



NORDIC IN

Stockholm, 5 May 2009

Mr José Manuel Barroso
President of the European Commission
Brussels, Belgium

By e-mail only

EU'S EASTERN PARTNERSHIP AND TRADE UNION RIGHTS IN BELARUS

Dear Mr Barroso,

During the past years, Nordic trade unions have been involved in activities to support independent trade unions in Belarus. Now as the European Union has extended an invitation to the Belarusian government to attend the Eastern Partnership Summit on 7 May in Prague, we want to draw your attention to continuing serious problems regarding trade union rights in Belarus.

The attached recent statement by the Baltic Sea Trade Union Network (BASTUN) illustrates the situation well. Despite some positive steps taken with the help of the ILO to develop tripartite dialogue, progress on the ground is very limited. Incidents of discrimination of free and independent trade unions are frequent. There are still difficulties to register local and regional union organisations. Perhaps the most efficient tool for intimidation is the fact that 90 percent of jobs are on fixed-term contracts, and 90 percent of employment is government-controlled.

Mr Barroso, with this background, the invitation seems premature to us. However, now that it is a fact, we urge the EU to take up these matters at the Summit. Only continuous pressure on the Belarusian government to implement the recommendations of the ILO Commission of Inquiry will help the democratic forces in Belarus. Human and trade union rights must be part and parcel of any partnership programme.

Yours Sincerely,

Nordic IN

Stefan Löfven
President

Jyrki Raina
General Secretary

Note: Nordic IN is a regional trade union federation, whose 22 affiliated unions represent 1.2 million workers in metal, chemical, paper and textile industries in Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Norway and Iceland.

cc *Commissioner Benita Ferrero-Waldner, Czech Presidency, Nordic governments, ETUC, Belarusian unions*



Need for Better Trade Union Rights in Belarus

BASTUN Statement, 16-17 April, 2009, Minsk, Belarus

We, the representatives of Baltic Sea Trade Union Network (BASTUN) involving 22 trade union confederations from Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Germany, Poland, Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia and Russia affiliating more than 11 million members, have been closely watching the situation with regard to trade union rights in Belarus.

We note with regret that for years the ILO Conventions № 87 on freedom of association and protection of the right to organize and № 98 on the right to organize and bargain collectively have not been fully respected, although these Conventions have been ratified by Belarus. The authorities have deliberately been creating various obstacles so as to prevent the establishment of new independent union organizations in the country. They have been interfering in trade union affairs and activities and continued to cultivate favoritism in the trade union movement and to tolerate discrimination on the grounds of union affiliation.

The situation with regard to trade union rights in Belarus was brought to the attention of the ILO and was thoroughly examined by the ILO Commission of Inquiry in 2004. The Commission drew up 12 recommendations addressed to the Belarus Government with the aim of eliminating violations of workers' and trade unions' rights. The ILO Committee of Freedom of Association last reviewed the situation in Belarus in March 2007. Even though some positive steps have been taken, the progress has been very limited and incidences of anti-trade union discrimination and suppression have continued.

Violations became possible mainly due to the short-term employment contracts that have been widely practiced by the Government since 2004 in order to intimidate workers and employees and to keep them in strict obedience to the regime and, in particular, to the employers. BASTUN strongly urges the Government to take measures to reconsider the situation with labor contracts and to bring it into line with internationally recognized standards

Alongside this, BASTUN affiliates note that the Belarus Government has recently intensified its efforts to establish constructive dialogue with the International Labor Organization and independent unions on issues concerning the implementation of ILO recommendations. A number of joint seminars and workshops have been held on freedom of association issues as well as the recent seminar on the implementation of ILO recommendations by the Belarus government, which took place on 21 January 2009. These events indicate the willingness of the government to negotiate with the ILO and BKDP.



The BASTUN network representatives greet the adoption of the final seminar document, which was drawn up by all the unions, employers' organizations, the Government of Belarus and the experts of the International Labor Office. The document was presented as a government Action Plan for implementing the ILO Commission of Inquiry recommendations. Step-by-step realization of the Action Plan will facilitate the implementation of all recommendations and will contribute to normalizing relations with the ILO and eliminating all breaches of trade union rights.

The trade union representatives of the Baltic Sea region are convinced that the implementation of the ILO recommendations and the eradication of trade union rights violations will bring positive reactions on the part of the governments of the region and will definitely promote the further development of a more efficient and comprehensive cooperation between the countries of the region and Belarus.

The representatives of BASTUN, where BKDP has the status of a strategic partner, declare that they will continue to provide solidarity support to the BKDP and will use any accessible and legal means to protect the independent trade union movement in Belarus from any groundless attacks on the part of officials and unfair employers.

On behalf of BASTUN,

Marie-Louise Knuppert

President of Baltic Sea Trade Union Network (BASTUN)

Appendix:

A brief note concerning the conclusions and recommendations of the ILO Commission of Inquiry concerning the observance of ILO Conventions 87 & 98 in Belarus (March 2004) and the most recent comments of the Committee of Freedom of Association (March 2007)

Action Plan of the Government of the Republic of Belarus for the implementation of recommendations arising from the Commission of Inquiry report "Trade Union Rights in Belarus" (January 2009)