



European Council of the Liberal Professions

Rue du Tabellion 66  
1050 Ixelles, Brussels  
secretariat@ceplis.org  
www.ceplis.org  
+32 2 511 44 39

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I am writing this letter in my capacity as President of the “European Council of the Liberal Professions” (CEPLIS), the single body bringing together legal, medical, social, and technical professions at the European level. Our Council is the voice of national interprofessional associations and European mono-professional associations of this socio-economic category.

As a European voice of millions of intellectual workers corresponding to 22% of the working population, highly qualified professionals have a singular role in the proper and smooth implementation of policies enacted by the European Parliament, and represent a significant driver of economic growth for the Union. For this reason, the coming European elections are for us exceedingly important, as the Parliament that will assume the responsibility of the Union’s legislation till June 2029 will be called to decide and legislate on issues that directly concern us, as well as our clients and patients.

In that context, our membership would be deeply interested to know what are the views and positions of your political family on several issues, that we feel are going to shape the future of our professions, and that of the lives of the millions we advise and serve:

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is evidently one of the first among these issues. We welcome the fact that the Parliament and Council have recently adopted the “AI Act”, placing the EU at the forefront of responsible preparation for the new era this technology is bringing forward. A human-centred approach to the integration of AI into daily activities is of the utmost priority. We understand that a Directive will shortly follow to establish a precise regulatory framework around the use of AI. We believe that the specific needs of senior citizens and other vulnerable categories with which we are in constant professional contact should be a priority in any future European regulation on this issue. At the same time, it is for us very important that every legislation on AI takes into consideration that priority must be put in guaranteeing that our patients and clients are going to continue to benefit from person-to-person interaction with highly qualified professionals. The work of these professionals can undoubtedly and considerably be enriched in knowledge and efficiency thanks to AI, but the latter can never substitute human interaction, especially when citizens are vulnerable in the context of health, legal or other issues relevant to our professional specialisations.

Already today and especially after the pandemic, the transformations brought by digitalisation to our professional exercise and to the lives of EU citizens, have facilitated many of our tasks but have also raised serious challenges to our work. The dangers of seeking legal or medical information online are now very well known. Further regulatory work to limit them is, in our view, absolutely necessary. Adapting the Continuous Professional Development (CPD) of our professions to digitalisation is also extremely important, especially in the context of the Single Market and the automatic recognition of professional qualifications. CEPLIS has called, by means of several letters to the last Presidencies of the Council, for a European CPD framework aiming to harmonise the requirements for professionals to keep their knowledge up to date. Guaranteeing that citizens receive advice and services of proper quality is a matter of public health and safety. We strongly feel that the European Parliament must call upon the Commission to bring up legislative proposals guaranteeing that professionals across the EU have the same level of CPD, and can thus propose informed and updated services and advice to the citizens everywhere within the Single Market.

Social Dialogue is an important mechanism towards bringing stakeholders' feedback into EU legislation dealing with issues regarding labour law. Currently, not all Member States have institutionalised social dialogue processes for liberal professions. Legislators must actively encourage national governments, so that all Member States implement paths for collective bargaining to flourish. Social dialogue is central to the European Single Market economy, which has enabled all to benefit from economic prosperity. To be sure that our unique model endures, legislators must make sure that the interests of all productive forces of our economy are properly represented.

Since 2005, several pieces of EU legislation have enriched the automatic recognition of professional qualifications. The latest in date, concerning nurses, dental practitioners, and pharmacists, will enter into force in May 2024. At the same time, skill shortages are hitting numerous EU Member States, whilst several of the Directive's provisions, such as the Common Training Frameworks, have remained dead letters, even though many professions have approached the European Commission with well-documented requests. CEPLIS believes that the current Directive needs to be updated to include a broader array of professions, and to guarantee that the skills required by our society remain accessible to all. Moreover, the provision of the Common Training Framework needs to be used to its full potential to ensure equal qualification for all professionals across the Union.

As we have already mentioned, the European Union currently suffers from increasing skill and labour shortages. The pandemic has shown that healthcare professions are particularly affected by these shortages. In the recent period, the European Commission has acknowledged the importance of the challenge faced by the Union, and has set out an action plan to mitigate the issue. To enable a proper digital and ecological transition, the EU must ensure that its economy can benefit from a sufficient number of highly skilled professionals. In that sense, we encourage legislators to take urgent action to ensure that short-term and long-term skills and labour needs are fully covered.

SMEs represent 99% of all companies in the Union, they are the backbone of our economy. As such, they must be free from all unnecessary administrative burdens which hamper their productivity, and their ability to innovate, so they can focus on their core activities and create a

thriving EU economy. We welcome the different initiatives brought by the Commission to support SMEs and encourage legislators to support all future actions in that sense.

CEPLIS is also sincerely concerned by the issue of gender inequality in the workplace. We think that this issue deserves the most acute attention, and that further regulatory evolutions are needed to enshrine the protection of women against sexual violence in the workplace. Moreover, other issues of discrimination remain plethora. In that sense, we strongly feel that the Parliament must put the values of equality, diversity, and inclusion, at the centre of all future labour legislative action

In 2018, the Council adopted a recommendation on Social Protection that pleads for adequate coverage for all working individuals. Every working person should have access to proper social protection. Thus, to further integrate the Single Market and to adequately protect all individuals, we feel that harmonisation on Social Protection for highly qualified professionals is of the utmost importance, and should be a priority of future legislative action.

With two wars in our immediate neighbourhood and an international context of geopolitical instability, it is obvious that the European Union is at a crossroads, and the MEPs who will be elected this coming June will have to face crucial challenges during their mandate. Our socio-economic category is profoundly and sincerely attached to the European idea, and it is thus very naturally that we believe in a more resilient and less externally dependent European Union. Past experience has shown that we cannot afford to unilaterally and unduly rely on foes or friends. Strong with the collective capacity of its twenty-seven Member States, the EU must affirm its proper place in the new multipolar world order.

At the same time, we must imperatively strengthen the mechanisms that guarantee transparency and accountability within the European institutions. Incidents such as the recent scandals involving corruption instigated by foreign agents destroy the citizens' faith to the Union and its goals. The new mandate of the Parliament, and of the College of Commissioners it is going to confirm, must be free from the shadows that have somehow tarnished these last years. It must also steer the Union towards a revision of its Treaties that will strengthen its cohesion and facilitate the adoption of common decisions on issues that are vital to our common security and prosperity. We strongly hope that your political family shares this view of our common future.

Thanking you in the name of all our membership for your attention on these points, I remain at your disposal to discuss the above, and I look forward to sharing your views with professional bodies across the EU.

Sincerely yours,

Gaetano Stella  
President of CEPLIS