



To all Members
of the European Parliament

Vienna, 5 November 2012

EU Free Trade Agreement with Columbia and Peru as touchstone for trade union rights

Dear Member of the European Parliament,

We would like to draw your attention to the further treatment of the Free Trade Agreement with Columbia and Peru. In spite of the **serious and repeated objections of the international trade union movement**, the European Parliament has been asked to vote on an extremely problematic negotiation outcome.

For both the Austrian Trade Union Federation (ÖGB) and the Austrian Federal Chamber of Labour (BAK), the further treatment of the Agreement represents a touchstone for trade union rights in the foreign trade relations of the EU. Hence, we hope that parliamentary discussions will reveal these weaknesses and lead to a rejection of the present Agreement.

The European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), the Trade Union Confederation of the Americas (TUCA) and the Global Unions already sent a detailed letter to you outlining the situation of trade unions in Columbia and Peru. Ratifying the Agreement threatens **to legitimise the continued violations of fundamental trade union rights**. Apart from this, the means of exerting pressure, i.e. to suspend the negotiations in view of the dramatic human rights situation in Columbia and to make their continuation dependent on binding and strong measures to strengthen the trade union rights at an early stage remained unused. In view of the human rights emergency situation in Columbia, these failures are particularly serious. Columbia remains by far the most dangerous country in the world for trade union work; moreover during the past decades the trade union movement has been seriously weakened. The common practice of murdering, threatening and making trade unionists vanish is still widely ignored. The continuous problem of impunity for these crimes makes it only too clear how much more has to be done to **increase capacities for the better protection of trade union rights**.

Against this background it is even more negligent that the text of the Free Trade Agreement **does not even include absolute minimum standards**. Its sustainability chapter has been excluded from the legally binding dispute settlement mechanism of the Agreement. The result is another missed opportunity to give more emphasis to the compliance and enforcement of elementary trade union rights. In particular the European Commission also failed to take these and other objections into account during the negotiations. We would like to point out the early and detailed objections by the Austrian employees' representations¹. The European Union should at last take **responsibility for developing and expanding global social rights**.

By rejecting the Anti-Counterfeiting Trade Agreement (ACTA), the European Parliament has already strongly urged the compliance with human rights standards in European trade policy.

Hence, we hope even more for your support to make the further treatment of the Agreement a **touchstone for trade union rights** in the foreign trade relations of the EU. We therefore ask you to support a **rejection of the present Free Trade Agreement**.

Yours faithfully,

Erich Foglar

President

Austrian Trade Union Federation

Herbert Tumpel

President

Austrian Federal Chamber of Labour

¹ AK position paper on the continuation of negotiations with Columbia on an Association Agreement and on the state of negotiation concerning sustainable development (DS 1001/10) – March 2010. http://www.akeuropa.eu/en/publication-full.html?doc_id=113&vID=43; AK position paper: Yes to binding sustainability chapter! New codecision competence of the European Parliament for Trade Policy should be actively used for social and environmental standards! – March 2010. http://www.akeuropa.eu/en/publication-full.html?doc_id=116&vID=43; ÖGB position papers on the EU Free Trade Agreement with Central America (DS 296/09) and the EU Free Trade Agreement with the Andean countries (MD 313 REV1) of 19 May 2009.