

FCE CFDT – May 14, 2025

Congress, Friends,

It is an honour for me to join you today on behalf of the 7 million industrial, mining, and energy workers organised in industriAll Europe.

Thank you to all my FCE-CFDT colleagues who are active in our networks and our work.

I would particularly like to thank Dominique Bousquenaud for his active role in industriAll Europe. This has taken many forms, but I would particularly like to highlight one element: the renewal of unions and the promotion of the voice of young trade unionists. Dominique has been a proactive supporter of our Youth Network's activities—for which we are truly grateful—and we have been impressed by how FCE CFDT has risen to the challenge many unions face in recruiting and mobilising young members. This is an important legacy, and we wish you all the best, Dominique, in your next chapter.

Across Europe, workers in industrial sectors face harsh realities every day: restructuring, plant closures, delayed investments, and falling demand fuelled by austerity measures and the cost of living crisis. According to Eurostat, up to 4.3 million jobs are now at risk if immediate action is not taken.

On 5 February, 6,000 workers from the north, south, east, and west came to Brussels with a common call: investment in quality industrial jobs.

In three weeks, more than 600 trade unionists will gather at our 4th Congress in Budapest under the slogan "UNITING WORKERS FOR AN INDUSTRIAL FUTURE."

Dear delegates, we are living through a pivotal moment in history. By any measure, European industry is under extraordinary pressure: strategic dependencies on components and energy, a trade war and heightened tensions on both sides of the Atlantic, and the demands of a massive economic transformation.

We are engaged in an energy and industrial revolution, while war rages in Europe, testing the strength of our democratic structures.

Attacks on unions and our values are increasingly coordinated.

The short-term strategies of multinationals - prioritising cost cutting, excessive dividends, and share buybacks over profit reinvestment - have further undermined the dynamism and resilience of our industries.

Profit-maximising strategies - squeezing workers even harder and extracting value from our industries.

The resulting decline in the wage share and falling or stagnating real wages have allowed profits to soar. Europe is the world leader in dividend distribution (up 25% last year to €46 billion).

The far right is using this context of economic uncertainty to divide and find scapegoats. Recent developments in the United States are another wake-up call to the very worrying rise of the far right across the world. In Europe, the big wake-up call came with the results of the last European Parliament elections in June 2024, when far-right parties managed to increase their presence.

We are facing substantial attacks on the recent victories we have achieved at the European level: Recent union victories for platform workers, the Minimum Wage Directive, or the duty of care in supply chains. The rules are being attacked through a deregulation agenda under the guise of "simplification." But yesterday's failed solutions of austerity, labour market flexibility, and privatisation will only exacerbate the problems we face.

Austerity measures have exposed social safety nets, increased precarious work, and undermined labour inspections, with fatal workplace accidents increasing in nearly half of EU Member States. Austerity has not only economic costs, but also political consequences.

There is no business-as-usual solution for European industry.

Europe must urgently address the economic and social insecurity that is at the root of the growing anger and fear in our societies.

Another way is possible.

Investment and industrial democracy are antidotes to our economic instability. Decarbonisation must remain the goal, based on the Green Deal, but Europe cannot be prosperous or peaceful without good industrial jobs. Our energy and manufacturing industries are the foundation of our welfare states and social cohesion, but they are also the key to our political sovereignty.

Europe must not be a purely economic project. Europe must also be social, that is, responding to the needs of citizens.

Dear colleagues, a strong and united trade union movement is a prerequisite. Achieving our climate goals is rightly a political and societal priority, which is why politicians have a direct responsibility to put in place an active economic policy and the necessary political framework and tools to implement an orderly and just transition, with worker involvement and social security at the centre. This is the time for political and industrial courage, not political gimmicks.

As a result of our joint campaign, Europe has finally recognised that we need an industrial policy fit for the challenges of our time, linked to social conditionalities on all financing and public procurement that guarantee the maintenance and creation of quality jobs and worker participation at all levels of the company.

But these proposed measures lack both urgency and the necessary funding.

This inadequacy is all the more striking compared to the "ReArm Europe" initiative, which was tabled in rapid succession after Zelensky's time in the Oval Office. The EU has proposed releasing €800 billion and exempting military spending from revised EU budgetary rules.

Alongside the ETUC, we are calling for a complete suspension of EU budgetary rules.

Potentially, things are moving. The decision taken in Berlin by the new coalition government has triggered public support for the renewal of energy and transport infrastructure, as well as for military spending.

More and more governments are recognising that investment in the energy sector and critical infrastructure is as important to our security as military equipment. Whatever its origin, the power outage in Spain has reinforced this reality. The Commission has presented an Action Plan for Affordable Energy, recognising the need to ensure security of supply and affordability. However, a key game-changer is missing, namely the absence of specific measures to reform electricity sector regulation and decouple gas and electricity prices. Geopolitical changes have led to previously

unthinkable ideas being incorporated into EU policy. A good example is "European preference," which is increasingly being proposed to ensure the maintenance of industrial value chains in Europe and promote demand for cleaner, but currently more expensive, products and materials. This has been welcomed by industriAll Europe.

At the sectoral level, a European sectoral strategy for the chemical industry will be presented before the summer, following the recent action plans for base metals and the automotive industry. We are working to ensure that the views of industry workers are heard in its formulation. In our view, the chemical industry must be recognised as strategic. This is why we are calling for an ambitious law on critical chemicals. Investments should be linked to specific social conditionalities to ensure the creation of quality jobs, strong social dialogue, and training opportunities to support workers throughout the transition, as well as an increase in the number and quality of apprenticeships.

Our changing context and the ongoing transformation require a new social contract with government and industry, and it must deliver dividends for workers, giving us a stake in decision-making as masters of our own destiny.

Dear colleagues, as in all our struggles as a movement, we have never been given anything easily. We have mobilised collectively and fought for our victories, and this is what we must continue to do together.

This requires strengthening our alliances and redoubling our action.

We are the generation that must engage in this struggle. We are counting on you and the FCE CFDT to stand by our side. We look forward to working with the new leadership as constructively and actively as we did with Dominique.

Solidarity!