

A new dynamic as a bridge to the future

FRANK MOREELS

Frank, You are running for the presidency of ITF, the International Transport Workers' Federation?

Indeed, I want to assume the presidency for the next five years because every trade union organisation should evolve and adapt to the new social and economic realities. Even an organisation that is already delivering good work today, under the leadership of Steve Cotton, the Secretary General of ITF. As president, I think I can add additional emphases, develop new dynamics, ... It is good to bring a breath of fresh air into an organisation from time to time.

The challenges we face are not minor! Just think of the climate problems, digitalisation and artificial intelligence, the success of populism and the extreme right, social dumping in most sectors of the transport industry, ... By the way, I wrote down my vision and experiences in the book [“The world belongs to us.”](#)

Moreover, when I took up the chairmanship of ETF, I proved that innovation also brings dynamism. I inherited an organisation that was somewhat dormant. Since 2017, we have renewed the organisation in terms of approach, changed structures, dynamised the culture of the organisation. Today, ETF looks completely different from before. And with my unanimous re-election in 2022, people have shown that this renewal is also recognized.

What could be better in ITF?

I believe that a global trade union federation stands or falls on member involvement. Greater member involvement is therefore my first and foremost priority. An organisation is more than its president. It is the members who come first. An organisation has to be relevant to a maximum number of members. So we need to get more unions effectively involved in the functioning of ITF.



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You also think the regions should get more attention?

The sections of ITF are running well, and are today - rightly - the hub of ITF operations. But we should not lock ourselves into the sections. Many problems we face today are cross-sectional. Just think of automation, the impact of artificial intelligence in transport, social dumping, greening. This needs to be addressed cross-sectional. Connecting with member organisations cannot be done only from headquarters in London. That is why regional antennae need to be strengthened. More resources, energy, man- and womanpower may be invested in that.

Involving the regional vice-presidents in ITF's executive committee would also help the regions have more impact. If I were ITF president, believe me, I would visit the regions every year and listen to the members, all of them, because it is all about them!

Every project, meeting, statement, ... that ITF launches must pass the “relevance” test. Whatever we do must be relevant to the affiliates, not to some of them, but to the majority. And the affiliates know best what their expectations, their demands, their needs are.... The bottom-up approach

must take precedence over the top-down approach.

Aren't you too old to lead ITF?

I am a white, European man with quite a few trade union years on my record, that's true. The advantage is that I already have 43 years of trade union experience, that I lead a national trade union as president and have therefore conducted national and sectoral negotiations, that I coordinate a staff of more than 70 employees, ... I have been president of the European transport federation ETF for seven years now and have proven there that I am still super dynamic and bursting with ideas. It taught me to look for balances, to make syntheses that everyone can relate to. I think it is important to unite, not to impose my opinion. In a country like Belgium, with three communities that each speak their own language, I learned how to bring people together. I will be able to put that experience to good use globally.

At the same time, it is my desire to do only one term as ITF president. In those five years, I want to pave the way for a woman president, preferably from the global south. In any case, it will be my endeavour to get

noses in that direction within ITF. If no candidate with that profile presents herself today, my ambition is to make sure there is one in five years' time. To put it in a witticism, it would be nice if I were to become the last male president, and it is important not delay this by 10 years or more. I have spoken with quite a few member organisations and learnt that we need to bridge today to the future, and use the next five years to feminise. I want to take up that bridging role.

How do you see yourself as chairman, what is the style of leadership you want to adopt?

I want more participatory meetings, for example of the Executive Committee, with more space for members to have their say. This gives us the opportunity to build collective knowledge and learn from each other. If participants in an ITF meeting often have to travel long distances, we should make these meetings a place where they can be addressed.

From me, members should not expect long intros at the meetings, and no scansion of slogans! The chairman should create space, Looking for solutions to difficult problems, must speak to everyone and make syntheses, Running the meetings in an efficient way, no nonsense, ... making sure there are clear

decisions. In Europe, we already know this approach, which I use at ETF.

Moreover, I do not want to impose a political vision or ideology. Everyone knows that I am president of a progressive trade union in Belgium. But we also know that ITF members have diverse inspirations, diverse backgrounds.... If you want to keep everyone on board, you should not impose your own political inspiration, but just look for what unites us, not what divides us.

However, there is one clear boundary: there is no place for the far right in our midst. There, we must be clear and irreconcilable. Our global organisation must be radical when it comes to racism, sexism, Then, for me, zero tolerance applies. Inclusion must be our guiding principle.

Is your union, BTB ready to invest in ITF?

My union, the BTB, fully supports my candidature. But my confederation, the FGTB, which has more than 1.4 million members, is also fully behind me.

Moreover, I have been running as ETF's president for seven years, and it has not cost ETF a single Euro. BTB funds my engagement. Because we truly believe that

strong international unions also strengthen national unions. It is in our own interest to organise internationally and make a fist. We do not want to profit from ITF. Strengthening international trade union power is enough "return on investment" for us.

Will you be able to leave ETF with peace of mind?

First this: if I am elected as ITF president, I will not cumulate! I will not claim two positions within ITF.

So I will also say goodbye as ETF chairman. But I am sure the continuity is there. Livia Spera is a solid Secretary General who will ensure that the ship keeps sailing. Moreover, there is quality enough in Europe to take over a place at the helm, as president. I could see that over the past few years. There is a lot of trade union talent in our Management Committee and in our Executive Committee. I am confident.

By the way, I want to get involved in ITF, but if it is judged that someone else should assume the presidency, I will continue to faithfully and loyally fulfil the mandate I received at the Budapest Congress.



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