Joint Declaration

Ensuring business continuity and protection of workers in the COVID-19 pandemic

The current COVID-19 pandemic has revealed that private security services and its workforce are essential for the functioning of our economies, public health systems, supply chains, infrastructures and institutions. As security guards control access to supermarkets, nursing homes, protect hospitals and critical infrastructure, they support the enforcement of public health, as well as safety and contingency measures.

Despite their remarkable job in contributing to a safe and secure society for the benefit of every citizen and organisation, too often private security workers remain invisible. For that reason, the EU social partners in private security – CoESS and UNI Europa – welcome that the European Commission[1] and many European governments have officially recognised private security as "essential services".

This "essential services"-status should lead public authorities to rethink how they purchase security services and value a sector whose goal it is to put the health and safety of workers and citizens first. The European sectoral social partners for the private security industry, CoESS and UNI Europa, share the common goal to ensure business continuity in a situation where the provision of private security services is essential as well as to retain staff in a safe and secure working environment. It is in this context that maintaining and using collective bargaining is key to finding equitable and sustainable solutions for businesses and workers during the crisis.

At the same time, the private security industry is severely affected by closures of buildings and offices, substantially reduced air traffic, and the cancellation of events. In some countries, business activity has declined by 25-30 per cent compared to the prior financial year. For that reason 75 per cent of CoESS members report that lack of liquidity has become a problem for the sector. By no means are new service demands compensating for the downturn and standstill in service segments such as aviation and event security. As a consequence, the future of many businesses, especially those specialised in the above services, hangs in the air and workers face an uncertain future.

Despite the sector's substantial challenges that threaten business continuity and the protection of workers, the private security industry remains committed to contributing to a safe, healthy, sustainable and secure economic recovery in Europe, in collaboration with or on behalf of public forces. For that reason, CoESS and UNI Europa congratulate the European Commission and Council for the valuable "Joint European Roadmap towards lifting COVID-19 containment measures" which outlines the necessary criteria to respect upon the lifting of the confinement measures. Private security will continue to provide expertise and help to enforce many of the health and safety measures with which citizens will have to live for the foreseeable future.

[1] C(2020) 102I final

To support this process, CoESS and UNI Europa have adopted the following joint recommendations for competent authorities, at European and national level, to address in cooperation with sectoral social partners:

(I) **Better recognition of private security as essential services**: Although the crisis has proven that private security provides essential services, and both the European Commission and many Member States have recognised the profession as such, many CoESS members report a lack of recognition of the profession by public authorities in practice. More than 30 per cent of CoESS members report that governments did not respond to the urgent need to recognise private security as an essential service – which stands in contrast with the work carried out by guards, the support they require and the public praise the sector received in many countries. We therefore call on competent authorities in Member States to provide private security workers and businesses with the special consideration and support they need and deserve, and to engage with sectoral social partners on our recommendations. This also includes adequate childcare options for workers that are working during the lockdown.

(II) **Access to personal protective equipment (PPE)**: In many countries, companies still face challenges in procuring a sufficient amount of suitable PPE. Competent authorities must ensure the dissemination of information on how to use PPE as well as the provision of appropriate PPE to businesses in order to protect workers and citizens without creating market competition to the healthcare sector. Financial support should be considered, either by buyers or competent authorities, to enable businesses in covering the rising, additional costs for risk assessments, analysis and the distribution of PPE to the workforce. Public authorities should also provide up-to-date training on infectious disease protocols.

(III) **Financial and administrative support to struggling businesses and workers**: We highly welcome the EU's and Member States' efforts to provide administrative and financial support to workers and businesses suffering from the COVID-19 situation. Aid and support must be quickly available with low administrative burden, and competent authorities must engage with sectoral social partners to find quick, sector-specific solutions. Financial aid should aim to improve the working conditions, pay, and health and safety standards of the industry. If it is linked to collective bargaining, expanded public aid into private security would support sustainable growth in the wake of the crisis and provide millions of workers with stable employment. Private security is also part of the value chain of many other sectors. To address the likely increase in demand for services during the gradual lifting of containment measures in many different sectors, it is important to retain workers and ensure the sustainability of businesses now. Financial support will also be necessary for those industries that have been put to a halt and will not be able to restart without additional safety measures performed by private security.

(IV) **Best value procurement**: The European Commission and many European governments have rightly recognised private security as essential services. This recognition must continue once Member States gradually lift contingency measures in terms of best value procurement that respects important quality criteria. Guards will play a central role to implement, in collaboration with or on behalf of public forces, public health and safety measures that support the safe and secure recovery of the European economy. It is important to hire qualified staff in qualitative working conditions for these tasks. CoESS and UNI Europa call on public and

private buyers of private security services to apply the social and quality procurement criteria and approaches defined in the Best Value Guide, which was jointly developed in the framework of the European Social Dialogue and co-funded by the European Commission. It is available at www.securebestvalue.org.

(V) **Contracting practices**: 50% of CoESS members report that public and private buyers have adopted bad contracting practices, including: unilaterally scaling-down or suspending services without bridging agreements, extending or suspending payment terms, or forcing contractors to lower rates that compromise quality and collective agreements. Such practices exacerbate businesses' financial difficulties; incentivise working conditions that are not compliant with collective agreements; and stand in contrast to the role that private security plays in managing the COVID-19 situation. They ultimately compromise health, safety and security for both the client and the security personnel. Beyond that such practices undermine the sustainability of many businesses. After all, the very businesses and workers that protect the public need financial security themselves. We therefore call on competent authorities to urgently address this matter and engage with sectoral social partners to discuss practical, temporary solutions during the ongoing crisis. Now more than ever, buyers who incentivise unfair competition are a danger to occupational health, public safety and economic recovery.

(VI) **Adequate removal of barriers for the redeployment of workers**: The standstill of numerous service segments such as aviation and event security is hitting private security businesses hard. At the same time, the sector has difficulties responding to a growing demand for other essential services, such as access control and enforcement of public health and safety measures in the healthcare and retail sectors, banks and public administration, as well as private properties including offices and factories. The demand can be expected to increase when schools, universities, transportation, HORECA and tourism are gradually opening again with the obligation to implement additional safety measures. It is therefore crucial to retain workers in the sector now, address existing barriers to the redeployment of guards and find qualitative solutions to train and license personnel in a way that reflects new market demand, necessary occupational health protection procedures, as well as physical distancing measures that will likely stay in place for a longer period and that may inhibit training and licensing.

(VII) **Ensure that cash continues to offer access to payment for all:** Cash payments are currently stigmatised and restricted in many shops, although it is particularly vital to older people, the homeless and other marginalised groups. This trend has therefore led to a severe financial situation of Cash-in-Transit businesses and their workers. Governments and central banks should ensure that everyone who wants to pay with cash can do so. The World Health Organisation, the European Central Bank and other national central banks have ruled out that the coronavirus spreads through banknotes.

Brussels, 08 May 2020

About CoESS

CoESS acts as the voice of the private security industry, covering 21 countries in Europe and representing 2 million guards, over 45,000 companies and generating a turnover of over €40M. The private security services provide a wide range of services, both for private and public clients, ranging from European Union institutions buildings to nuclear plants, airports, Critical Infrastructure facilities, inter-modal transport hubs, public transport stations and areas, and national governmental agencies and institutions (such as asylum seekers centres, public hospitals, etc.).

About UNI Europa

UNI Europa is a European trade union federation, which represents more than 7 million workers and 320 affiliates in 50 different countries. UNI Europa is based in Brussels and is the representative organisation for the Social Dialogue in Private Security, amongst many others. UNI Europa assists national trade unions in regards to new EU legislation through information-sharing and consultation. Its work also involves generating best practices and coordinating policy initiatives at the EU and European level which advance a Social Europe, strong public services, and fair markets with social regulation transparent financial transactions. This strengthens trade unions in negotiations and social partners to develop equality in work as well as sustainable, secure and good employment at the national level.