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Brussels, 4 November 2014

Mr Frans Timmermans
First Vice-President of the
European Commission

[Letter sent by e-mail]

Dear Mr Timmermans,

Let me first congratulate you on your election to the post of First Vice-President of the European Commission. You are in charge of issues which are very close to the heart of the European trade union movement.

The ETUC attaches the utmost importance to the Charter of Fundamental Rights and we believe that any proposal or initiative from the Commission must comply with the Charter. We are delighted that it is your intention to work in close cooperation with the Council of Europe to ensure that fundamental social rights are respected throughout Europe. We also expect you to ensure that the EU's accession to the European Convention on Human Rights is finally completed.

We are, however, greatly concerned about the Commission's better regulation agenda, which in our view is more a reflection of a deregulatory approach than a serious effort to improve regulation.

Please rest assured that the ETUC is in favour of making regulation more effective. We believe that it is important to consider how rules and regulations can best be designed to meet their objectives and we would urge the Commission to take steps to ensure that EU legislation is properly implemented in the Member States.

We feel, however, that a number of the proposals that have been made in the two REFIT communications will not improve the regulatory framework. We regret that the Commission has withdrawn several key legislative initiatives regarding workers' health and safety and we call on the new Commission to proceed with the adoption of the social partner agreement on the protection of occupational health and safety in the hairdressing sector.

We also have serious concerns about several of the recommendations that were presented last month by the High Level Group on Administrative Burdens. I attach for your information the ETUC position, which was recently adopted by our Executive Committee. Besides the recommendations, we have on several occasions criticised the way the group has worked. We do not see the need for a new expert group in this area, but given the proposal to establish a new high level group to assess the impact of EU regulation, I would like to arrange a meeting with you to share our experiences.

I would also like to bring to your attention the draft conclusions on smart regulation that are being prepared for the meeting of the Competitiveness Council on 4-5 December. The ETUC is alarmed by the call for "sectoral reduction targets in particularly burdensome areas". We do not believe in a quantitative approach to regulation. It is the quality that matters. Setting arbitrary reduction targets will not improve the regulatory environment.

Finally, I would like to examine with you the link between better regulation and the Charter of Fundamental Rights.

I would therefore appreciate a meeting at your earliest convenience to discuss these important issues.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

