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Your Reference:
Your letter of
3 April 2020

Dear Madam President,

Consequences of COVID-19 pandemic for the European Union

Our extreme concern about the serious consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted us to write this letter.

United in our federation industriAll European Trade Union, of which I am President, we trade unionists from Italy, Spain and Germany currently fear that the great European idea and the European Union as a historic project are currently seriously in danger. Faith in the capacity for action of the European institutions is declining dramatically, as the Member States have still failed to deliver convincing joint answers to the existential challenge of the innovative virus pandemic.

The European citizens' general disappointment at this manifest weakness to take effective action during the greatest social and economic crisis confronting us since World War II is growing with every day that passes and this will not fail to have negative consequences for solidarity within the European Community. Especially those people who live in the countries and regions which are most severely affected are calling for solidarity and joint responsibility; unfortunately, however, there are no remotely satisfactory signs of understanding or fair cooperation, or of any dependable experience of tangible assistance in Europe.

This discrepancy is even more apparent in Italy and Spain than in the other countries which are also severely affected by COVID-19. This is because Italy and Spain, as you know, have the highest numbers of infected people and the most, frighteningly high fatalities. In both these countries, the health services have quite obviously long since reached the limits of their capacities. There are insufficient capacities in the hospitals and insufficient materials and supplies. However, it is not only the health service that urgently requires personal protective equipment and disinfectants, but also the employees in the production plants. Every single Member State is trying to remedy these shortages, but there is no European prioritisation and no consideration of the urgencies in the different European regions.

In fact, economic development is suffering particularly in those countries which have been hardest hit by the pandemic. The people in these countries are facing not only high health risks, but also enormous threats to their income and jobs.

In view of this situation, large-scale concerted action in the EU that goes beyond the current European measures you have already announced – which we explicitly welcome – is absolutely essential. COVID-19 impacts on all countries, with no warning and through no fault of their own. The virus does not distinguish between different economic and financial circumstances in the different Member States. But the capacities of the individual Member States for gaining control of the crisis are, of course, limited.

We have not forgotten the efforts that were needed to overcome the global financial and economic crisis of 2008/2009. Many workers had to pay a very high price. Since the financial crisis the governments of Italy and Spain in particular have made great endeavours to reduce their debt ratio. Even though not all the countries in Europe have succeeded in recovering from the financial crisis to the same extent, they now have to try to contain the economic effects of the pandemic.

We therefore believe that the current discussion within the EU about joint forms of financial security measures is misguided. Instead of a brief debate on debt ratios, Europe has to signalise solidarity and unity.

The EU has to be seen as a centre of decisive action and as the hub of joint responsibility for all the people in the Member States. If this is not the case, large parts of the EU populations will continue to have substantial reservations about the political legitimisation of the EU and its decisions. The beneficiaries would be – and in fact already are - the Euro-sceptical parties, especially in Italy and Spain.

Our trade unions in the industrial sector unequivocally support the European idea and are well aware of the importance of the Single Market for economic development. We also realise how important it is for the EU to take one common stance vis-à-vis the large economic powers USA and China. We want to see globalisation that takes social factors into account and the self-asserted claim of the European idea of social equalisation from economic competition.

We wish to have a strong EU for our members and for all workers in the factories, laboratories and offices throughout Europe. Europe has to be more than a mere conglomeration of bureaucratic interpretations of debt ratios; it can be – indeed it has to be – more than a mere union of national and financial market interests without a common ambition. Europe means a better opportunity for a good future with a good job, for economic development, social security and prosperity for everyone.

Whether or not we succeed in fulfilling these demands and this scenario for the future will essentially be determined during this present crisis.

We therefore intend to play our part and do everything in our power to achieve these objectives. For instance: the IG BCE in Germany and its member companies in the chemical industry are investigating how they can ramp up the production of personal protective equipment and disinfectants for Italy and Spain. Or, for example: by working in close cooperation to demand a policy of solidarity in the Member States and in the EU, within the unity of our European federation industriAll Europe.

In this exceptional situation and in view of the dramatic circumstances in the Member States that are most severely affected by the pandemic, we expect the following from the EU Commission:

- Clear commitment to the values of the Community and systematic solidarity amongst all Member States. It is both shameful and extremely bad media for the acceptance of the EU when non-EU-countries send in aid and medical professionals, while the following question remains unanswered: Why can we not manage to do so ourselves within the European Community?
- Clear focus on needs and urgency and an EU-wide coordinated supply of medical equipment and personal protective equipment.
- Immediate relief for business enterprises in that they do not have to pay penalties for default in delivery resulting from the pandemic and when production comes to a halt because of government restrictions. As well as the guarantee of maintenance of the contracts, once this crisis of the Covid-19 has passed.
- A programme of industrial policies for a new start throughout Europe after the crisis. We now have to ensure industrial policies which lay secure foundations for employment and growth if we are not to lose market shares and fail to realise future potential after the crisis. We will support this process and submit detailed proposals from industriAll Europe as soon as possible.
- Immediate financial aid which is clearly distinct from and not merely the continuation of an obsolescent austerity strategy, as this would disregard and jeopardise the economic foundations of national prosperity. In the debate on this subject, Eurobonds have emerged as suitable new instruments.

We emphatically ask you to stand up for the European values of joint responsibility and action that is based on solidarity, also with regard to those Member States which are rooted in national self-interest. What Europe needs now is a clear focus and an unequivocal stance, together with proactive crisis and aid management.

These are our expectations of the European Commission. We assure you that we will always support such policies for Europe, a policy of humanity and a policy of fairness.

I should, of course, be happy to discuss the above issues as well as other questions of crisis management in further depth at any time.

Yours faithfully,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Richard Haubrich". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large initial 'R'.

PS: We are also sending copies of this letter to the European Parliament and to our own governments to encourage them to address our concerns and support you in tackling the great challenges that now lie ahead of you.

Further signatories to this letter:

For IndustriALL Global

Jörg Hofmann, Chairperson of IG Metall, President of IndustriAll Global

For the ITALIAN TRADE UNIONS

Federazione Italiana Lavoratori Chimici Tessile Energia Manifatture (CGIL FILCTEM)
Marco Falcinelli, Secretary-General

Federazione Impiegati Operai Metallurgici (CGIL FIOM)
Francesca Re David, Secretary-General

Federazione Lavoratori Energia Moda Chimica e Affini (FEMCA CISL)
Nora Garofalo, Secretary-General

Federazione Italiana Metalmeccanici (FIM-CISL)
Marco Bentivogli, Secretary-General

Unione Italiana Lavoratori Metalmeccanici (UIL M)
Rocco Palombella, Secretary-General

Unione Italiana Lavoratori Tessile, Energia, Chimica (UIL TEC)
Paolo Pirani, Secretary-General

For the SPANISH TRADE UNIONS

Federación de Servicios a la Ciudadanía de CCOO (CC.OO FSC)
Jose Francisco Fernandez Rodriguez, Secretary-General

industria CCOO (CC.OO industria)
Agustin Martin Martinez, Secretary-General

ELA industria eta eraikuntza (ELA)
Unai Martinez, Secretary-General

Federación de Industria, Construcción y Agro (FICA UGT)
Pedro Luis Hojas Cancho, Secretary-General

FI - UNIÓN SINDICAL OBRERA (FI USO)
Pedro Ayllón (Member) GS