



Brussels, 07th April 2020

Dear President Von der Leyen,

We are writing to you in our capacity of Presidents of our respective national inter-professional organizations, ConfProfessioni and Unión Profesional, and as President and First Vice-President of CEPLIS, the European Council of the Liberal Professions.

We would like to call your attention to the peculiar situation liberal professions are now facing due to the pandemic emergency, and to emphasize the need of a coordinated agenda for relief, recovery and growth of our tertiary sector, so crucial for the same identity of our European community of peoples and values. We are aware that, in these days, all of your energies are focused in tackling the sanitary emergency, that we all feel as the priority for our communities; at the same time, however, the social and economic conditions of our Countries urge to plan a set of policies aimed at matching the daily emergency as well as targeted to the horizon.

The rapid spread of coronavirus disease 2019 is causing a dramatic economic crisis, which affects a vast majority of sectors, endangering the stability of our society. Italy and Spain are the countries which are suffering the most from the Covid-19 crisis, both for the extent of the contagion as well as for the fragility of the economies of the two countries.

In this framework, **the subsector of liberal professions is likely to suffer huge consequences**, not only limited to these days coinciding with the peak of the epidemic, but also extended to the next years. In tackling the crisis, the Italian and Spanish professions are acting in an exemplary way always in defense of the **general interest**, fulfilling their common professional values of **personal responsibility, independence and professional deontology**. In their ongoing duties characterized by their closeness to citizens and their problem-solving capacity as well as the application of their professional judgement, they have the support of their representative organizations: *ConfProfessioni* and *Unión Profesional* which have an adequate capacity and potential to coordinate, act and dialogue to the extent necessary.

We agree that a specific attention and support is required to the institutions, with the aim to **mitigate the effect of the crisis in the short term** and to **foster the growth of the sector in the long-run**. A better development of this crisis depends on the behavior of the professions. It is

crucial to count on them in order to minimize the social and economic impact of Covid-19 as well as to stimulate a rapid recovery, both of which are strategic issues in the words of the United Nations. In order to make this possible, real, effective and proportionate economic measures are essential, as well as the establishment of public and private financing and ad hoc funds. The needs of our Countries today reflect what will happen tomorrow in others. Today's response to these Countries by national Governments and the EU will be the guide that will set the course for European action.

This effort shall be shared by the member States and the European Union. We face a global, connected situation in which Europe must be a true Union. Italy, Spain and the European Union must emphasize the European model of cooperation and solidarity.

Italian and Spanish Governments have immediately adopted economic measures aimed at providing a first relief for workers, enterprises and professionals, also thanks to the suspension of the Stability Pact. In adopting such measures, the **national Governments should be aware of the exigencies and the peculiarities of our subsector**. To this end, each profession in its field and region must be able to communicate its needs to the public authorities and they in turn must listen to them. Citizens should be encouraged to go to their professionals and understand that they are essential actors at this moment. Official awareness campaigns are recommended in recognition of our professionals. Italy and Spain call on their governments to **structure dialogue with representatives of the professions**. To this end, **they urge the EU to recommend models of interlocution/dialogue and to promote a citizen awareness campaign on the importance of liberal professions** in all branches, given their essential role in managing this crisis and their vital importance in managing this crisis recovery.

National Governments cannot achieve their goals without a coordinated political responsibility of the European Union. Unfortunately, **the first reaction of the European Union's institutions does not match adequate standards of cooperation and solidarity**, as requested by the situation.

The agenda of the European Union must be reshaped consistently with the emergency.

A first list of actions can be easily pointed out: there is the necessity to **financially support the measures adopted by the States** for the recovery of their economies through a European intervention in the treatment of sovereign public debts. This goal must be pursued abandoning the rigid conditions, inspired by objectives of financial austerity, that currently regulate the European Stability Mechanism (ESM), that in managing the Greek crisis has demonstrated its

inefficiency. This is a crisis of public health, the origin of which is not economic, but which will have serious effects in this financial and social economic sphere, so the measures taken will have to be in line with the size of the problem and its origin.

The destination of the European Structural and Investment Funds and the European Regional Development Funds (2014-2020), which are in part still available for the member States, must be quickly reshaped and redistributed in order to cope with the new necessities arising from the crisis. In this perspective, liberal professions, key drivers of the economy and key actors in the functioning of our society, have to be taken into account as addressees of the funds, especially in order to back actions aimed at (i) **preserving the job of professionals and their employees**, (ii) granting a counter-guarantee for **providing financial support** to professionals; and (iii) **improving the technological facilities of the professional practices** – whose importance, in the middle of this crisis, is evident.

In this direction, the European Investment Bank has proposed a plan to **mobilize resources directed to the relief of Small and Medium Enterprises**, providing them liquidity through simplified and free access to finance. Such a plan is crucial and must be adopted as fast as possible, to support the parallel measures adopted by the States, whose resources could be not sufficient to reach the whole category. Being included in the definition of SMEs according on EU law, liberal professionals, most of them micropymes, are entitled to the same treatment, which we deem fundamental in this moment for the continuity of their activities.

Furthermore, **the Union is required to undertake a step forward in the development of its social dimension**. In the debate on the new budget of the Union for the years 2021-2027, the priorities must be reconsidered. The measures must take particular attention to those who have suffered the most in this situation.



The Union is now facing a fork, which must be crossed. It's up to the Union to decide whether remaining silent, and thus take the way of its marginalization, or rather choosing the more challenging road of engagement in the cooperation with the national Governments, and thus becoming the butterfly it is called to be. Spanish and Italian liberal professions, and their representative organizations, have no doubt on the necessity to undertake this second path: as the poet Robert Frost used to say, "the best way-out is always through".

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Gaetano Stella".

Gaetano Stella
Presidente ConfProfessioni
Presidente CEPLIS

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Victoria Ortega".

Victoria Ortega
Presidenta Unión Profesional
Vicepresidenta Primera CEPLIS