Brussels, 24 March 2020

To the Video Conference of the Members of the European Council

Statement of the European Social Partners ETUC, BusinessEurope, CEEP, SMEUnited on the COVID-19 emergency

The European employer and trade union organisations' sympathies are with the families of those who have already lost loved ones to COVID-19, and our gratitude is to the workers and enterprises who are already showing exceptional courage and resilience, both to treat the sick, and to maintain the vital goods and services upon which we all depend. We are closely following the developments of the dramatic emergency of the COVID-19 epidemic across Europe and are at the forefront, particularly within member states, of the design and implementation of the extraordinary measures to help enterprises and workers in facing this emergency.

The European social partners support the set of measures announced by the European Commission and the European Central Bank over the last days, and are in close contact with the Commission to help ensuring a swift and effective implementation, which shall come on top, and in support of, the national measures that have been, and are going to be discussed between national social partners and national governments.

The European social partners urge the European Council of Heads of State and Government to approve all the measures proposed by the European Commission so far, without any delay, nor with changes that could weaken their impact.

The social partners urge the governments to approve in particular measures envisaging:

- the temporary full use of the built-in flexibility in the Stability and Growth Pact targets, including its temporary suspension by using the general escape clause;
- avoiding single market distortions, including bans and export restrictions and especially for export of medical equipment and medicines, and stopping closing borders for goods; safeguarding all freight transport modes is a priority within the EU, also having an essential role to coordinate and inform regarding actions taken in Member States;

- encouraging Member States' spending and investment particularly to reinforce staff, equipment and means for national health services, social protection systems and other services of general interest;
- mobilising unused structural funds and any other available EU funding to support Member States in ensuring financial and income support for workers affected by unemployment or suspension from work, including non-standard workers and self-employed;
- ensuring credit access and financial support for enterprises, especially all types of SMEs, affected by lockdown and emergency measures, with a coordinated intervention from the EU budget, the ECB, the EIB, and national promotional banks;
- activating the solidarity fund for natural disasters and any other available funding at EU level;
- the efforts by the European Commission to deploy full flexibility within State Aid rules should also be acknowledged.

Member States should involve national Social Partners in the designing and implementation of national measures.

All efforts need to be undertaken to help workers, enterprises, economic activities and public services to survive the crisis, so they will be able to come back to their activities when the crisis ends, to keep workers in their jobs meanwhile, to protect from unemployment and loss of income, and to alleviate financial losses.

The Commission and Member States must ensure that financial support reaches enterprises, especially all types of SMEs, and all workers, including the self-employed and those with precarious jobs who are most vulnerable.

The Commission's plan to apply flexibility regarding the application of its fiscal and State Aid rules is essential to supporting public services, which are stretched to the limit, as well as companies and workers hit by the crisis.

EU funding invested in protecting workers and enterprises from the worst effects of the crisis should be additional to member states' spending.

Europe must show responsibility, solidarity and efficiency in facing this emergency, by protecting all its affected citizens, workers and enterprises.

ETUC	BUSINESSEUROPE	CEEP	SMEunited
Luca Visentini	Markus J. Beyrer	Valeria Ronzitti	Véronique Willems
General Secretary	Director General	General Secretary	General Secretary