EPSU: Security must be based on social and economic justice and democracy

(6 March, 2025) As European leaders and institutions rush to react to the US government's withdrawal of support to Ukraine, EPSU reaffirms that there can be no lasting peace without social and economic justice, democracy, and human rights.

EU leaders are meeting on Wednesday, 6 March for an extraordinary European Council meeting to discuss European defence and Ukraine while the European Commission unveiled plans to invest €800 billion in the European defence industry on 4 March. Europe is reacting to a US government that has made it clear that it no longer sees much interest in supporting Ukrainian workers and those fighting the Russian aggression and occupation of their country.

In light of these recent shifts, EPSU emphasises that Europe's future cannot be built on further militarisation. Lasting peace cannot be achieved without social and economic justice, democracy, and respect for human rights. Europe's security arrangements must be rebuilt based on these principles.

The increase in defence expenditures in the EU and Member States comes at a moment when many countries are facing new austerity measures that cut funding for public services like health, education and care. Stringent budget rules have a negative impact on public investments for example in infrastructures and social housing and in the green and digital transition. This will undermine the broader security that working people need: wages that ensure workers can cope with rising prices and rents and working conditions that protect against profit-taking and exploitation by employers.

The Commission's plans do not reflect the broader economic and social security that people in Europe need. It is urgent that the EU uses the escape clause for all public funding. This will allow the strengthening of public services and social security. The European Council should be aware that spending on the arms industry while there is no funding to recruit staff and improve pay and conditions across our public services - from health and care to education and public administrations - will not be accepted. The EU urgently needs a public service agenda that responds to peoples' needs.

For EPSU, the undermining of social justice and democracy in Europe is a key factor in the emergence and escalation of conflicts. Attacks on human and trade union rights, freedom of expression, civil liberties, and press freedom are all linked to the weakening of democracy and the shrinking of public space. It is disappointing that while there are proposals to buy more weapons, there are none to address wealth inequalities that undermine democracy, social justice, and welfare states. There are no proposals to address excessive salaries for corporate executives in the defence industry, to prevent profit-driven exploitation, or to restrict dividend payouts in the industry.

EPSU's 2024 Bucharest Congress stated "Within the European Union (EU) there is a need for better coordination of foreign and defence policy in support of long-term disarmament, peace and stability in Europe and beyond. Public services are a crucial element in ensuring and maintaining peace, as well as an effective and efficient economy."

The Congress reiterated "The invasion in Ukraine has shattered Europe's peace, stability and security. We condemn the Russian war of aggression and support the Ukrainian people's fight for democracy, sovereignty and territorial integrity. We call for a cessation of the war, the withdrawal of Russian troops from all occupied territories, and for peace

negotiations. We call for war criminals to be prosecuted and for reparations to be made to Ukraine for damages caused. We support the efforts of the EU and the international community to help rebuild Ukraine and insist that these efforts strengthen human, social and trade union rights and democracy. Trade unions must be fully involved in this effort. We expect and demand that the rule of law, freedom and trade union rights be upheld and not further undermined under the pretext of war. As with all conflicts, we will support diplomatic initiatives to find a way out of the conflicts."

The ETUC called for a full suspension of economic governance rules following the European Council meeting. Read their reaction here.

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