

## To the international trade union organizations ETUC, ITUC, UNIGlobalUnion and the EESC'S Workers' Group

The Portuguese banking trade unions - Mais Sindicato/ Financial Sector Union, Bankers Union of the Center (SBC) and Financial Sector Workers Union of Portugal (SBN), affiliated to UGT-Portugal, hereby request the support of the above-mentioned international organizations in the struggle they have been developing, since September 2020, against Santander Totta Bank (BST) and Banco Millennium BCP (BCP), banking institutions operating in Portugal.

At stake is the situation of the workers of these two banks, whom for a year have been subjected to threats and pressures to accept the termination of their employment contracts and which now culminate in collective dismissal processes.

Therefore, these UGT-P and their affiliates of the Portuguese banking sector appeal to the support of the international trade union organizations, where UGT and its Unions are affiliated, in order to address an explanation to the president of Banco Santander in Madrid, Mrs. Ana Botin, and to express our concerns to the European Commission and the European Central Bank against the undignified procedure of BST and BCP, which undermines the basic principles of the right to work and respect for workers, leaving hundreds of workers unemployed, in a very specific social period after the pandemic crisis, which is not over yet.

To substantiate the complaint, we present this draft with the most important facts of this conflict:

- In September 2020 the Banking Unions in Portugal are informed of the intention of some banks to implement processes to reduce the number of workers;
- In the last quarter of 2020, BST presents proposals for mutually agreed rescissions (MRAs) to hundreds of workers; the workers targeted by these proposals are summoned to meetings with the Human Resources Department (HRD) of the Bank, during which they are told that if they do not accept, they may be dismissed, either by termination of employment or in a collective dismissal process (which will eventually be the first time in this sector in Portugal);
- Right at this stage, the Unions meet with BST's Management, denouncing the pressures on the workers, namely threats, inexistence of objective criteria for the presentation of proposals, inexistence of retirement proposals for those aged 55 or more, under the Collective Bargaining Agreement for the Banking Sector;

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- The bank argues that the resizing of the staff is due to the effects of the pandemic and consequent acceleration of the digital process, claiming that this situation forces the closure of branches and empties functions, which become redundant. It also argues that a new business model is at stake and that it has not proposed early retirements, as is the norm, to avoid the inherent costs;
- This first attempt to reduce staff was a failure, as most workers did not accept the proposals for termination.

## Negotiations

- In January, the Unions call on the BST to suspend the MRAs, in the middle of the pandemic crisis. By this date, the Bank had already closed 60 branches (in the last quarter of 2020 alone) and would close 30 more in the first quarter of 2021;
- In early March, the Bank informs the Unions that it has reanalyzed the situation and commits to contact all targeted workers aged 55 or over (about 950) to present them a retirement proposal instead of the MRAs - but not all workers in this condition were contacted. BST continues to threaten that anyone who does not accept the proposal will be subject to collective dismissal;
- Mais Sindicato, SBC and SBN insist with the Bank to create the possibility of applications for agreements with workers who want to leave, instead of choosing one by one the workers to whom it presents MRAs proposals - BST also rejects this solution;
- The Unions continue to claim the need for the reduction of the number of workers to be done gradually, by agreement, without pressure, asking for more time, and that the workers be requalified and relocated to the areas that have proven to have a deficit of workers;
- At the end of April, in a press release, the Administration stated that in June there would be a restructuring plan - although contacts with the workers were still being made - which clearly represents another threat to force them to accept the Bank's proposals.
- BCP announced its intention to reduce the number of workers by about 900, insisting mainly on MRAs.

## Denunciations

In addition to numerous meetings with the Management of the BST and BCP, the Unions also denounced the situation and requested intervention to the following entities:

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- Authority for Working Conditions, a public supervisory institution;
- Parliamentary Groups of the parties with seats in the Parliament;
- Government - meeting with the Ministry of Labour.

## Other actions

In July, the seven national unions from the sector get together, for the first time in the history of trade unionism in Portugal, to try to stop these processes and put an end to the worker reduction programs, calling for professional reconversion, the end of outsourcing and temporary work. They called for a demonstration in front of the Parliament, which took place on July 13th.

In July, 750 workers had already agreed to leave BST, through early retirement or MRAs. But the bank continued the process of downsizing.

On July 15th, BST implements the announced restructuring plan: 685 workers receive MRAs proposals and the threat that if they do not accept, they will be covered by collective dismissal - once again the trade unions intimidation and denunciation - of these, around 300 had already accepted on July 19th, the day the program ended. The remaining 350 are now targeted for collective dismissal.

At BCP, the restructuring plan was concluded on July 18 and most workers accepted agreements with the bank. The 100 workers who refused are now targeted for collective dismissal.

On July 29th, the Unions are heard in a hearing at the Parliament Labor and Social Security Commission, Commission that the presidents of BST and BCP were also called to explain the processes to the Parliament;

The Unions also request the intervention in this process from the Competition Authority and the Bank of Portugal.

On August 20th, BST threatens again with unilateral termination - in other words, collective dismissal - of the remaining workers covered by the restructuring plan.

The Unions respond with a new complaint to the Authority for Working Conditions, as well as to the Attorney General and the Ombudsman.

On September 3rd, UGT General Secretary requested a meeting with Mais Sindicato, SBC and SBN to the Ministers of Labor and Economy who, on behalf of the Government, commit to

contact with the Administrations of BST and BCP in order to bring serenity and more time to conclude this process without any collective dismissal;

The bankers' strike is being considered

## Appeal

A meeting between UGT-Portugal and UGT-Spain and all our banking Unions is scheduled for September 15th, in order to deliberate what measures we can take together against this offensive to bank employees.

The external complaint to the Banco Santander in Spain and near the competent entities – UE Commission and ECB - is now necessary to put an end to the destruction of thousands of jobs in the sector - and for that we ask you to prepare a letter to all them, signed by the major leaders of ETUC, ITUC, UNIGlobalUnion/UNIEuropa and EESC Workers Group.

We cannot lose this struggle.

In solidarity

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Carlos Silva', is written over a light blue circular stamp or watermark.

Carlos Silva  
General Secretary  
UGT-Portugal

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