



**D**ear readers,

The spirit of the revolution is spreading across the Mediterranean – general discontent with the work of the Government, and political elites as a whole, bitter grievance over poor social and economic conditions and employment perspectives, corruption of the ruling party, high profits of foreign-owned banks which were not touched by the crisis and the call for the Government to resign and announce the elections have triggered off (“Facebook”) demonstrations held almost every second day in the streets all over Croatia, reminiscent of the revolutions in the Arab world for democracy, social justice and fairer society. The Government refuses to discuss the date of the elections before the accession negotiations with the EU are concluded, using once again the EU accession for internal political purposes. The UATUC, and the coordination of five Croatian trade union confederations, support the peaceful demonstrations, demanding the announcement of the date of elections and urgent reforms to take place to prevent further erosion of the living standard of Croatian citizens. If these demands are not achieved through social dialogue, the unions will take these issues in the streets!

Recently published interim report of the European Commission on the progress in fulfilling the criteria for closing the negotiation chapter on judiciary and fundamental rights – acknowledging significant progress in many areas but highlighting the need for further efforts to meet the closing benchmarks – has provoked quite opposing interpretations, with the Croatian Government taking it as a positive sign that negotiations could be concluded by June as planned and most of the civil society organisations claiming it means that such scenario is not realistic.

Almost record-high unemployment rate, one of the main reasons for the widespread demonstrations, is additionally aggravated by the problem of a large number of people working without salary – approximately 70 000 – which was the reason for the UATUC to start a widespread campaign against unpaid work, aimed at institutions, employers but also shop stewards and workers in general.

After ten months of the suspension of its work due to the Government’s continuous disrespect of the basic principles of social dialogue, the Economic and Social Council has finally resumed its work, based on new rules and principles. On its first session, the Council discussed the problem of non-payment of wages and social contributions and the social partners reached the consensus that the problem should be urgently tackled and concrete steps and measures discussed urgently.

As a part of their initiatives to boost the economic and social recovery and to create new but also decent jobs, the Croatian trade unions held a joint awareness-raising seminar within the Decent Work Country Agenda between Croatia and the ILO on green jobs and their potential for job creation and economic recovery and the role of the trade unions in the process.

These are just some of the issues you can read about in this UATUC INFO ■

*Dijana Šobota*

Head of International Department

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## FIGURE OF THE MONTH

**10 000**

**PEOPLE ON THE  
STREETS OF ZAGREB**

# NOT A REVOLUTION, BUT A SERIOUS WARNING TO THE POLITICAL ELITES

Peaceful walking demonstrations continue to be held every second day in Zagreb, involving between five and ten thousand citizens, who are calling for the Government to resign and announce elections, but are also showing general discontent with Croatian political elites as a whole and with the way this country has been led throughout the last 20 years



Zagreb, 14 March 2011 – Demonstrations that started on 17 February with three citizens protesting in front of the Government seat, and continued to take place every second day in Zagreb, have been gradually growing since then to reach the size of between five and ten thousand people marching on the streets of Zagreb throughout the last week. Similar demonstrations are taking place in a number of other larger Croatian cities.

Popularly called “the Facebook demonstrations”, the protests are mostly organised through social networks, without clear leadership structure or political goals except for the Government to resign and announce elections, involving a number of mostly marginal and semi-formal organisations stretching from the far left to the far right.

The first two demonstrations of significant size, involving up to 1000 citizens each, held on 24 and 26 February, ended with violent clashes with the police, as the demonstrators tried to reach St. Mark Square, central location of the old town of Zagreb, which hosts seats of the Government and the Parliament. Since the changes of the Law on Public Gathering in 2005, all public gatherings in the circle of 100 meters from the seats of Government, Parliament and President of the Republic have been strongly banned. As in November 2009, when the UATUC organised demonstrations against changes of the Labour Code, police again set up barricades on the streets leading to St. Mark Square. While the trade union demonstrations in 2009 ended peacefully, this time a group of around 50 demonstrators started to attack the barricades, throwing cobble stones taken out from the street and even traffic signs to the heavily armoured special police force. However, after the police subsequently detained the group of around 50 violent demonstrators, apparently mostly football fans with previous records of violent behaviour on stadiums, all further demonstrations were carried on peacefully.



Subsequent demonstrations have grown to the size of between five and ten thousand people and took the form of gathering at one of the squares in Zagreb centre, during which short speeches of ordinary citizens and occasionally few opposition MPs took place, followed by three to four hours of walking demonstrations around the city. Target locations, at which the demonstrators were stopping to shout different messages included headquarters of the ruling HDZ party, private apartments of Prime Minister **Jadranka Kosor** and other prominent HDZ politicians, public television, Croatian Employment Service and other. Locations are being spontaneously chosen during the walk and vary from demonstration to demonstration.

Messages which demonstrators are communicating by shouting, singing and carrying banners vary considerably (especially in relation to criticizing the opposition parties as well and attitudes to the EU accession), but all have in common bitter grievance over poor social and economic conditions and employment perspectives in the country, corruption of the governing party (including those done in the privatisation process of the 1990s), high profits of foreign-owned banks which were not touched by the crisis and the call for the Government to resign and announce the elections.

## TRADE UNIONS SUPPORT THE DEMONSTRATIONS, BUT NOT THE VIOLENCE

The UATUC supports the demonstrations as legitimate means of expressing the citizens' discontent, but we strongly oppose any form of violence during the demonstrations, said UATUC President **Mladen Novosel** speaking on the press conference on 3 March. We are joining all those who are calling for the Government to announce the date of elections, and use the remaining time to do what is possible to stop the further erosion of the living standard of Croatian citizens, stated Novosel. Five days later, UATUC's position was confirmed by a joint statement of the Coordination of Croatian trade union confederations. Croatian trade unions do not plan to actively engage in the organisation of popular demonstrations at the moment, but will continue to pursue trade union positions on social and economic recovery through social dialogue. However, if there will be no adequate response from the Government, five confederations will consider organising joint demonstrations in April.

While the Prime Minister and other leading HDZ politicians are so far refusing to comment on demonstrations and are sticking to their position that any discussion on election date should wait for the [conclusion of the EU accession negotiations](#), which they expect by the end of June, the Social Democrats and other main opposition parties are not involved in demonstrations, but are also calling for setting up the date of elections as soon as possible. The regular elections are to take place by March 2012 the latest.

Although the demonstrations are primarily anti-Government, participants are also showing general discontent with the Croatian political elites as a whole, rather than supporting any other established political option.

Recently conducted public opinion poll said that 70 percent of the citizens support the demonstrations while the Government support is at the record low of 13.7 percent ■

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## TRADE UNION PROGRAMME OF SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RECOVERY

On a joint press conference held on 15 March, five trade union confederations presented the trade union "Social and Economic Recovery Programme". The programme consists of 36 different measures in the fields of economic policy and social and political reforms, with main points including combating unpaid work and grey economy, solving the problem of illiquidity and lowering interest rates, stimulating investments in economy and domestic consumption, reforms in tax, pension and health systems, as well as in the areas of state aid, public spending and election laws.

[Trade union demands - Economic and Social Recovery](#)

## PRESIDENT JOSIPOVIĆ: THE SYSTEM IS NOT FUNCTIONING

Increasing size of demonstrations involving citizens of different political orientations are showing that the system is not functioning, that stability of Croatia is in danger and you do not have to be a great politician to see that, stated Croatian President **Ivo Josipović** last week, after consultations with all parliamentary parties on the issues of demonstrations, forthcoming elections and EU accession.

It is obvious that people are not protesting because they enjoy it, but because they are not satisfied with how the whole system functions, said Josipović, stating that all institutions, including himself as well as the Prime Minister and the Government, share the responsibility for this situation.

# UATUC ON THE CAMPAIGN AGAINST UNPAID WORK

At least 70 000 workers are working without their wage being paid in due time, while the practice of paying only the net wage but not the pension and health insurance is widespread among Croatian employers



Zagreb, 8 March 2011 – Since the beginning of February, the **UATUC** is pursuing a campaign against unpaid work and widespread practice of Croatian employers to pay only the net wage but not the social contributions from the wage (i.e. pension and health insurance). The campaign is aimed towards state institutions, employers and shop-floor workers' representatives.

According to the data of the national Financial Agency (FINA) from the end of the last year, at least 70 000 workers in Croatia were working without receiving wage in due time, with a further unknown number of workers working without their social contributions being paid. Due to unpaid taxes and social contributions, state budget lost around 1.85 billion euro in 2010. At the same time, the problem is aggravated by the fact that 24 percent of all legal entities (employing 4 percent of all employed workers) and 43 percent of all craftsmen have their bank accounts blocked due to illiquidity. Increasing by 32 percent since January 2010, the total amount of unpaid financial obligations of companies and citizens has reached 4.7 billion euro and is currently seen as the main obstacle for economic recovery. The problem of unpaid wages is especially present in the construction industry, tourism, commerce, metal industry, chemical industry and paper industry, affecting one in ten UATUC members.

The UATUC campaign includes pressure towards the Government in enforcing existing labour legislation, making data on unpaid wages and contributions, which is currently considered a "tax secret", publicly available (so that the trade unions can monitor on behalf of their members if the employers are fulfilling their obligations), coordination of different public institutions in solving this problem, as well as adopting new measures to combat illiquidity. The initiative has been addressed to the Prime Minister, Minister of Economy and Minister of Finance.

The UATUC has also addressed the Croatian Employers' Association (HUP) which was invited to join the action in order to prevent unfair competition among its members to the detriment of the workers.

As one of the results, the issue has subsequently been also discussed on bilateral meetings between the Government and HUP after which the Managing Director of HUP **Ivan Ergović** stated that the HUP has decided to expel from its membership all employers "who do not pay wages to their workers".



The campaign has been endorsed by all other trade union confederations, which joined UATUC's efforts to publicize the problem and advocate for its solution. The issue has been the main topic of the first session of the Social and Economic Council in ten months, which reached the consensus on importance of urgent tackling of this problem.

The second part of the UATUC's campaign includes informing the workers and their representatives on their rights regarding their wage and legal options available to them in case of violation of those rights.

The UATUC has also called all workers whose rights in this respect have been violated but who do not have trade union organised at the company level, to report such cases to the UATUC, who will collect the data and report it to the State Inspectorate for Labour.

Many workers are still unaware that the social contributions from their wages are part of the wage that they have earned and that belongs to them and tend to neglect the fact the employer is not paying the contributions, sometimes even for years, resulting with unpleasant surprise at the moment of retiring, when they comprehend effects of this on their pension. Therefore, the UATUC has called all workers and trade union members to personally check with the Tax Authority, Croatian Pension Insurance Institute or the Central Registry of Insured Persons if their employer is regularly paying taxes and social contributions from their wage ■

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## EU ACCESSION AGAIN POLITICIZED FOR INTERNAL PURPOSES

Lacking any concrete results of its programme of economic recovery, the Government has put all cards on concluding the EU negotiations before elections, at the same time unjustifiably claiming that announcement of the election date would prevent successful conclusion of the EU negotiations and bring long-term postponement of the EU membership



Zagreb, 15 March 2011 - Recently published report of the European Commission on the progress in fulfilling the criteria for closing the negotiation chapter on judiciary and fundamental rights has provoked quite opposing interpretations, with the Croatian Government taking it as a positive sign that negotiations could be concluded by June as planned and most of the civil society organisations claiming it means that such scenario is not realistic.

The European Commission's report acknowledged significant progress in many areas of one of the crucial negotiation chapters, which includes among other judiciary reform and fight against corruption, while it also stated that further efforts would be needed to produce desired results and meet the closing benchmarks.

Two weeks prior to the EC report, the group of most prominent Croatian civil society organisations published their joint opinion on the state of negotiations in this chapter, stating that reforms undertaken so far do not yet constitute irreversible steps that would ensure proper rule of law, efficiency of the judiciary system and the protection of human rights.

In the meantime, certain progress has been made in the chapter on competition policy, after the EC in February approved restructuring plan for "Brodosplit" shipyard. The immediate effect of this decision was lifting the ban on contracting new orders for "Brodosplit", which was welcomed by the trade union in the shipbuilding sector, including Metalworkers' Trade Union of Croatia – Industrial Union, affiliated to the UATUC. EC is expected to review restructuring plans for "Brodotrogir" and "3. maj" during March.

In the meantime, the Government is once again using the EU accession process for internal political purposes, refusing to even discuss the date of the forthcoming elections before the negotiations are concluded. The Prime Minister **Jadranka Kosor** claims that the announcement of elections would make it impossible for the Government to effectively conclude the negotiations, although a number of countries from the 2004 enlargement, such as Slovakia, Hungary and Latvia, did not experience any problem with holding the elections during the final phases of the accession process. Moreover, Kosor repeatedly stated that elections could wait for a month or two, while the EU could not, imposing the unjustified impression that the EU will close its doors for Croatia if the negotiations are not concluded by summer.

Further debates emerged about the referendum on the EU membership and its relation to the parliamentary elections. The President of the Republic **Ivo Josipović** and all opposition parties stand on the position that referendum should take place only after the elections, in order to prevent the low level of popular support for incumbent Government to affect the citizens' position on the EU. Lacking any concrete results of its programme of economic recovery, the Government has put all cards on concluding the EU negotiations before the elections, making it easily imaginable that many citizens will vote NO on the referendum just in order to oppose the Government, especially after the referendum campaign is expected to present the EU membership as an important result achieved by the Government and the ruling HDZ party.

Although Kosor insisted that the elections should be held only after the EU referendum, she finally had to give up to the arguments of the President and the opposition, announcing last week that the elections will be held first ■

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## WORKERS OR SLAVES? – WOMEN FOR SAFE, CREATIVE AND PRODUCTIVE WORKPLACE!



Zagreb, 8 March 2011 – Women's Network Croatia and trade union women's groups of UATUC, NHS and HUS marked the International Women's Day with a protest gathering held on the main square in Zagreb. Thirteen demands, calling for a substantial change in the society's attitude towards women, were read in public, distributed through a [leaflet](#) and subsequently presented to the Croatian Government. Demands include stopping discrimination against women at the labour market, stipulation of the issue of unpaid wages and contributions (pension and health), increase of the minimum wage for full-time employment; strengthening of the collective bargaining, fixed-term work to be used only as an exception, ratification of the ILO Convention No. 183 and the revised European Social Charter, and others.

Protest gathering was preceded by the performance *Unbreakable Threads*, held on 7 March. The event gathered former workers of the "Kamensko" textile company, a symbol of failed privatisation and lay-offs of female workers, together with numerous esteemed artists and actresses, who held an impressive and emotional performance, intertwining their destinies and stories into one thread, symbolizing their unity and solidarity of female workers in culture with female workers in the textile industry.

The performance was followed by the round table *Flexicurity – safe and quality work for women?*, organized by the gender equality ombudsperson **Gordana Lukač Koritnik** and three trade union women's groups from UATUC, NHS and HUS, with the participation of a wide range of experts and representatives of academic community and public authorities ■

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UATUC on 

(click on the picture to follow link)



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## ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COUNCIL RESUMES WORK AFTER 10 MONTHS



Zagreb, 14 March 2011 – The Economic and Social Council held its first session since May last year, when all five trade union confederations decided to suspend their work within the Council due to the Government's continuous disrespect of the basic principles of social dialogue.

New Agreement on the Proceedings of the Economic and Social Council envisages that decisions will be reached by consensus instead of voting (which enabled common practice of the Government and employers outvoting the trade union side). Agreement has also been reached on the procedure for adopting the new law on representativity of the trade unions and employers' organisations. The law is to be drafted by the group of the Croatian and international experts which will be established by the Ministry of Economy, Labour and Entrepreneurship and the Office for Social Partnership.

On its first session after ten-month suspension, the Council discussed the problem of non-payment of wages and social contributions. The social partners reached the consensus that the problem should be urgently tackled and concrete steps and measures are to be discussed at the following session announced for next week ■

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## UATUC INITIATIVE TO AMEND THE MINIMUM WAGE ACT

Zagreb, 9 March 2011 – The **UATUC** submitted its proposal to the Ministry of Labour, Economy and Entrepreneurship with the initiative to amend the Minimum Wage Act, demanding that as of 1 June 2011 the minimum gross wages should amount to 40 % of the average monthly gross wage paid in the last year with legal entities in Croatia.

The UATUC argues that when the Minimum Wage Act was adopted in 2008, the fundamental objective was agreed to progressively increase the share of the minimum wage in the average wage, from the then 39% to 50%. However, this objective was thwarted in practice by way of a formula for the calculation of the minimum wage, which led to the decrease of the minimum wage to 36%, instead to its increase as of 2009. The UATUC hence demands the increase of the share of the minimum wage in the average wage as well as the change in the formula for its calculation. Economic and social prosperity is not possible in the conditions of poverty of the

majority of Croatian citizens. Living expenses are rapidly increasing and they "eat" almost the total amount of the minimum wage. UATUC furthermore argues that the level of the minimum wage has a direct impact on a number of social and other material rights of workers, this also being a reason for progressive increase of the minimum wage to a living- and socially acceptable level. Croatian minimum wage is among the lowest in Europe, and has amounted to approximately 36% of the average gross wage for three years now.

Furthermore, in January this year as much as 18.2% percent of workers received the minimum or below minimum wage. More than 200 000 work for a wage at or below the minimum wage level. These figures, together with the ones on the growing unemployment, confirm the thesis that we are far from the economic recovery ■

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## JOINT CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE EU-CROATIA



European Economic and Social Committee

Zagreb, 28 January 2010 – The Joint Consultative Committee (JCC) of the EU and Croatia, comprising of the members of the European Economic and Social Committee and the representatives of Croatian social partners and civil society, held its 8th meeting in Zagreb. The aim of the JCC is to establish additional dialogue between the EU and Croatia and to foster public discussion on Croatian accession process and effects of EU membership for Croatia.

Discussing the state of Croatian accession negotiations, JCC called on the Croatian Government to deepen its consultations with Croatian social partners and other civil society organisations with regard to negotiations in chapter on competition policy. Moreover, JCC expressed great concern about the breakdown of social dialogue in Croatia, in particular the suspension of the work of the Croatian Economic and Social Council and called on all parties to re-establish social dialogue and strengthen its role in policy and decision-making process.

JCC also called for cooperation between the EU institutions, Croatian Government and civil society in communicating the EU and effects of accession to Croatian general public.

Apart from the JCC members, meeting was attended by representatives of the Croatian Government and Parliament, EU Delegation to Croatia and Hungarian Embassy to Croatia representing the Presidency of the Council of the EU. Croatian trade unions are represented in the JCC by **Ana Miličević Pezelj**, Head of UATUC Department for Organisation, Education and Publishing, who will be co-chairing the JCC in the period 2011-2013, and **Marija Hanževački**, General Secretary of the Independent Trade Unions of Croatia (NHS) ■

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## REGIONAL METALWORKERS' MEETING IN ZAGREB



Zagreb, 17 December 2010 – The Metalworkers' Trade Union of Croatia – Industrial Trade Union (SMH-IS) launched an initiative for the merger of Croatian industrial trade unions, as a "logical step", in words of SMH-IS President **Vedran Dragičević**, and follow-up to a systematic destruction of the Croatian industry, decreasing number of workers, fragmentation of industrial unions, decrease of membership, financial instability of trade unions and a weak influence of trade unions in the process in overall society. The initiative has already been accepted by the Construction Trade Union of Croatia (SGH), and the objective of the first phase is to integrate all the industrial trade unions affiliated to UATUC. The Metalworkers' Trade Union has also concluded an agreement on the integration with the Trade Union of Crafts and SMEs (HSMP), also an UATUC affiliate, the process scheduled to be finalized by the end of June 2011 ■

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## SPLIT IRONWORKS TO DECLARE BANKRUPTCY

Zagreb, 4 February 2011 – After two unsuccessful privatisations and many years marked by continuous stopping and restarting of production, as well as frequent non-payment of wages (the company owes around 11 million euro to the workers), Split Ironworks is finally to face a bankruptcy procedure. The workers and the trade union have accepted the bankruptcy procedure as the only option for the factory, burdened with more than 40 million euro of debts and its complicated ownership structure, to pay at least part of the debt to the workers and at the same time bring the possibility of restructuring and restarting of production.

Throughout the last ten years, successive governments were keeping the factory in business with different means of state aid, trying to find an owner ready and able to invest in modernisation and enable the fresh business start for Split Ironworks. However, the last owner, Polish company Zlomrex, since buying the company in 2007, has only managed to double its debts. As all negotiations with Zlomrex on changing the ownership structure and clearance of debts between Zlomrex, Croatian Privatisation Fund and the workers have failed, the bankruptcy procedure remained as the only option.

The bankruptcy should not result in the liquidation of the company, for which there are now two viable options. While Croatian company Cios from Zagreb is interested in leasing the factory and keeping 200 out of 400 workers, the other option is a public tender for a new owner who would restart the production ■



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## GREEN JOBS FROM TRADE UNION PERSPECTIVE



Zagreb, 1 March 2011 – One-day awareness-raising seminar on green jobs and employment, organised by the ILO, UATUC and NHS as part of the National Decent Work Agenda for Croatia, gathered representatives of all five Croatian trade union confederations.

Following interesting and fruitful discussions with the ILO experts and senior specialists **Lene Olsen** and **Svetla Shekerdijeva**, participants concluded that green jobs present a field in which Croatia has a lot of potential, but more willingness and support from the Government is needed, as well as initiatives from the employers. While green jobs have become symbol of sustainable economy and society responsible towards environment and future generations, there is an important role for the trade unions in this field, as social dimension needs to be taken into account and it must be ensured that green jobs will also be decent jobs.

Seminar was a preparatory activity for the forthcoming ILO tripartite conference mid April on the global employment pact and green jobs. Croatian trade unions used the seminar as an opportunity also to express most sincere appreciation for the work and support the Croatian trade unions have been receiving from the ILO and its senior specialist in Budapest SRO Office Svetla Shekerdijeva who is retiring by the end of March and will be replaced by a Romanian colleague **Ovidiu Jurca** ■

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# Croatia still in recession

Zagreb, 14 March 2011 – Although Croatia recorded GDP growth of 0.2 percent in the third quarter of 2010, recently published figure for the last quarter of 2010 again showed GDP decrease of 0.7 percent on a year-to-year basis. According to current calculations, overall figure for 2010 will be -1.4 percent. Despite strong growth of export and slow recovery of domestic consumption, both investments and industrial production continued to decrease in 2010.

However, even more worrying are employment and social indicators. In January, registered unemployment reached more than 334 thousands, or 19.6 percent, recording a growth of 4.5 percent since December and 8 percent since January 2010. Unemployment is expected to continue growing in the following months. Throughout the last two years Croatia has lost between 120 and 140 thousand jobs, while the retired to employed ratio has reached a record low of 1:1.22. As a result, the average pension of 293 EUR now accounts for only 38.9 percent of the average salary (729 EUR). A year ago, the share of average pension in average wage was 40.5 percent. As the Government has halted the pension indexation for the next two years, this ratio is only expected to further worsen.

With the [non-payment of wages](#) being an especially severe problem, 18.2 percent of the employed workers (206 thousand) in January received the minimum wage of 296 EUR. Furthermore, the data of the Central Registry of Insured Persons (REGOS) shows that around 16 thousand workers are receiving a wage which is lower than those established by the Law on Minimum Wage.

The number of users of welfare assistance increased by 10 percent since the end of 2008, reaching 102 thousand, out of which 42 percent are those who are able to work ■

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Please pass this newsletter on to your colleagues and contacts who might be interested.

## UATUC VICE-PRESIDENTS AND UATUC SECRETARY ELECTED

The Council of the UATUC, on its meeting held on 17 February, elected UATUC Vice-Presidents and Secretary for the following four year period. **Ivan Tomac**, President of the Trade Union of Workers in Energy, Chemistry and Non-Metal Industry was elected UATUC Vice-President for industry sector. **Eduard Andrić**, President of the Trade Union of Tourism and Services was elected UATUC Vice-President for services sector. **Željko Slunjski**, Coordinator for Public Relations of the UATUC, was elected UATUC Secretary.



Union of  
Autonomous  
Trade Unions  
of Croatia

*Together we are stronger*

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