

To President of the European Council
Charles Michel
reception.desks@consilium.europa.eu

President of the European Commission
Ursula Von der Leyen
ec-president-vdl@ec.europa.eu

European Commissioner for
Neighborhood and Enlargement
Olivér Várhelyi
cab-varhelyi-contact@ec.europa.eu

Prime Minister of the Government of
the Republic of Croatia
(presiding the European Council)
predsjednik@vlada.hr

Minister of Labour and Pension System
Mr Josip Aladrović,
kabinet@mrms.hr

Ref:JWG/se

Brussels, 5 May 2020

Trade unions and the Western Balkan Summit

Dear President of the European Council, Dear Prime Minister, Dear Commission President,

The Western Balkan Summit of 6 May is an important moment for the European Union to re-affirm its commitment to the workers and people of the countries of the Western Balkans. 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. Workers, our families and our communities expect policies that stress the values of the European Union, strengthen real democracy including the participation of the trade unions in the integration processes and support collective bargaining.

We appreciate that the European Commission has provided support to the Western Balkan countries in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic. This was an important signal. 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 activities.

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. Strong public institutions are needed to fight corruption and fraud still prevalent in many countries. As much recent research has underlined privatization and procurement will undermine reforms rather than the reverse as oligarchs and political elites benefit and not workers and the people when institutions are not developed and resourced including well-trained public service workers.

EPSU, the European Federation of Public Service Unions, with affiliated unions in all EU and Western Balkan countries and therefore providing a comprehensive and inclusive position, addresses the attached position to you. We look forward to hear from you how our views have been taken into account and look forward to be in further contact with you and your colleagues.

Yours sincerely,



Jan Willem Goudriaan
EPSU General Secretary

EPSU Secretariat 40 rue Joseph II, box 5 – 1000 Brussels, Belgium
Phone: +32 2 250 10 80 Fax: +32 2 520 10 99 Mail: epsu@epsu.org www.epsu.org

European
Federation
of Public
Service
Unions

Federación
Sindical
Europea
de Servicios
Públicos

Fédération
Syndicale
Européenne
des Services
Publics

Europeiska
Federationen
för Offentlig-
anställdas
Förbund

Europäischer
Gewerkschafts-
verband für den
Öffentlichen
Dienst

Европейская
Федерация
Профсоюзов
Общественного
Обслуживания



EPSU is a member
federation of the ETUC
and represents
PSI in Europe