On the eve of the EU-Western Balkans Summit, EPSU calls on both sides to ensure fair and sustained development for all



(5 May 2020) On the eve of the EU - Western Balkans Summit EPSU calls for concrete measures from both sides to support fair and sustained economic, political and social development for all. In the light of the COVID-19 pandemic such measures are needed more than ever.

In a letter / statement addressed to the Council and the European Commission, EPSU points out that the impact of COVID-19 has been equally felt in the Western Balkans and that cooperation and solidarity between the two sides is essential to provide a robust response to the virus and its consequences. The European Commission and the Council should ensure that the Western Balkan countries are:

- Part and parcel of the work that is done in the Commission and the EU institutions at large to deal with the pandemic and its aftermath, including long-term commitments to more fair, green, and equal societies. The Western

Balkan countries should be included in the Joint Procurement initiatives for example, and measures similar to SURE (to assist unemployment systems) and the health emergency fund (to reinforce the resilience of public health systems) should be considered.

- Equally involved in the recovery plan and can benefit from EU funding for their national plans. These should be based on consultation with the trade unions and employers. It is in the interest of the EU as well as the Western Balkan countries that the recovery benefits both sides.
- Actively supported in strengthening information and consultation rights of workers, collective bargaining and social dialogue. These are key ingredients of democracy and ensure that the voice of all workers can be taken into account in health and safety measures and protocols, in dealing with unemployment and short term working arrangements, in the strategic investments needed for recovery and the longer term policies, and in tackling corruption and illegal activiies.

EPSU also calls on the Summit to agree concrete steps to reinforce the rule of law in the region, including in the accession process with Albania and North-Macedonia. The COVID-19 crisis is a reminder of how inter-connected and fragile our societies and democratic institutions are. Lessons must be learnt that reforms will backfire, encourage corruption and concentration of power in the hands of oligarchs if there is no underpinning of the rule of law, independent justice systems and strong democratic and participatory institutions, including trade unions.

- **For the letter**
- **For the statement**
- **For ETUC position**
- **The Zagreb Declaration of Western Balkan summit (6 May 2020)**
- **Conclusions of the European Council**
- **Letter received from the cabinet of Charles Michel (President of the Council)**
- For a statement of the trade unions in Western Balkans

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