengthened.
- **The EU should further support education-to-work transitions for workers by banning precarious traineeships.** All curriculum-traineeships should be subject to adequate working conditions, occupational health and safety, working time, mentoring and learning outcomes and an allowances for expenses so that young people can take up traineeships regardless of their family's financial background. Beyond this, all post-curriculum traineeships should be paid at least at minimum wage level.
- **The EU should step up its efforts to support Member States, authorities and social partners to end violence against workers.** This concerns violence and harassment at the workplace by colleagues and management as well as third-party violence. The EU social partners' multisectoral guidelines to tackle third-party violence and harassment related to work should find a broader application in particular in the public sector areas of public administrations, education, health care, security and justice. However, they should be a role model for employees in the private sector too.
- **In an EU Single Market with free movement of labour, there is a strong role of the EU to set the frame for ethical, sustainable and fair labour migration in Europe** and help balance out push and pull factors of labour migration and address its complex and diverse socio-economic consequences. Immigration may help to meet skills shortages in the labour markets of Member States with the most advantageous working conditions and social protection coverage, but adverse effects of brain drain are severe for the countries of origin. These face depopulation of vast regions that are left un-serviced and deprived. In time, this widens financial disparities, living standards and economic performances between more and less advantaged countries and regions in the EU. EU cohesion policy and the EU's structural and investment funds as well as the EU neighbourhood policy should be sensitised to mitigate causes and consequences of brain drain.

3. Build a strong public sector agenda for Europe

Sustainable societies depend on strong and efficient public services. However, liberalisation and privatisation as well as budget and personnel cuts across public services and administrations in Europe have taken their toll during the perma- and polycrisis that Europe has been facing during the last years – from migration and integration challenges to the Covid pandemic and internal and external security threats. Experience has shown that the while the public sector is truly ‘essential’, many public services and administrations are not sufficiently resourced, staffed and trained to manage unexpected and severe crises. Public services in Europe must not be caught off guard and ill-prepared. This concerns especially remote, peripheral and low-populated regions in the EU that depend disproportionally on the availability of quality public services for their economic development and environmental preservation. The EU needs to build, maintain and strengthen an agenda for performing public services throughout. To make public services work:

- **The EU should encourage Member States to build, maintain and strengthen an agenda for performing public services** through policy tools such as the European Semester and applicable EU funding programmes for capacity building including the NextGenerationEU. The EU should highlight, more than before, the urgent need for adequate investments in administrations and public services and their personnel, in order to make them crisis-proof. This applies to higher staff levels and better employment and work conditions (including higher pay and pensions for many underpaid jobs, improved work-life balance, enhanced promotion schemes and more opportunities for voluntary professional mobility) as well as to up-to-speed equipment and modern facilities, not least also to better attract and retain talented public sector personnel.
- **The European economic governance framework must be adjusted to meet investment needs while safeguarding sustainable public finance.** For this:
 - i. Deficits to no more than 3% of the national GDP and public debt levels to below 60% of national GDP should remain the target for all Member States in the European economic governance. At the same time, EU economic governance rules should take a more flexible and stronger anticyclical approach than in the past. Experience has shown that budgetary consolidation should above all be pursued during times of economic booms, and investments should be implemented especially as a tool to fight recessions.
 - ii. EU economic governance should be revised to enable Member States to engage in expenditures when they promise to yield – as investments – higher returns in the future. This applies above all to investments in the public sector and administrations. For this:
 1. EU economic governance should feature a Gold Rule to exempt from deficit calculations certain investments in public services that are required for their crisis resilience and continued performance. Those expenditures in public services are not merely costs, they are investments in the future.
 2. The EU should further work with the Member States for fair corporate taxation and to raise taxation revenues from unethical tax avoidance and illicit tax evasion and increase capital taxation vis-à-vis taxes on labour to help finance investments in public services.

- **The EU should encourage Member States to consider more re-communalisations, stressing the role of public services to guarantee the well-being of people and to make societies resilient to crises**, rather than continue to pursue a unilateral dogmatic agenda of further market openings in services of general economic interest. The crises that Europe has been experiencing has again unearthed negative impacts of uncompromising market liberalisation and privatisations in many areas of the public sector. This concerns both the quality of service delivery and the quality of employment and working conditions.
- **The EU should further support the development and implementation of comprehensive and effective training programmes for public service personnel.** These programmes should focus on crisis management, resilience, and the adaptation to evolving challenges. There should be a standardised and continuous and effective training framework to ensure that public service employees really do have the necessary skills and knowledge to effectively respond to the challenges and crises that they perform in.

4. Ensure adequate support for the different public services

Reflecting the diversity of the different fields of public services in Europe, targeted and specific measures are necessary to provide quality services in the different parts of the public sector. Many of them refer to a need for higher levels of staff recruitment and retention, inter alia by means of better employment and working conditions. To better support the different fields of public services in Europe:

- In the area of *public administrations*, **the EU must take forward an existing social partner agreement on digitalisation in central government administration in order to convert it into a Council Directive that is binding in all Member States.** This would bring important minimum standards for central government administration workers in the areas of teleworking, mental health and safety, skills development, data management and protection, and the use of artificial intelligence. It could serve as a role model for *local and regional administrations*, too.
- In the particular area of *tax administrations*, **the EU must take further measures in the context of the Directive on administrative cooperation (DAC) to ensure seamless digital and physical exchanges and mutual exchange programmes among tax administration personnel** of the different Member States. The EU must also further encourage Member States to higher adequate numbers of tax administration personnel to effectively detect and pursue cases of tax evasion.

- In the area of *education*, **the EU must strive to improve the employment and working conditions of teachers in many Member States** in order to attract, recruit and retain more talented young persons into this occupational field and counter teacher shortages. This is especially true for the areas of VET, lifelong learning, and the education of adults. The EU should also take additional measures to support a better public recognition and appreciation of the work of teachers and to mitigate violence in the education sector, especially also third-party violence against teachers.
- In the area of *health care services*, **the EU should strive to implement patient-to-staff ratios**, in order to ensure a sufficient level of staff to ensure quality health care service delivery. In the health sector of Member States across the EU, pay is poor especially for nurses and working conditions are intense – at the expense of quality care. As part of an implementation of the EU Care Strategy, the EU should use patient-to-staff ratios to push Member State to improve working conditions for health care staff and invest in additional personnel.
- In the area of *defence*, **the EU security policy tools must incorporate a social dimension and a voice of military staff representatives in their governance**. This relates above all to the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) as well as its European Defence Union, Defence Strategic Compass and Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) in Defence. So far, EU frameworks for joint military operations and missions are planned and executed largely without common working conditions for military staff from different Member States and without any involvement of staff and military staff unions.
- **In the area of *telecoms and postal services*, the EU must maintain the universal service obligations (USOs) fixed in the postal services directive and extent them to the parcel delivery market.** The growing number of personnel in the parcel delivery sector currently works in highly precarious and stressful conditions, and USOs help set safeguards for decent employment.
- In the area of *justice and security*, **the EU should strive to further encourage adequate salaries, social recognition and effective occupational health and safety for staff in police forces and firefighting and civil protection authorities**. For prison officers in particular, Member States should be encouraged to clarify their official status as authority agents. Generally, privatisations in the justice and security sectors do not promise to lead to better services or improved working conditions for personnel.