

XIII UILTuCS Congress – General Secretary Paolo Andreani’s introduction

Extract on European and international matters

Since 2020, the global context has given rise to crises that have hit the world of work and the most vulnerable members of society particularly hard.

The pandemic, the growing number of wars – starting with the one in Ukraine and those in the Middle East – trade conflicts, and the dismantling of global political and economic rules: all these crises are leading to unemployment, attacks on workers’ rights and precarious working conditions, soaring corporate profits and plummeting wages, with widespread impoverishment for the people we represent.

The recent report by the International Labour Organisation notes a deterioration in the quality of work and purchasing power across Europe. Informal work and exploitation are on the rise. There is a strong call to action to reduce gender and generational gaps and tackle precariousness. One in four people is vulnerable.

During and after the pandemic, Europe was able to protect its citizens by funding the rescue of more than 40 million jobs and implementing the largest investment plan in its history, thereby reviving the economy and employment. At the same time, directives and measures were enacted that advanced workers’ rights and conditions.

Today, that era is a distant memory; the European Union is weak on the international stage, caught between major economic and military powers, and uncertain in its actions due to the rise of right-wing populism and nationalist vetoes.

Security, defence and competitiveness are failing to translate into common policies, and the labour market is weighed down by a neoliberal culture that seeks to dismantle all the significant achievements of recent years.

A ‘constitutional vision’ is needed to free the European Union from cross-vetoes and build a new, unified identity.

A ‘political vision’ is needed to make Europe a defender of democracy and the multilateral international order, of rights and peace on the global stage.

An ‘economic vision’ is needed to drive new sustainable growth, based on joint investment, industrial and sectoral plans, respect for the environment and digital leadership.

And above all, a “social revolution” is needed, one that puts people and work back at the heart of all policies, reviving that Social Europe which had risen from the ashes of austerity, but was immediately sidelined by the prevailing neo-conservatism. Draghi has repeatedly pointed the way forward.

Perhaps the United States of Europe, if that is the possibility of the present, needs pragmatic joint action. Perhaps we need another Italian – one who, having saved the single currency and an Italy brought to its knees by Covid – can be the voice of the free world’s response to the chaos created by Trump and Putin.

It is the trade unions' duty to play a leading and active role in all these visions and revolutions, and this is why UILTuCS strongly supports the activism of UIL and its General Secretary in calling for a change of pace from the European and international confederations.

It is for this objective that UILTuCS has sought to expand its role within our European federations, UNI Europa and EFFAT, and our international federations, UNI Global and the IUF.

We have committed ourselves to the issues of combating low-paid and precarious work, countering the excessive power of multinationals, revitalising European social dialogue, exchanging experiences, and the development of common policies and actions with sister organisations at European and international level, to defend rights and build better working and living conditions for service sector workers, in Europe and worldwide.

We have done this first and foremost by bringing European and international issues into our own debate, in the knowledge that the decisions taken at those levels have a fundamental influence on the Italian world of work.

This is why we have established coordination among our representatives on the European Works Councils (EWCs) and developed research and training activities for our union officials and leadership on labour issues at European and international level.

Furthermore, we have made a concrete contribution, in close collaboration with the confederation, to the correct transposition of the most important labour directives, with particular reference to the directive on decent minimum wages, the directive on transparency and equal pay between men and women, the directive on the protection of workers on digital platforms, the new directive on EWCs, and the ongoing revision of European directives on public procurement and concessions. We have stood and will continue to stand alongside Uni Europa and EFFAT in the difficult process of revising the public procurement directives.

Our government is undermining the scope of these directives through piecemeal and disappointing legislative measures. This is why the link between our action in Italy and that of our federations in Europe and globally is now more essential than ever: only together can we bring about real change.

For this reason, I would like to thank the general secretaries of the European sectoral trade unions, Oliver Roethig and Enrico Somaglia, and the international trade unions, Christy Hoffman and Kristjan Bragason, for their presence at our congress and at tomorrow's round table: thank you for being here with us. On behalf of the entire UILTuCS, I want to tell you that we are here and ready to fight alongside you for a fairer and more just Europe and world!