

**Greeting from Susanne Uhl, NGG, at the VIII National Congress of the FLAI CGIL, Rome**

Dear colleagues,  
sisters and brothers,

I am very happy to be here at your congress and I bring you the warmest greetings and solidarity from the Executive Committee of the NGG in Germany.

We - I - would like to take this opportunity to thank you, your Executive Committee and especially Giovanni and Andrea in many ways.

Within the framework of our international and European umbrella organisations IUF and EFFAT, you have supported us in solidarity and actively so that we could successfully put an end to an exploitative system in the German meat industry.

After long years of political struggle for improvements in the working conditions of mainly migrant workers in German slaughterhouses, we succeeded in having work contracts and agency work in the industry banned by law.

The Covid pandemic had once again exposed, like in a burning glass, how inhumanly especially migrant workers in Germany were treated.

Accommodation in overcrowded and worst housing, withheld wages, excessive working hours and even worse health and safety conditions in the factories.

In German agriculture, working conditions are similarly dramatic. Due to climate change, however, another one is added. Harvest workers work outside in intense heat without protection. Our experiences in the summer of 2022 showed: many protective measures were missing. There were no shady places

to cool down, no sufficient drinking water, there was a lack of everything from sun cream to simple headgear.

You probably know the description from your caporalata system, but in Germany much of what I described concerning the work in slaughterhouses was unfortunately not illegal.

A big problem for us was, that it was difficult to hold anyone on the employer side responsible for the working conditions. The slaughterhouses shifted the responsibility to their subcontractors, and these to the sus-subcontractors and so on.

In many cases up to 80 per cent of all workers were employed by these subcontractors and only 20 per cent by the slaughterhouses themselves. And the slaughterhouses were comfortable: earning money, making profits without being responsible for vicious working and living conditions.

Migrant workers, who are recruited mainly from Eastern European member states, had to pay for this shifted responsibility with their health and with their faith in the rule of law.

Imagine: You come to a country that enjoys the reputation of a constitutional state in Europe.

You come to a country where it is said that you are safe and injustice have no place in the world of work. You also go there because you know that these values are not so good in your own country.

So you come to the country where this is supposed to be different. And you have to find out for yourself that this is not true.

What does that do to your faith in the principles of the rule of law, in the promises of a democratic Europe, based on the rule of law? Not good, I fear.

And yet Europe is precisely the place where we must fight together for the improvement of working conditions, for functioning occupational health and safety, for the strengthening of collective agreements and for the rule of law and democracy in all member states. We can only do this together, in solidarity with each other.

We have to do this together at the European level, because otherwise we will be played off against each other, employers threatening to relocate their companies if the national governments do not also worsen their working conditions.

Much of this could be seen in Germany in the meat industry. Danish slaughterhouses were relocated to Germany, citing deregulated labour conditions and wage dumping in Germany.

This is also why your solidarity with us and the political pressure from many European unions was so helpful that the German legislator, the parliament, finally intervened on the side of migrant workers, on the side of NGG.

Don't get me wrong.

The European Union today is far from what we would want it to be.

There is still a lot to do, but especially in the last few months we have achieved a few joint successes. For example, these include the directive impeding unfair trade practices in the agricultural and food sector, the minimum wage directive, and the supply chain law, which is currently being negotiated.

All these directives give us instruments so that we, as trade unions, can improve our national situations, but also the situation of many workers in third countries, on the basis of European law. But we all know: having a law alone does not change much. It has to be filled with life, applied and controlled. For trade unions, a law is not the end of the campaign, but a beginning with new means.

We also need this renewed powerful, common beginning with a view to defending democracy, freedom, diversity and internationality. We also need this renewed common beginning to defend from authoritarian, neo-imperial and/or extreme right wing governments.

At this point, I would like to thank you once again.

It is thanks to your initiative - together with the CISL and UIL - that we will adopt the MANIFESTO OF THE INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF ANTI-FASCIST TRADE UNIONS within the framework of EFFAT.

The manifesto makes clear that trade union values are the opposite of what extreme right-wing parties represent in Europe and around the world.

That we stand together against extreme right-wing movements, nationalism and populism, dictatorships and against all forms of discrimination, exclusion and oppression.

You and your Congress stand for this.

Thank you for that.

And: Lets go on together with concrete actions of mutual solidarity.