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***European Economic and Social Committee***

***Workers' Group***

Brussels, 17 February 2016

**EESC Workers' Group Declaration on the 'New Settlement for the United Kingdom within the European Union'**

The Workers' Group (Group II) of the European Economic and Social Committee has been closely monitoring the developments regarding the negotiations on the future of the United Kingdom in the European Union. This is an unprecedented situation, where based on the outcome of these negotiations a Member State will hold a referendum on its continued membership of the Union. The implications are great not only for the UK, but also for the rest of the EU. The Workers' Group is convinced that the EU will be weakened if the UK leaves, but equally that the UK is stronger as a member of the European Union and that the cost of leaving will far outweigh what some may regard as the 'cost' of being a member.

Europe stands at a crossroads. The trust and confidence of European citizens and workers has never been lower. The reasons for this are multiple, but for European workers, the increasing number of attacks on their rights, fuelled not only by austerity policies but in many cases by ideology, is a key factor. European workers need not only to be reassured that the EU remains committed to improving their living and working lives, but to see concrete evidence of this through a stronger economy that brings with it quality jobs and a decent standard of living for all.

The Workers' Group is of the view that the current UK-EU negotiations are a threat to EU cohesion. While the legitimate concerns of a Member State must be taken into consideration, democracy demands that one member should not be able to unilaterally dictate the rules of the game. We are deeply concerned that the current proposals will undermine the principles of free movement of workers and citizens and that of non-discrimination, which are fundamental aspects to workers' support for the EU. Discriminating against other European workers should not be allowed. Efforts should be focused on ensuring equal treatment, equal pay and in addressing the negative drivers of EU mobility, namely the lack of decent perspectives and a positive future in the individual's country of origin.

The Workers Group expresses its unqualified support for British and European workers, particularly at this moment when their rights are under constant threat at national, European and even International level. We call on the European institutions to live up to their collective responsibility to defend the Treaties and the European values on which they are founded. The UK is a part of Europe. We must use all our capacities to ensure that it remains a member of the European Union and oppose all attempts to make this at the expense of workers' rights and the undermining of EU fundamental freedoms.