

Virtual Tripartite Social Summit – 14 October 2020
Intervention of Luca Visentini – ETUC General Secretary

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Chancellor, Presidents,
Vice President, Commissioner, Ministers,
Colleagues of the social partners,

We thank you for focussing the Tripartite Social Summit on the need to build a sustainable and inclusive recovery in response to the pandemic.

The European Trade Union Confederation welcomes the adoption of an ambitious EU Recovery Plan, for Europe to emerge from the COVID-19 outbreak and avoid massive unemployment, a recession and a rise in inequality and social exclusion.

The mistakes made in the past in addressing the financial crisis with austerity and cuts in wages, public services and social protection, had a tremendously adverse impact on European workers and their families, and made our economies and societies less resilient to face the current emergency.

Those mistakes must not be repeated.

The emergency measures put in place so far by the EU and member states have protected workers, companies and public services. However, there were significant shortcomings in adequacy, universality of coverage and access, and not always proper involvement of social partners at national level.

We are now experiencing a new rise of infections in many countries, so we need to remain vigilant and to make sure that everybody is protected. Additionally, there is no certainty on when the final agreement on the Recovery package will be reached between the EU institutions, and on when the funds will be paid out.

There is a high risk that the tens of million workers who are suspended from work and benefitting from employment protection measures, will become unemployed if the time gap between the end of the emergency measures and the start of the recovery plan payments is not bridged.

For this reason, the European Trade Union Confederation calls for all national and EU emergency measures to continue until the full recovery of the economy and stabilisation of jobs.

This means governments must consider a prolongation until the recovery funding will be available; and the Commission must consider refinancing SURE next year.

Furthermore, all existing shortcomings of the emergency measures, particularly in terms of adequacy and universality of coverage and access, must be fully resolved.

This means that employment protection and income compensation measures must be extended to cover all categories of workers, including precarious, non-standard and self-employed, in all countries. And that the income compensation provided ensures a decent living.

Workers' rights and health and safety must be respected, and adequate support should be provided for workers to take part in responsible restructuring processes and maintain employment.

We ask you to consider these needs as a matter of urgency, to avoid an unemployment tragedy, from which Europe will not be able to recover.

The European Trade Union Confederation appreciates the EU Recovery Plan is good news for the tens million workers in the EU who depend on rapid investment to save their jobs. Such a plan represents an historical change in EU policy and decision-making, compared to the disastrous austerity-led response to the previous crisis.

We urge all EU institutions to agree the Recovery plan as soon as possible and to make the plan's timely implementation their highest priority.

We insist on the full involvement of social partners at EU, national and sectoral level in the governance of the Plan and the MFF, in the design and implementation of the investment priorities, and in the monitoring of the results.

At the same time, we would like to draw your attention to the lack of social and employment focus in the deal reached in Council in July.

There are important aspects of the agreement that worry us, in particular:

- The cuts introduced by Council to the proposed Just Transition Fund, health measures, funding for research and innovation, and measures for solvency and restructuring.
- That the overall EU budget is not big enough to deliver ambitious green and digital transformation and adequate resources for cohesion, convergence and social priorities.
- That there is not a clear link between the investments which are envisaged by the Plan, and the need to accompany the green and digital transformation of our economy with creation of quality jobs and just transition.
- And finally, that any reference to the social dimension, to the European Pillar of Social Rights, and to the involvement of Social Partners has been eliminated.

We appreciate that the Commission, in the recently published Annual Sustainability Growth Strategy, has tried to address many of these issues, and has particularly recommended Member States to put in place a meaningful and substantial involvement of Social Partners in the national Recovery Plans.

Nevertheless, all this will not succeed without the active commitment of governments, and the willingness of the Council to consider including these elements in the final decisions.

For these reasons, we appeal to all of you to reinforce Social Partners involvement in the MFF, Recovery Plan and national plans; and to make respect for social dialogue, collective bargaining and workplace democracy compulsory conditions for funding.

We ask you to reverse the cuts to the proposed Just Transition Fund and to make sure that climate action and digital transformation are managed through a socially just transition, especially in regions and sectors heavily dependent on fossil-fuel and high-emission industries, and where digital innovation is not developed.

We ask you to restore the Solvency Support funding, which is crucial to address company restructuring processes, and to reverse the cuts to all funds related to innovation, research, public services and active labour market policies.

We ask you to preserve social investment in the MFF and RRF, to reinforce the ESF+, and to commit to fully implement the European Pillar of Social Rights and the Agenda 2030 of the UN.

As I said, we cannot repeat the mistakes of the past, when anti-crisis and recovery measures completely neglected the social and employment dimension, precariousness was not addressed, and led to massive inequalities and deterioration of working conditions.

We count on you to make the recovery sustainable and benefit working people this time.

Finally, we appeal to you to support the legislative and non-legislative initiatives the European Commission and the German Presidency have announced in the areas of employment and social rights.

In particular, we ask you to contribute to making sure that the Directive on Minimum Wages and Collective Bargaining and the Directive on Pay Transparency are published on time for the legislative process to start before the end of this year.

And to support the Commission in pushing forward new legislative and enforcement initiatives, such as those in the fields of minimum income schemes; due diligence and responsible business including in supply chains; workers' participation; seasonal and mobile workers; non-standard workers and self-employed workers, including in platform companies.

There is a high need to make our social market economy really inclusive and sustainable: to do so we have to fight dumping, divergence and discrimination which affect particularly women and youth, as well as migrants and other disadvantaged people.

We have to make sure that everybody can contribute to and benefit from a genuinely fair and sustainable growth.

We believe that Europe needs a People's Recovery for a socially fairer, greener and digital future, and we are ready to actively participate in a process that designs the concept of European wellbeing for the next decade.

In this perspective, we warmly welcome the summit announced by the Portuguese Presidency for next May, to endorse as institutions and social partners the Action Plan for the Implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Thank you very much for your attention.