



Joint Declaration

of the Trade Union Organisations of Industrial Workers from the Countries of Southeast Europe on Just Industrial Transition, Industrial Convergence, and equal participation in the new European Industrial Policy.

We, the representatives of trade union organisations, industrial workers, and social partners from the countries of Southeast Europe, following the regional meeting held on 18 May 2026, express our common position regarding the need for a new European policy towards the region, based on industrial development, social justice, and genuine economic convergence.

We acknowledge that the countries of the region are at different stages of integration into the European Union – some are EU Member States, while others are candidate countries or states outside the Union. Nevertheless, the economies, industries, and labour markets of the region are strongly interconnected and face similar challenges: low incomes, emigration of qualified workers, weakened social dialogue, industrial insecurity, inflationary pressure, and the risks of a socially unjust green transition.

In the context of the new European policies currently under discussion concerning industrial development, including the Clean Industrial Deal, the Green Deal initiatives, the Industrial Accelerator Act, mechanisms for strategic autonomy, decarbonisation, digitalisation, and the development of artificial intelligence, we express our common position regarding the future of industry and labour in the region.

Today, the European Union is faced with the need to restore its industrial competitiveness, guarantee energy security, and accelerate the transition towards a low-carbon economy. These processes will determine Europe's economic development for decades to come.

At the same time, the countries of Southeast Europe continue to face structural economic disparities, low incomes, dependence on cheap labour, lack of investment, demographic crisis, brain drain, and limited participation in high-technology industrial value chains.

There is a real risk that the new European industrial policies may deepen the divide between economically stronger countries and the peripheral regions of Europe if mechanisms for industrial and social convergence are not established.

The region has strategic importance for Europe's industrial resilience, energy security, and production capacity.

In this regard, we call upon the European institutions, national governments, and international industrial partners to urgently begin the development of the following policies:

Equal Participation of Southeast Europe in European Industrial Policies and the Industrial Accelerator Act

We call for the countries of Southeast Europe, including candidate countries, to be fully integrated into the mechanisms of the new European industrial policy and the future Industrial Accelerator Act.

We demand:

1. Equal access to European industrial and investment funds;
2. Participation of the region in the EU's strategic industrial projects;
3. Inclusion of enterprises from Southeast Europe in the supply chains of European industry;
4. Special support mechanisms for industrial modernisation in peripheral regions;
5. Accelerated integration policies and harmonisation of legislation for countries that are not yet officially part of the EU with European industrial and energy policies.

European Funding Linked to Social Standards and Collective Bargaining

We support the principle that public funding must be linked to social responsibility.

We call for all companies receiving European or national funding under EU industrial programmes to guarantee:

1. The right to trade union organisation;
2. Effective collective bargaining;
3. Decent incomes and fair wage growth;
4. Direct participation of trade unions in restructuring and technological transformation processes;
5. Effective mechanisms for the protection of workers during industrial changes and automation.

European funds must not support models based on social dumping and cheap labour.

Protection of Strategic Industries and Energy Security

We call upon the European institutions and national governments to protect the strategic industries of the region, including: the automotive industry; metallurgy; the chemical

industry; mining; energy-intensive industries; mechanical engineering; and parts of light industry.

The following are necessary:

1. Affordable and predictable energy prices;
2. Investments in energy infrastructure;
3. Protection of industrial competitiveness;
4. Measures against energy poverty;
5. Guarantees for the region's energy security.

Policies Against Social and Economic Dumping

We express concern regarding the model under which multinational companies exploit differences in labour standards and income levels between the countries of the region.

We call for the introduction of effective European mechanisms against social dumping through the establishment of common social standards, as well as for European investments to be linked to long-term industrial presence and reinvestment in the local economy.

Policies for Training, Reskilling, and Human Capital Development

Technological changes, automation, and artificial intelligence will transform the labour market and industry in Europe.

We call for:

1. The right to lifelong training and reskilling throughout professional life;
2. Mapping of skills and future industrial needs;
3. Investments in technical and industrial education;
4. Special programmes for young workers;
5. Protective mechanisms agreed between employers and trade unions through collective bargaining for workers affected by technological changes.

Strengthening Social Dialogue and Regional Coordination

Without the genuine participation of trade unions, there can be no fair industrial transition.

We call for trade unions to participate in the formulation of industrial and energy policies, and for sectoral collective bargaining to be strengthened through legislation in order to guarantee the protection of trade union rights.

Today, multinational companies operate in a coordinated manner at regional level.

An equally coordinated social and institutional response is necessary.

Southeast Europe possesses industrial potential, strategic geographical importance, and qualified workers.

The future of European industry cannot be built on a division between the “centre” and the “periphery.”

We call on Europe not to allow a two-speed industrial transition. Only through coordinated policies, long-term investments, and the active participation of workers and trade unions can a dignified future for industry and the societies of Southeast Europe be guaranteed.