

# Istanbul Memorandum

Following our conference in Istanbul from 3-5 May 2017, the metalworkers' trade unions of the European countries in the Mediterranean area hereby commit to continuing the joint action begun recently.

We must work to reduce the deep divides in our region which have widened still further despite the ongoing European drive for integration; a drive which has lost momentum due to the primacy of economic and social convergence policies in individual countries (both EU members and candidates). We must also counteract the short-sighted view which has caused Europe to lose the Mediterranean, an area wrongly considered to be on the fringes of globalisation. Quite the opposite is true: this area is in fact being restored to its position as a strategic region, more due to the proactivity of countries such as China, India and Russia than to renewed interest on the part of the EU.

However, this is also an area that has been ravaged by war and terrorism, leaving it unable to manage international tensions without the use of weapons and incapable of dealing with the refugee crisis and migratory flows. Once a crossroads of civilisations, the Mediterranean Sea has become a graveyard. The quest for peace, protection for democratic and free institutions and respect for the rights of migrants are issues which, for the trade unions as for anybody else, distinguish a civilised society.

In this complex geopolitical context, metalworkers in different countries find themselves experiencing similar problems and challenges despite their different trade union cultures and ideas. These problems range from the increasing influence of multinational corporations to digitalisation, from more precarious employment to global supply and sub-contracting chains, from the need to increase productivity per hour of labour to decent pay, and from automation to employment protection.

Although metalworkers in the Euro-Mediterranean area share a number of problems and challenges, their systems of industrial relations, collective bargaining or welfare can differ. This means that there are no joint instruments for responding to company policy, nor are trade unions equally strong in all countries. Trade union strength can be gauged according to two indicators: trade union density (number of trade union members in the workforce) and bargaining coverage (percentage of workers covered by collective agreements).

A country-by-country analysis nonetheless reveals that negative trends in these two indicators have occurred both in the Euro-Mediterranean economies hardest hit by the crisis (i.e. Greece, Portugal, Spain and Italy) and in countries like Turkey which have witnessed extraordinary economic growth, increased industrial production and unprecedented levels of global trade. Although company profits in Turkey have skyrocketed, the amount of wealth, which filters down to workers, has shrunk.

This has caused injustice, a concentration of wealth and rising social inequalities, even in a context of strong economic growth. That is why the working class cannot allow itself to be divided by national interests. National trade unions need to work together. We must increase our actions outside of national borders and coordinate better among ourselves. As such, we need to make organisational changes to facilitate participation and democracy. We also need to instil a lasting sense of solidarity between workers of all countries. The solidarity and joint action, which we build up, will be our source of strength in the future.

The time has come to build new bridges and break down both old and new walls, first and

foremost between workers and metalworkers' trade unions in the Euro-Mediterranean area. At a time when the interests of banks and multinational companies override those of nation-states, trade union action needs to rise up from the workplace and step out into the global arena in order to be effective. This trade unionism will remain strongly rooted in the workplace, with its feet firmly planted in factories, workshops, research centres, logistics departments etc.

We need to realise from the outset that the types of company policies, investment strategies, new manufacturing systems, technological and organisational changes, ergonomics and other elements implemented by companies are often the exact it in every country. However, while some multinational companies operate at global level as *One Big Company*, trade unions in the different countries continue to react in a fragmented manner, and are often divided among themselves. At our Istanbul conference what has emerged is the need for trade unions to be able to speak with one voice: "*One Big Union*" for every "*One Big Company*", in accordance with the IndustriALL Global Union work programme.

In order to do this, we first need to get to know each other and understand the situation pertaining to labour and agreements in each country. We need to help each other and share experiences, finding a basis for joint action which we can all approve. During the conference three domains in which to work were identified:

- <sup>1.</sup> 1. Company-level and sectoral collective bargaining (monitor changes in content and the scope of the agreement, exchange information and experiences, coordinate actions to promote solidarity);
2. Multinational companies (map their presence in the Mediterranean area, including the African and Middle Eastern coasts, set up new EWCs and strengthening existing ones, create and empower Global Union Networks, negotiate and implement the GFAs (Global Framework Agreements), solidarity campaigns;
3. Industrial and sectoral policies (monitor trade policies in the Euro-Mediterranean area and investment policies in the automotive, aerospace, household appliances, electronics/ICT and steelwork sectors etc.)

<sup>4.</sup> The following suggestions were made to achieve these aims:

1. Establish a technical headquarters in Izmir (Turkey) and observatory in Rome (Italy) - within SindNova - on the metalwork industry in the Mediterranean area;
2. Set up a steering committee with a representative from each trade union who will meet in Izmir by July to draw up the work programme from now up until the next Euro-Mediterranean Conference in May 2018.

<sup>3.</sup> This project is still "under construction": we welcome the suggestions and involvement of all metalworkers' unions in the area, including any unions who could not attend the Conference due to organisational reasons despite being interested or those who did not share in the intents and purposes of the conference. All the participants at the Istanbul Conference expressed their willingness to work together in a spirit of unity, inclusion and respect for the diverse voices in the region and in each country.

Istanbul, 5 May 2017

The background of the page is a faded, high-angle photograph of the Hagia Sophia in Istanbul. The large central dome and several minarets are visible, with the building's intricate architectural details softened by the light overlay.

## **TRADE UNION SIGNATORIES OF THE ISTANBUL MEMORANDUM**

### **BOSNIA-ERZEGOVINA**

SMBIH - Metal Workers' Union of Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina

### **FRANCE**

FGMM-CFDT

### **ITALY**

FIM-CISL

### **KOSSOVO**

SPMH

### **MONTENEGRO**

FTUMM - Trade Union of Metalworkers of Montenegro

### **SERBIA**

Autonomous Metal Workers Union of Serbia AMUS

IER Nezavisnost

Serbian Trade Union of Industry

### **SPAIN**

FICA-UGT

USO Industry

### **TURKEY**

TURK Metal