

INTERNATIONAL TRADE UNION CONFEDERATION

Turkey: European and International Trade Unions Demand Immediate release of DISK General Secretary

Brussels, 17 June 2016 (ITUC OnLine): European and international trade union organisations have expressed their shock and anger at the news that Arzu Çerkezoğlu, General Secretary of their Turkish affiliate DISK, has been arrested at Istanbul airport as she was about to take a flight to Germany to visit a relative in hospital.

Police claim that she was arrested because she allegedly insulted Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan in a speech she made on 31 August last year. The ETUC, ITUC and European Public Services Union are demanding her immediate release and the withdrawal of the bizarre charge against her.

Sharan Burrow, ITUC General Secretary, said "Thousands of people, including journalists, trade unionists, public figures, even sportspeople now face legal attacks for insulting President Erdogan. The real insult however is to common sense and to fundamental freedoms, with the President's dictatorial approach threatening the very foundations of democracy."

ETUC General Secretary Luca Visentini said "The EU must open its eyes and see is really happening in Turkey, instead of simply paying Mr Erdogan's government to escape Europe's own international obligations for asylum seekers and refugees. Respect for democratic, social and trade union rights are part of European the social model and any country seeking accession to the EU must respect these fundamental values. The EU must never allow itself to be blackmailed by the Turkish government or indeed any other government".

Jan Willem Goudriaan, General Secretary of the EPSU said "This arrest is an unacceptable aggression against trade unions and is incompatible with European values. We call on the EU to condemn the actions of Turkish security forces and take all action necessary to get Arzu Çerkezoğlu free".

The ITUC represents 180 million workers in 162 countries and territories and has 333 national affiliates.

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