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## **Trade union reaction to Pierre Régibeau's interview in L'Echo concerning industrial and competition policy**

Dear Commissioner Vestager,

We are writing to you to express our deep concern regarding comments made by Pierre Régibeau, the outgoing Chief Competition Economist DG Competition, with regard to European industry and to seek clarification regarding the Commission's commitment to the future of European foundation industries and their highly-skilled workforce.

Mr Régibeau recently told the L'Echo newspaper that supporting European industry is a "waste of money", suggesting that Europe should buy cheaper steel from countries such as Indonesia and "thank them for the gift."

The only gift on offer here is to the far-right ahead of the European elections. These outdated laissez-faire views belong in an economic textbook from the 1980s not in the upper echelons of a Commission which has committed to building an economy that works for people.

The livelihoods of 8 million people and their families depend on these industries and they underpin millions more jobs, notably in the automotive, construction and energy industries.

These comments are particularly irresponsible given that they come after years in which European steel industry and its workforce has suffered as a result of global trade distortions created by the dumping of excess capacity onto the EU market, often produced in less environmentally friendly conditions. In fact, the comments are incoherent as the EU currently has safeguards for steel products in place recognising this unfair global competition.

As a result of their energy intensity, Europe's foundation industries, including the steel sector, have been hit hard by the energy crisis, with production stopped or slowed at a number of sites as a result of a seven fold increase in costs, and a shortage of raw materials following to the Russian invasion of Ukraine. For the first time, Europe has become a net importer of chemicals both in volume and value as a result of energy prices. We believe that the reforms proposed thus far of the electricity market design fail to address the scale of this challenge.

Far from allowing our foundation industries to "disappear" as Mr Régibeau suggests, Europe needs to urgently put in place an action plan to safeguard their future in Europe. From basic metals to chemicals, cement, glass and ceramics, these industries have a vital role to play in delivering the goals of the European Green Deal, through their products and industrial transformation, as well as ensuring our strategic autonomy. In contrast, both the Biden administration and Chinese clean industrial strategies explicitly reference and recognise these industries unlike the European Green Deal Industrial Plan.

That is why the European Commission should help industry and the workforce through this crisis by creating a SURE 2.0 scheme, including social conditionality through provisions on the retraining and upskilling of the workforce. Any support to industry must have mandatory social conditions attached.

More broadly, we are concerned that Mr Régibeau's comments reflect the consistent failure of the EU's competition authorities to consider the interests of workers.

The impact of mergers on employment have largely been ignored by DG Competition in its consideration of cases, including in the case of the ArcelorMittal SA acquisition of Ilva in Italy, where 15,000 jobs were at risk.

As our recent [analysis](#) of EU competition policy found, the failure of EU competition enforcers to assess and address the impact of growing corporate power on workers is contributing to lower employment, wages and working conditions.

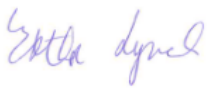
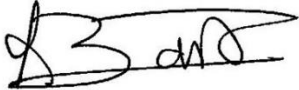
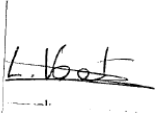
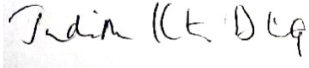
**The European Trade Union Confederation and IndustriAll Europe call on you to:**

- 1) Clarify that Mr Régibeau's position is representative of neither your team nor the European Commission;
- 2) Set out what measures you plan to take to support the future of Europe's foundation industries through the energy crisis and invasion of Ukraine;
- 3) Set out how you will reform EU competition policies to ensure they consider the interests of working people and not only corporations and consumers.

We hope that the departure of Mr Régibeau will help bring about a break with the failed neoliberal policies of the past and ensure the Commission pursues an active industrial policy which protects and creates high-quality jobs in our industries, delivering a Just Transition in every corner of Europe.

This is the only version of Europe which will command the confidence of working people.

Yours sincerely,

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 Ludovic Voet Confederal Secretary, ETUC	 Judith Kirton-Darling Deputy General Secretary, IndustriAll Europe