



Statement on the geopolitical situation and its consequences for working people

Adopted at the Executive Committee meeting of 19-20 May 2026

The ETUC expresses deep concern over the current geopolitical situation and the escalation of conflicts, and its far-reaching consequences for workers in Europe and worldwide. The ongoing conflicts and worsening international relations risk leading to an increasingly brutalised world made harsher, more violent, through repeated exposure to wars, injustice, and suffering. The EU cannot give up its claimed purpose of promoting peace and its values.

The ETUC reiterates its call for a deescalation by all parties in the conflict in the Middle-East, an immediate and comprehensive ceasefire and a return to diplomacy and dialogue and to full respect for international law, to prevent further loss of life and achieve peace. The unilateral military actions carried out by USA and Israel and the subsequent retaliation by Iran against independent states constitute serious attacks against the rules-based international order. These actions continue to undermine international order and contribute to the continuing humanitarian catastrophe in Gaza and the wider region. The ETUC also reaffirms its solidarity with Ukrainian people and its support for working people and trade unions in Ukraine, and its call for a just and lasting peace to be delivered together with Ukraine. The ETUC recalls that security must be built on diplomacy, conflict prevention and social progress, not military escalation. International law must prevail over military strength, and dialogue over an uncontrolled race to armament, especially when it comes to nuclear weapons. There is no lasting peace without social justice and respect for workers' rights.

With its illegal and ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine, Russia has brought war back to Europe. At the same time, democracy and fundamental rights are coming under increasing attack from authoritarians around the world, amplified by the election of Donald Trump. Recent actions by the United States, from illegal military aggression in Venezuela to the imposition of trade tariffs, geopolitical tensions surrounding Greenland, military escalation involving Iran, and restrictions affecting oil shipments to and interference in countries such as Cuba, reflect a growing logic of power politics and resource control. These developments weaken multilateral frameworks and exacerbate fuel instability.

These geopolitical tensions are increasingly driven by competition over energy and raw materials, boosting inflation and deepening global instability. The situation in the Strait of Hormuz further exposes Europe's vulnerabilities, with major risks to energy supplies, transport routes and global trade, while thousands of seafarers face increasingly dangerous and insecure conditions. European workers are directly impacted through volatile and rising energy prices, declining purchasing power, and increased pressure on industries, while some multinational corporations continue to accumulate extraordinary profits.



Geopolitical crises are also increasingly becoming food crises, creating risks around food availability, affordability and speculation, particularly for food-import-dependent countries. Food security must therefore be recognised as a strategic issue. This underlines the urgent need to move away from a model driven by conflict and extraction towards one centred on peace, strategic autonomy, social justice and quality jobs, through long-term social and industrial planning that delivers sustainable prosperity and stability.

The reaction of the EU institutions in 2026 has failed to meet the scale of the challenges facing workers and society, repeating many of the shortcomings exposed during the 2022–2023 energy crisis following Russia’s illegal invasion of Ukraine. Europe faced similar shocks then, yet the response proved insufficient. The reform of the electricity market did not deliver structural protection against price volatility, nor ensure a durable decoupling of decarbonised energy prices from fossil fuels. Likewise, the temporary windfall profits tax introduced during the crisis was neither made permanent nor easily reactivable, while the expansion of renewable and decarbonised energy production remained insufficient. Valuable time has been lost.

Every day of delayed decision-making has concrete consequences: excess profits continue to flow from workers and businesses into the hands of major energy companies, while rising input costs fuel inflation, weaken purchasing power, and increase pressure on industries and public services. It is imperative to learn from these failures and urgently put in place a reformed economic governance framework, strengthened investments with social conditionalities, permanent crisis-management tools that prioritise workers’ protection, and a new governance of the electricity market.

The ETUC therefore calls for a fundamental shift in EU policy, and for the EU institutions to urgently convene a summit with social partners to discuss the current crises and the actions necessary. The European Commission must recognise the seriousness of the situation and step up its response accordingly. Without a far more proactive European industrial, energy and investment policy, Europe risks repeating the same crises and vulnerabilities. Growing economic insecurity, inequality and instability are creating the political conditions for the rise of anti-democratic forces. At European and national level, this crisis must be managed through reinforced social dialogue that leads to greater social progress. Governments must not weaken climate ambition, industrial policy or social investment in response to growing security challenges.

Fiscal rules must be suspended for emergency support and reformed to allow sustained public investment to deliver industrial renewal and strategic autonomy. Within the reformed framework of the Stability and Growth Pact, measures aimed at supporting workers affected by the energy shock should be excluded from deficit calculations. As NextGenerationEU ends, it is even more urgent to establish permanent common investment tools, including through the issuance of common EU-denominated bonds, aiming to develop European fiscal capacity.

Crisis tools should not be temporary improvisations but standing systemic instruments ready to be activated when needed. A permanent European instrument, building on the success of the SURE mechanism, must be established to protect employment and incomes during crises and transitions.

Wage increases are necessary to tackle the cost-of-living crisis, reduce export dependency and to increase internal demand, thus supporting sustainable growth. The EU must, in full respect for national industrial relations systems and the autonomy of social partners, ensure the ambitious and full transposition of the Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages and strong action plans by Member States to deliver on the target of 80% collective bargaining coverage.

Social solidarity, strong public intervention and fair distribution of costs must underpin the response. Targeted measures should be taken to protect low and middle-income



households, disproportionately hit by the shock, who cannot easily adjust their consumption patterns in the short-term.

It is unacceptable that extraordinary corporate gains are accrued through widespread hardship. Price controls are urgent. A temporary freeze on profit margins in the energy sector - capped at pre-crisis levels from February - is an essential step to ensure prices reflect real costs rather than opportunistic mark-ups, speculation and companies taking advantage of the crisis through unjustified price increases. Windfall profits on energy and other essential goods must be effectively and permanently taxed. Those with the greatest means must contribute more. Growing security spending must not be used to justify cuts to healthcare, pensions, emergency services and social protection. EU social and cohesion funds, including ESF+ and the Cohesion Fund, must not be redirected to subsidise military spending. ETUC reiterates the demand for more progressive tax systems and an EU directive on wealth taxation.

The EU must also urgently reform the electricity market to decouple decarbonised energy from fossil fuel pricing and ensure affordable energy for all. Crisis responses must this time avoid propping up fossil fuel demand and instead prioritise energy savings, efficiency and fossil-free alternatives.

As telework is again being promoted to mitigate rising energy and fuel costs for workers and companies, this underlines the urgency of strengthening protections on telework and the right to disconnect through the upcoming EU Quality Jobs Act. At the same time, the current crisis also demonstrates the essential role of affordable and accessible public transport in reducing costs for workers and supporting a fairer and more sustainable organisation of work.

Actions to combat energy poverty are urgent, including banning disconnections and ensuring aid for the most vulnerable households. It is also important to introduce more protective rent regulations and control over the market to protect renters against exploitation and abuses, to end no-fault evictions and protect vulnerable families, and to freeze/put the brakes on the increase of rent prices.

Accelerating electrification and investment in renewables is essential to achieving strategic autonomy, price stability, and quality job creation. Europe must move from reactive crisis management to a proactive, structural approach that protects workers, delivers adequate public services and a just transition. This requires large-scale investment in skills, reskilling, paid educational leave and concrete support for workers affected by industrial transformation.

Europe cannot continue with a system that leaves repeated crises unmanaged and abandoned to market forces, with workers bearing the cost. The ETUC stands for a resilient and fair Europe that puts people first, and will continue to strengthen solidarity and cooperation with the ITUC and regional trade union organisations in defence of peace, democracy, social justice and workers' rights worldwide.