

Brussels, 16 September 2020

## **ETF Management Committee statement in solidarity with Belgian Dockers**

The Management Committee (MC) of the European Transport Workers' Federation (ETF), meeting on 16 September 2020 discussed the opinion issued by the Advocate General at the European Court of Justice issued an opinion on the Belgian “Wet Major”, stating that the Belgian pool system of recognized dock workers defies the right of establishment and free movement of workers under the EU law.

In Belgium, dock work is regulated by the “Wet Major”, establishing that the loading and unloading of ships in the Belgian ports shall only be done by recognized dock workers, for safety reasons. Recognition is done by joint committees, in which employers and trade unions sit on an equal basis.

Indeed, since the entry into force of the “Wet Major” social partners in Belgian ports have built a solid social dialogue that has established a climate of social peace.

In 2014, the European Commission refrained from launching an infringement procedure against the obligation to work with a pool of recognized dock workers in ports, following the actualisation of the law negotiated by the social partners together with the minister for employment. Since then, dock workers could gradually come from outside the pool provided they meet the same conditions as recognized dockworkers and this also for safety reasons.

Port labour pools are very modern forms of labour organisation, which allow to mitigate the effects of the fluctuations in the demand for port services while guaranteeing social protection and job retention

What is more, Belgian ports are among the most productive in Europe and have experienced a steep growth in volumes also thanks to the labour pool system.

The MC noted that the verdict, which is due in few months, could heavily hit the Belgian port sector, representing a threat to the safety of Belgian dockers and to their social protection.

Belgian dockers have always been the backbone of our fights along the years, by providing active support and great show of solidarity to the ETF and the transport workers all over Europe.

The MC renewed the solidarity of the whole ETF to the Belgian affiliates BTB-ABVV, ACV TRANSCOM and ACVLB and to the Belgian dock workers. The three unions will have the full support of the ETF during the negotiation process that is due to start soon as well as in the framework of possible future actions that may be taken in defence of our dockworkers' rights at work.

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