

**Speech given by Bernadette Ségol, ETUC General Secretary
35th GSEE Congress**

22 March 2013, Alexandroupoli

[Check against delivery]

Chair,
Dear Friends,

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to address your congress on behalf of the European trade union confederation.

Your country, Greek citizens, Greek workers in recent years and recent months have been going through an extraordinary painful process.

Cuts in wages, cuts in pensions, cuts in social provisions, attacks on industrial relations, on collective bargaining, selling of public assets, political uncertainty,

Greek people are poorer, uncertain, distrustful.
Greek people are unemployed.
Young Greek leaves the country they love.
Dispair, anger, discouragement are overwhelming.

I am here, on behalf of ETUC members to bring you a message:
It is unfair, and therefore unacceptable that the most modest of a population should bear the burden of this crisis.

This crisis originates in speculation, manipulation, credit excess; the workers you represent are not responsible for speculation, manipulation or credit excess.

I am also here to tell you that we are angry at the way political leadership has been dealing with this crisis.

Instead of showing solidarity in the interest of all European citizens, they gave priorities to policies that exacerbated the crisis.

Those policies are those of austerity.
Austerity is unfair because it puts the burden of adjustment on the most modest.
Austerity does not work: it deepens recession.
Austerity is a means to attack the European Social model, made of social dialogue, public services and social protection.
Through austerity neoliberal ideology is implementing its views: Workers in Europe should be less protected, trade unions should be weaker or eliminated, social security and public services should be privatised.

With you the ETUC is saying loudly and clearly: NO to these policies.

The ETUC says that it is necessary to return to sound accounts, to reduce public deficit and public debt; but we know that this will take time. We know that with no growth, cuts will bring more unemployment, more inequalities, more poverty.

Friends, what we need is solidarity.
Solidarity in practice.
Economic solidarity means a large investment plan with 1 to 2 per cent of EU GDP per year.

Economic solidarity means Eurobonds.

Economic solidarity means a European energy policy with a European tax for the European budget.

But we also need social solidarity.

And that means European minimum standards,

The obligation of a decent wage everywhere.

The obligation for each country to have a decent minimum income, to have unemployment benefits and social protection.

Social solidarity means that the role of trade unions and collective bargaining must be promoted.

Remember: trade unions, the right to organise and to negotiate is part of democratic rights; attacking those rights is attacking democracy.

To start with we want Greece to benefit from the funds available in the European social fund. We want these funds to be used without negative conditions. We want these funds to be used to give employment to people.

GSEE should be involved in discussing employment programmes in Greece.

Solidarity means unity. We need to be strong together. Within the ETUC there are different trade union cultures but together we presented our demand for a social compact for Europe. This compact is on the table. In a few weeks' time the EU Council will discuss what the social dimension of the EMU should be.

Our view is that the EU must -I am saying "must"- have a social dimension. Workers reject downwards completion within a free trade zone. Workers want a European integration process which brings economic and social progress. This is not what is happening today.

Friends; close to our hearts are workers and people in Cyprus.

The fate of this country and the fate of its people are hanging in the air.

Once again unleashed capitalism has shown its power of destruction.

And once again the ETUC will defend workers and citizens who are the victims of this madness.

I know. The temptation is to become anti-European.

But this is not the solution. In a more and more globalised world the solution is not to build new frontiers.

Trade Unions are defending equality, social justice across borders. They are trade union values. We will not stand with populist or nationalist organisation. Never.

The solution to the Greek situation is certainly to be found in determined action at national level, but also in a better European Union.

Friends we are, you are part of the solution. Each of us and all of us together must look ahead: how to rebuild the future; how to trigger better times for us, our children and our grandchildren.

We must not sit back and abandon action. As individual and collectively as trade unions we must use our strength to engage in opposition and in proposition, in opposition and in action;

This is your job at national level. This is also our job, to support you, at European level.

Friends, I thank GSEE, and my good old friends in GSEE for their support to the work the ETUC is doing. You can be assured that our strong relationship is there to stay.

I wish you strength and determination to go through these difficult times. I wish you strength to build a better future. Thank you for your attention.