

Colleagues, brothers and sisters,

It is a big honour to stand before you as candidate for the position of EFFAT General Secretary.

From the moment I joined EFFAT, it was clear to me that this organization is at the heart of something profoundly important.

Our mission is clear: to defend workers' rights in some of the most precarious and challenging sectors of the economy.

To deliver real change for them.

Change for all those brothers and sisters who harvest our fields, process our food, clean our houses and keep the hospitality industry running . Essential workers who make our societies function, despite many of them are underpaid, undervalued and even exploited.

Our role, our fundamental task, is to represent them, to fight with them, with the ultimate aim of achieving a fairer and more just society for all .

We do this through mobilisation, organising and the fundamental role of collective bargaining.

We do it through the power of our actions and the guidance of our values.

We do it every day in unity and solidarity within a fantastic trade union family of 113 organisations across Europe.

Solidarity is not an empty word brothers and sisters – it is a commitment.

It is the foundation on which everything we do is built. Solidarity means action. Solidarity means also sacrifice. Solidarity means supporting each other no matter what is the challenge: being it industrial action, political struggles, campaigns or joint mobilisations based on common trade union values.

Solidarity requires us to speak with one voice. And yes, we know it is not always easy. It requires time, dialogue, mutual understanding, and the willingness to build the broadest possible consensus.

But it is when we rise to this challenge that we achieve victories—impressive victories for working people, whether it is in the context of our struggles in transnational companies; or when we deal with national governments and the European institutions.

Unity and Solidarity are the two secret formulas of our success, *they are* the fundamental principles to which all of us here today in this room have fully committed to.

And what I can promise, is that I'll give my very best to uphold, *respect and amplify these values, if you elect me as General Secretary of EFFAT.*

Colleagues, we have ahead challenging years.

The Kremlin's brutal invasion of Ukraine and the ongoing war in the Middle East have plunged the world back into fear and a dangerous military escalation.

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- We cannot turn a blind eye in front of human suffering and the indiscriminate massacre of innocent civilians.

War is not a fatality. It is the failure of politics, the antithesis of progress, and history has shown us that working people have nothing to gain from it.

Along with death and destruction, war has also triggered a cost of living crisis exacerbated by speculation, with vulnerable households struggling to put food on the table. And it is indeed a brutal irony that those producing or serving our food are themselves among the most likely to be unable to adequately feed their own families.

In such an insecure context, the far right and its toxic rhetoric have found fertile ground.

Although they didn't manage to take control of the EU institutions, they are now part of more and more national government coalitions and their ideas are already influencing the EU agenda.

- We see it in the EU's approach to migration that undermines human rights and dignity and try to sow the seeds of division among working people.
- We see it in a much less ambitious EU social agenda and the dangerous call for deregulation.
- We see it in the rollback of EU green policies and the instrumentalisation of farmers' protests. A protest that was primarily an urgent call for a better distribution of wealth across the food chain, but that has been converted into an attack against EU green policies!.

But the fight against the extreme right is a fight we cannot loose brothers and sisters.

Because they stand for the exact opposite of our values and take decisions that are detrimental to our members. It is enough to see how they voted on key files in the last EU term:

- They voted against social conditionality in the CAP!
- They voted against women's rights and against the Gender Pay Transparency Directive!
- They voted against the Due Diligence Directive!

And we can add the many examples of their damaging policies in Finland, Hungary and Italy.

So the stakes are too high for us to stand on the sidelines. Because what is at risk is basically everything the trade union movement has won - struggle after struggle, over decades.

And to play our part as EFFAT in in this vital battle, we must develop tools to fight back their lies and their attempts to divide us at the workplace.

But we must also confront the inequalities and injustices that workers in our sectors face. As the most effective way to counter grievance politics is by improving jobs and living standards.

And colleagues, inequalities and injustices in our sectors are too many

- **Unjust is the distribution of wealth across the food chain, with shareholders of retailers and food and hospitality giants making record profit, while our members are squeezed.**
- **Unfair is that undeclared and under-declared work affect at least 32% of all agricultural workers across Europe! And that at the same time we have countries like Italy, where only 0.02% of agricultural employers are inspected every year!**

Shameful is to record an average of 550 deaths a year in agriculture and forestry across Europe! Mothers and fathers who leave their children every day to go to work and don't come back! Like the 4 grape pickers who lost their lives last year because of heat strokes in the Champagne regions.

- Or like Satnam Singh, the Indian farm worker who lost his arm in an accident in Italy. And instead of getting immediate help, he was left on the road and died a few days later.

And again

- **Unfair is that at least 3.5 million domestic workers across Europe are denied recognition and basic workers' rights!**
- **Unacceptable are the cases of violence and sexual harassment against hospitality and fast food workers, with companies like McDonald's doing nothing to address them and evading liability due to their franchise system.**
- **Unequal is the treatment reserved to many migrant workers in our sectors, trapped in abusive subcontracting arrangements or exploited by unscrupulous gangmasters.**

And yes, profoundly Unequal is also having gender pay gaps of up to 16% like in the hotel industry in Cyprus, or 29% like in the Spanish fish processing industry. Because a society that doesn't respect women's rights can have no claims of being civilised!

Colleagues, Inequalities and injustices in our sectors are widespread, and they demand our action.

Because agriculture and food workers cannot afford to wait!

Because Fast food workers cannot afford to wait!

Because Domestic workers cannot afford to wait!

So what is the way forward?

- **The way forward is an EFFAT that leads the fight for more sustainable agri-food and hospitality sectors against power concentration and corporate greed.**
- **The way forward is an EFFAT that continues supporting an ambitious environmental agenda - but it must be clear that there cannot be any green transition without decent work!**

The way forward is an EFFAT that place organising and collective bargaining as the number one priorities. Because union power is key to deliver long lasting change for our members. And because Collective bargaining driven by the power of working people is our most effective tool to improve terms and conditions. And as said yesterday we have a lot to exchange and learn from the fantastic work you do in your respective countries.

We need an EFFAT that inspires hope, offers solutions, and puts the needs of working first.

But all this cannot be reached by the Secretariat alone!

Everything we have achieved so far is because you have built strong unions. It is because your members have fought every day for social justice in the workplace, and because we have joined forces across borders.

So If I stand before you today, it is because I firmly believe, deep in my heart, that starting from tomorrow.

thanks to our mutual commitment to act in solidarity as a collective

—together with the fantastic Secretariat we have—

we will write new and remarkable chapters in the history of our fantastic trade union family!

Viva l'EFFAT! Viva the power of trade union solidarity!