Dear Secretary General Pambis Kiritsis,

Dear delegates

Comrades and friends

I think we are all excited!

After many years, in the country that hosted the first congress of the World Federation of Trade Unions in 1945, a full 80 years of exciting, intense but complicated life, we are bringing together delegates from all over Europe to agree and decide together on "what is to be done" to make our historic international trade union, the WFTU, which today unites more than 105 million workers and is permanently organised in 133 countries, grow and gain more weight.

We are here to reaffirm our closeness, our solidarity and our struggle with the Palestinian people, who have been suffering for too long under the genocidal and unpunished aggression of the terrorist state of Israel;

we are here to support the Cuban people, who have been suffering for years under a notorious "blockade" that is strangling the economy of a country and a people that does not bow to American imperialism;

we are here alongside the peoples of the global South in their struggle to free themselves from colonialism,

we are here because we are aware that war is always against peoples and workers,

we are here because militant and internationalist solidarity is in the DNA of the World Federation of Trade Unions.

But we are also very interested in discussing what is happening in Europe and in the world, how the economic and social transformations are affecting the lives of working people, of the popular masses, of our social bloc of reference.

Europe is experiencing its second war since the end of the Second World War and this is bringing about a profound change of perspective for the peoples and workers of our continent.

The rupture at the beginning of the 1990s, the long period of austerity, the forced de-industrialisation of entire productive sectors, the war on trade through tariffs and sanctions in the context of inter-imperialist competition, have led to a serious overall decline in living and working conditions in almost all European countries.

Military spending is becoming an increasingly important component of the budgets of our countries, which are diverting more and more resources from welfare and wages to increase those for the military-industrial complex, and today the newly elected President of the United States and the Secretary-General of NATO are calling for a further increase in appropriations to 5% of GDP.

The assertion of the war economy is already a reality: rising cost of living, wage freezes, extension of the retirement age, privatisation, precariousness, mass impoverishment, supported by a repressive crackdown and attack on all expressions of conflict that oppose it.

The recent elections to the European Parliament showed a considerable political stability on the continent, so much so that the same previous majority, resulting from the alliance between the European People's Party, the European Socialists and Democrats and the Greens, was again proposed for the EU government, despite a further sharp increase in abstentions and votes for extreme right-wing formations.

Many countries in the European Union have right-wing governments. These results are the poisoned fruit of the austerity policies imposed by the EU.

For years, the EU ruling classes have increased exploitation, cut services, carried out financial and environmental speculation, generated anger, hunger and frustration and subordinated the policies to the interests of capital and the bourgeoisie, which in many cases have been implemented by the so-called liberal left, economic and social decisions that have hit the working classes hard and contributed to the impoverishment of the middle classes, alien and invisible to the lives of the people.

The possibility of a change in the political electoral scenario had led the ETUC/CES to take the field in support of the reaffirmation of the current political set-up in the European Parliament, even to the point of drafting a "manifesto" that carefully avoided even mentioning the ongoing genocide by the Zionist state of Israel against the Palestinian people. The obvious aim was to maintain the absolute monopoly on industrial relations by offering to continue to play the role of enabler of the EU's anti-grass roots policies.

A fitting tribute to the considerable financial support given in various forms by the Parliament and the European Commission to the ETUC/CES.

All the anti-worker measures adopted by the Parliament and the European Commission were agreed and supported by the ETUC/CES, which acted as a guarantor of social peace and to prevent any real opposition from emerging.

The Qatar-gate scandal in which not only numerous parliamentarians and officials were implicated, but also the top management of the yellow ETUC/CES, the rivers of dollars that ended up in their pockets and coffers for not denouncing the dramatic working conditions of the workers involved in the construction of the World Cup stadiums in Qatar, are the clearest demonstration of the role played by this criminal association that calls itself a trade union.

The position of the ETUC/CES vis-à-vis the European Parliament and the latter's unwillingness to have any relationship with the FSM is a problem that the Eurof must propose to address and overcome.

The fragmentation of the political framework and the markets is also the fragmentation of labour, artificial intelligence is being used as a cudgel to destroy jobs and dismantle production apparatuses and services.

The demand, which now involves all categories and all countries, for a drastic reduction in working hours for the same wages, clashes with the will of the bosses to keep profits unchanged through mass redundancies.

The industrial crisis has been going on for at least two years in the main European manufacturing countries; relocations continue to reduce production capacity and destroy the manufacturing vocation.

The shortening of production chains favours reshoring and nearshoring, but at the price of lowering wages and rights to the same level as in the countries from which the previously relocated companies are being brought back home.

The profits of banks and utilities have reached very high levels without any impact on wages, stable employment or pensions, and inequality has not been reduced.

Precariousness is rampant across Europe, no longer just among the young, but across all generations and social classes. The reality is an army of the working-poor who are unable to earn a decent living, and unemployment is rising almost everywhere.

Precarious and blackmailable work is increasingly replacing stable and decent work, denying the younger generations a future and shifting the costs of restructuring the labour market to support the interests of capital onto the weak and those who lose their jobs as a result of the crisis.

One of the phenomena common to all European countries is the recourse to the privatisation of public services and strategic assets to give them away to the private sector.

The hunger for profit and power of financial and productive capital is being satisfied by handing over whole sections of the welfare state, especially health, education, research, the pension system through pension funds, the production and distribution of electricity and gas and the management of public utilities, to large multinationals and the private market.

In all countries, mobilizations against the Russian-NATO war in Ukraine, militant support for the just struggle of the Palestinian people against the Israeli occupier, arms blockades at ports and airports, strikes against layoffs, attacks on pensions, health, public services, wages, for the right to housing, have always seen the flags of the WFTU in the front row.

Our aim is not to reduce the damage, which is the declared aim of the yellow trade unions, we fight every day to change the model of society, to defeat the capitalist mode of production, to affirm that war is always against the workers and the common people, that wealth belongs to those who produce it.

Our unwillingness to compromise, the determination with which we take up trade union disputes, with which we oppose the exploitation of man by man and man by the environment, with which we assert the right to work in safety, for gender equality and fight to overthrow colonialism, and stand with migrants against racism and for them to have the same rights as their European brothers and sisters, make us, our organisations, our delegates and leaders, the targets of the most determined repression by the bosses and governments.

All our governments are persecuting militant trade unionists and class trade unions. Hundreds of trade union leaders and activists have been sacked and/or put on trial for their class militancy. It is our task to resolutely oppose any attempt to reduce the class struggle to criminality with the full force of internationalist solidarity.

The bosses and the bourgeoisie are pushing through the parliaments restrictions on the right to strike and other repressive laws on the classical forms of social and trade union conflicts in order to deprive the class movement of indispensable instruments for the defence of its rights and to weaken its impact.

The banner of defending the civil rights of citizens is artificially set against the rights of workers. The yellow organisations in many countries share this philosophy and have allowed anti-strike measures to become law.

We need militants, trained and determined, we need to intensify the ideological training of the cadres of our organisations, to study and analyse the processes and trends set in motion by the bosses and governments in order to be able to confront them with the necessary strength that only class unity can give us.

Only by strengthening the WFTU, following the guidelines given to us by our history and by the 18th Congress, through direct participation in the intensive activities carried out by the TUI/UIS in all categories and in the initiatives promoted by the regional and sub-regional offices, will we be able to build the critical mass necessary to change the present state of affairs.

The WFTU was not created to serve the bosses, to grab a few scraps of power, to accompany imperialist and capitalist processes by ensuring social peace and making itself the banner of damage limitation.

With our conference, we want to implement the decisions and the spirit of the 18th Word trade union Congress in Rome, to give new impetus to the WFTU in Europe, to organise it better and to strengthen its struggles and presence in as many countries as possible, to grow in the workplaces and in the squares, to be a general point of reference for the struggles against the bosses, to affirm the rights of the workers, pensioners, youth, women, migrants, to practise internationalism, to hold high the flag of anti-fascism, anti-imperialism, anti-colonialism.

Long live the FSM!

Long live the internationalist solidarity

Long live the class struggle