

## Tripartite Social Summit

Intervention by Livia Spera, ETF General Secretary

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It is obvious that we face a multifaceted challenge. A worsening geopolitical environment is creating economic instability, while the climate crisis continues to deepen. In such a context, we must be clear: the European Social Model is not a burden on our competitiveness. On the contrary, it is an asset, a foundation for a resilient and innovative economy.

Europe should not engage in a global race to the bottom on social standards. There will always be someone more unscrupulous, willing to exploit workers further. The Draghi Report itself made this clear: Europe's competitiveness does not come from cheap labour but from strong public services, investment in skills, and good jobs. The EU should have its own model of competitiveness, without copying models defined in other parts of the world.

Yet, across our industries, we see a worrying trend—precarious, low-paid, and undervalued jobs are becoming the norm. Instead of competing on innovation and efficiency, firms are competing on who can suppress wages and good working conditions the most. This is unsustainable. It is damaging to workers, to businesses, and to the European economy as a whole.

Take transport—one of the key pillars of European prosperity and security. The sector is facing crippling labour shortages, not because there aren't skilled workers to do the jobs, but because those jobs have been degraded. Increasingly, we see reliance on a workforce of precarious third-country nationals, often exploited and denied access to their rights and the use of fraudulent business models. If we do not act, other critical sectors will follow.

The solution is clear: we must promote quality jobs. This is not just about fairness—it is about economic security, innovation, and sustainability. The Quality Jobs Roadmap must deliver real legislative initiatives, not just empty recommendations. We need a move from promises to concrete actions and legally binding commitments. And beyond that, quality jobs must be embedded in all policy areas, including public procurement. European public money should not be handed to unscrupulous employers who drive down wages and working conditions.

Let me be clear—we are not necessarily against simplification. But we will not accept deregulation under the guise of reform. Deregulation will only make the situation worse, entrenching a low-wage, low-productivity model that undermines Europe's long-term strength. If we look at transport, lack of enforcement is creating economic damage and is halting competitiveness, not regulation.

I would like to signal what our colleagues from IndustriAll Europe, in the manufacturing sectors, are calling for a comprehensive European industrial policy. We need investment in infrastructure, in skills, in affordable and clean energy—delivered with strict social and environmental conditions attached to public funding. Security is not just about re-arming. It is about ensuring strong societies and strong public services, where the burdens and benefits of economic transition are shared equitably.

And as we talk about just transition, let's be clear that we need rules and policies to encourage this. Just transition won't just happen without a clear framework.

We stand ready to work to make this a reality. But let there be no doubt—workers' rights, quality jobs, and a fair economy are not negotiable. Europe's future depends on them.

Thank you.