



**FP CGIL Congress
15 February 2006, Viterbo**

**Address by Carola Fischbach-Pyttel,
EPSU General Secretary**

Dear Carlo, dear Colleagues and delegates,

My Italian is at very basic level and I HOPE you will understand me. It is my pleasure to greet all of you on behalf of the European Federation of Public Service Unions, EPSU.

I greet you as part of the large EPSU family of now 206 public service unions.

Let me start with the most topical piece of information: Yesterday, thousands of trade unions assembled in Strasbourg to express our opposition to the draft services directive, notoriously known by the name of its initiator, the former Commissioner of the European Commission Bolkestein. Members of the European Parliament will vote on amendments and possible compromise proposals tomorrow (today). A crucial vote this will be! It will help determine the position of the Commission. And then of course there is the Council, the governments of the Member States who will also be called upon to evaluate the situation. Whatever the outcome of the vote tomorrow in the European Parliament, our struggle is not over. Perhaps there will be solutions for the issues of labour law and respect of collective agreements. Still, we could end up in a situation where the services of general economic interest are covered. Water supply services for example, waste disposal. Ambiguities remain and unfortunately where ambiguity is present, the internal market thrives.

There remains a further danger. The declared objective of the draft directive is to abolish 'obstacles to free trade'. National rules and regulations can be upheld **only** if considered to be 'proportionate' and in the general interest for reasons of security, public health and the environment. This means that free market principles still come first and that the burden of proof is on general interest considerations. We can foresee continuous legal challenges before the European Court of Justice by private

providers against inhouse municipal water and waste services, against intermunicipal cooperation.

The appeal from this congress **MUST** be: Stop the liberalisation obsession. Bolkestein remains a bad piece of legislation. Whatever compromise might be reached, at the end of the day, we remain critical towards a policy approach where the Internal Market becomes the sole driver of European integration. We agree that cross-border trade can deliver growth, employment and cohesion, but only if it works **for the population at large and** not just for private companies, for private companies within a social Europe not in opposition to a social Europe. We have seen the effect of EU energy liberalisation: qualified jobs are lost, insufficient investments into the maintenance of networks have caused power cuts in many European countries. The Bolkestein directive is more radical in its approach. It illustrates quite dramatically how much the EU is at a crossroads: pure market liberalisation or a balanced policy, reconciling economic efficiency with social and environmental considerations.

The current political tides dominating EU policies want to restrict **or worse even** roll back acquired social rights. There are employers and politicians who want to put a stop to all further European social policy, who want to renationalise social policy. Dear Colleagues, we must **not let** that happen. We have to struggle hard to assert our position.

Our message **MUST** be clear: we want the European Union to be a political and social Union. This requires strong social partnership, a sustainable economy, efficient welfare states and public services. We stand for democracy, equal opportunities, goods jobs and a better life for all people.

Solidarity is a major ingredient for societies to function. It therefore has to take precedence over competition and Europe has to be more than an economic space. It is unacceptable that competitiveness is the dominant yardstick against which everything is measured, whereas the social Europe is lagging behind.

We want political recognition of public services in the further construction of the European Union. This is why the members of our Executive Committee agreed to launch a major campaign on **‘Quality Public Services in Europe – Quality of Life’**.

We want to rally for an alternative to the current agenda of liberalisation and deregulation with this campaign. Our aim is to provide a European platform for ongoing national campaigns. We demand a political and legal guarantee for public services within the EU and we will forge alliances in this campaign with organisations supporting the objective of quality public services for Europe's citizens. The success of our campaign will depend on the support of the affiliated unions. This major initiative will only be successful if **you** are committed to be actively engaged. The timetable of our campaign will allow us to apply pressure in the EP this spring, as it considers its response to the White Paper on Services of General Interest.

EPSU held its 7th Congress in June 2004 in Stockholm. This was the occasion to reaffirm some of our basic positions on the role of public services in the EU, on solidarity based pension systems, on social social dialogue and collective bargaining coordination.

Dear Colleagues, social partnership is another central feature of the European Social Model. It is the mechanism for representative European social partners to develop social standards aiming at improved working conditions. Employers and trade unions have thus the possibility of creating binding European contracts as autonomous partners. This requires a strong European trade union organisation and it also requires an effective employers' representation. We have been able to establish a sectoral social dialogue committee for local and regional government. This is the second area after electricity where EPSU is involved in a formal social dialogue. We have been able to develop EPSU as legitimate social partner in the hospital sector on subjects like training, international recruitment and mobility. We now also have a prospect to develop social dialogue in the national administration sector.

It has to be said: progress in the social dialogue is slow, both at the intersectoral and at sectoral levels.

But we cannot give up in the face of obstacles. We need to persist in order to build a European social dialogue.

This means, that we all have to be prepared to actively support the process and to make the necessary links between national collective bargaining and European

industrial relations. The different levels of negotiations and collective bargaining cannot develop in parallel. The sectoral social dialogue is an important strategic instrument for us to exploit. But this requires much better coordination. Nothing happens in isolation. The current industrial dispute led by Ver.di in Germany is an example. The German colleagues want to ward off the attempts by employers to lengthen working time and at the same time cut salaries and other benefits. This is also a battle about jobs in the public services. Working time remains an important question on our agenda. It was because of united trade union action that we were able to work towards a good compromise in the European Parliament on the review of the working time directive. Our main objective is to end the so-called individual opt-out, whereby employers can force workers to sign an individual agreement to work more than the weekly maximum of 48 hours. We cannot give up on this important directive. It is one of the main pieces of European social legislation. It is to protect the health and safety of doctors, of ambulance staff, of bus drivers, of fire fighters and many other workers. But importantly it is also to protect the safety of patients, of service users, of citizens.

In conclusion, dear Colleagues, in an increasingly integrated European Union we need to work together, joint action is a political must!