

Speech given by Bernadette Ségol, General Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)

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President and friends,

It gives me great pleasure to be with you today.
It really does.

Yesterday, a man died who marked the 20th century. Nelson Mandela. What did he do? He opposed, with determination the nasty apartheid regime; he stood for his ideas without being moved for as long as was necessary and, when the right condition were there, a dialogue and a negotiation could start. We all admire this determination, this strength, this true authority at the service of social justice.

With this opposition, determination, strength and true authority, he changed the course of history.

I am glad to be here today, with you, and refer to this example at a time when you, in Hungary, are showing determination, strength and authority to change the course of things.

And I'd like to congratulate you most warmly on behalf of the European Trade Union Confederation.

The step you are taking today is very good news.

Very good news for the members you represent, very good news for the trade union movement.

Because your unity is your strength, because your strength is increasing the strength of the whole trade union movement.

Indeed, I am convinced that together you can, and together we can.

Trade unions are standing to improve the life and working condition of their members. And trade unions want to do that not as narrow minded corporations, but taking into consideration the future of their society.

Trade unions are standing for democracy: there is no democracy without free trade unions.

These objectives they have to carry using all the tools and all the strength at their disposal;

They have to use opposition, sometimes even rebellion. They have the power to say no. To say NO - enough is enough - it is necessary to unite and have a joint oppositional front. This is what you are doing.

Trade unions must also be ready to dialogue; when conditions are ripe, when there are windows of opportunity, then dialogue can start; in a dialogue you will be a stronger interlocutor if you are united.

Trade unions have another essential function: negotiation. In companies, at local or sectorial level you will be stronger in negotiations if you represent a bigger number of members.

I am also convinced that your organisation will be more attractive to potential new members if it becomes clearer that you are keeping, and promoting, together, the essential trade union values.

The step you are taking today is not simple; you probably have not solved all problems. I would be very surprised if you had.

You already overcame difficulties, but there are certainly more to come; it's not an easy process to unite; structures have their resistance; people felt at home in their own confederation; they have to adjust to new horizons; some might be destabilised.

Because unity does not only come from a top down decision, it must, gradually, be built internally. You, your members will have to make this new organisation, your organisation.

So, every time there is a problem, hard discussion, and even conflicts, think that this problem, or this conflict must be overcome one way or another, for the good of the people. We all must have a wider perspective.

As General Secretary of the ETUC, I'll do my very best to try and accompany this process and make it as smooth as possible.

Your country is full of fascinating history, full of fascinating culture, full of fascinating people. The move you are initiating today is and will remain part of your country's history.

Friends I wish you all the best.
We'll keep in close contact and help each other.

Dolgoszatok tovabb,
sok sikert!