

**Speech given by Bernadette Ségol, General Secretary of the
European Trade Union Confederation
OPZZ Congress**

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I bring you warm and fraternal greetings from the workers of Europe. I am very glad to share with you a special moment in the life of OPZZ: your congress and your 30th anniversary. Happy birthday. Sto lat.

Events in Ukraine and war in ex-Yugoslavia remind us that the Europe we know today is the result of two terrible wars, of blind nationalism, fascism and barbarian totalitarianism.

Friends, Europe is more than simply the European Union.

Peace, democracy and cooperation in the whole of Europe is what we want.

We say: Stop violence. Tanks must remain in their parking space. Kalashnikovs destroyed.

Borders between EU countries are not demarcation lines; they are open borders. This is everyday evidence for us. We are used to it; as we are used to other things Europe gave us.

Europe has achieved a lot: peace in western Europe after WWII; guaranteed democracy and freedom in former dictatorships in southern Europe and more recently in and eastern Europe; laws on working time, parental leave, equality between men and women, against age discrimination, health and safety, information and consultation of workers.

Unfortunately The EU appears more and more like an institutional system far away from its citizens.

Europe needs a new start now; and different policies.

So what is to be done?

Europe has saved the banks and the Euro. That's good. But today it is people's lives and hopes that need to be saved: the opportunity to work, the opportunity to earn a decent living from a decent job, opportunity for our children.

It was the financial sector that caused the crisis that has created so many difficulties across Europe.

It was saving the financial sector that increased public debt and public deficits.

Some countries like Greece, Portugal, Spain and Ireland have paid a very high price. Workers have paid the price. Citizens have paid the price.

The solution imposed has been austerity. Wages have been cut, minimum wages have been reduced – in Poland the minimum wage is too far low.

With you we demand an increase in the minimum wage. A decent job must be paid at least 60 per cent of the average wage. This is the way the Council of Europe defines a decent job.

We say no to unemployment, no to illegal undeclared work, no to precarious jobs, no to young people having to leave their country to look for opportunity.

In Poland you have not suffered recession, but you suffer from too much precarious work – temporary work, fixed term contracts, false self-employment – it is an abuse of flexibility, and abuse of workers' goodwill.

And low pay. Productivity is rising fast in Poland, but wage increases are small. There is a 40% gap now between the increase in productivity and wages – nowhere in Europe has such a big gap.

Bosses across Europe get huge rewards for their supposed achievements – especially in the financial sector - but the workers of Poland are not being rewarded for their real productivity: it is exploitation.

Precarious jobs are promoted as a solution to unemployment – not only in Poland but across Europe – but for us, for workers and families, insecure jobs at low wages are no solution.

Everyone, young or not, should have the right to decent work for a decent life.

People across Europe are fed up with austerity and unemployment, precarious work and cuts in social benefits.

This is why a large number of voters stayed away and record numbers voted for the far right or for Eurosceptic parties.

The voters have sent a warning to mainstream and governing parties. There need to be changes in policy. Not towards racism, or anti-immigration - but to tackle joblessness and poverty.

The ETUC wants a better Europe, a more social Europe, a Europe of quality jobs, decent employment for all.

Europe needs an ambitious plan for investment to drive sustainable growth.

You in Poland have seen the impact that EU funds can make, but now there is a need for a concerted investment plan to relaunch growth and relaunch new sustainable industry throughout Europe – starting with the countries with the highest unemployment.

Investment to achieve a more social Europe: where the needs of ordinary people, the needs of ALL citizens, is the priority.

To fund such investment, and social progress, we need a drive across Europe to end tax fraud, tax evasion and avoidance. More and more multinational want to avoid tax altogether. Multinational companies must pay their fair share. Tax fraud, tax evasion and avoidance costs Europe 1000 million Euros every year says the European Parliament – it is a disgrace.

Trade agreements – such as the one being negotiated with the USA - to enforce workers' rights, to respect public services, to uphold democratic decision-making. This is a priority for the ETUC.

You, the workers of Poland, know it very well. Change is possible. You started the big process of change in 1989.

It is 10 years since Poland joined the European Union, 10 years that have seen Poland's freedom and democracy guaranteed, after your heroic struggle for independence.

But democracy is not just about voting in elections – it is, as Poland's recent history shows us – also about participation in the workplace, and in industry.

Let me be very clear: there is no democracy without trade unions, there is no democracy without Trade union being able to negotiate with employers.

But instead of encouraging and building social dialogue, austerity has been used to undermine social dialogue and collective bargaining.

The European Commission are attacking collective bargaining in Greece, in Spain and elsewhere – when they should be promoting social dialogue in all European countries.

Social dialogue is a benefit for workers and employers – a way to find solutions to problems, to engage in a constructive relationship.

Germany's economy is strong because its social dialogue, effective negotiation between workers and employers, works well.

Social dialogue is at the heart of all of Europe's most successful economies – Germany, Sweden, Denmark, Finland, Belgium.

We want social dialogue to spread across Poland and across the whole of eastern and southern Europe – each in their own way and according to their own traditions, to make their own social dialogue, to create a shared prosperity for all.

European leaders are currently considering the results of the European elections, and discuss who can be President of the European Commission. In doing so, they must respect the democratic choices made by the European Parliament. They need to choose someone capable of providing that vision, someone able to lead Europe down that new path...

We at the ETUC, with our national confederations including the OPZZ, will keep working, until we achieve a better Europe, a new path, a Europe for all its citizens.

The Polish people have achieved so much / Polacy tak wiele osiągnęli.

Together we can achieve even more, not only in Poland but across the European Union / Razem możemy osiągnąć więcej, nie tylko w Polsce, ale w całej Unii Europejskiej.

I wish you a good congress / Życzę Wam udanego Kongresu.