



## CLOSING REMARKS

7 May 2021

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Full speech

Dear Mr President of the European Food Banks Federation, ladies and gentlemen. I want to thank you for the invitation today because I think that the title “For A Sustainable Future Food System” is very important and very telling.

It is key now that we build the foundations for a sustainable and fair society, in particular for the young generations. The social and economic crisis linked to the COVID-19 pandemic has amplified and exacerbated the pre-existing social inequalities and this is evident everywhere. A rising number of people across Europe have begun to fall into food poverty and are increasingly trying to, relying on Food Banks and similar services, to be able to meet basic needs. In this context, I would like to highlight the invaluable and selfless work of your member organisations that have had to face increasing pressure to support the most deprived in these difficult times. Your work to expand your membership by creating new Food Banks where they are most needed is particularly important in the current situation.

Also, the EU funds have played an important role in addressing food poverty. Our famous Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived, with a budget of EUR 3.8 billion for the 2014 – 2020 period, has provided support to 13 million people and 30% of these supported people were children. This goes through the cooperation of the partner organisations such as the Food Banks that you represent. The aim of the organisation, the European Food Banks Federation, to optimise the participation of its members in the EU social dimension by reinforcing the knowledge and understanding of social policies, in particular through the FEAD, is key to



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enhancing partnerships between the EU and local Food Banks. And I have always said that the FEAD implementation created a lot of synergies and a lot of additional positive impacts on partner organisations and including the creation of some Food Banks around Europe. The support of FEAD has also brought an important contribution to the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

The challenges that we face were already substantial before the crisis. Just over 21% of general population and over 23% of children were at risk of poverty and social exclusion and we know that 27 million people were experiencing material deprivation. With the crisis it was made even clearer that we needed more action and more to do. We needed more resources while the social restrictions addressing the health emergency have changed the way the organisations work delivering food and material assistance. In response to the coronavirus pandemic the Commission adopted two Coronavirus Response Investment Initiatives and they provided an extraordinary flexibility in the use of the European Structural and Investment Funds last year in April.

Moreover, these amendments to the rules for the implementation of the Funds introduced specific measures to support the most deprived by also adjusting the Fund for European Aid to the Most Deprived regulation and made it possible to deliver food and basic material assistance through vouchers, but also providing personal protective equipment to those who are doing this job. It also enabled financing measures with a co-financing rate of 100% for the accounting year 2020-2021. By the end of April this year, the uptake of all these flexibilities provided in CRII and CRII+ resulted in programme amendments in nine member states, which are Austria, Spain, France, Croatia, Hungary, Luxembourg, Italy, Portugal and Romania, and the Member States decided to use the 100% co-financing rate in eight of the cases. Also, we saw in four Member States the introduction of the emergency measures to respond to the COVID pandemic. In addition, the Recovery Assistance for Cohesion, and the Territories of Europe, known as REACT-EU, which is part of the Next Generation EU Recovery Scheme, provides additional resources to cohesion policy programmes and also enables Member States to inject further resources into the FEAD programmes. According to the information at our disposal, so far Member States are planning to use for FEAD around 1% of the REACT-EU resources, which are EUR 37.5 billion this year. Usually, contributions to FEAD are up to 3%, but we have seen that the contributions are bigger in Belgium (10%), Bulgaria (5%) and Romania (5%). So, in order to ensure that the quick delivery of the needed material support is in place, the Member States will receive a pre-financing of 11% for any allocation which is met through the REACT-EU. This is a continuation of the current system of allowing 11% pre-financing to the FEAD programme.

Also, the European Social Fund Plus (ESF+) which is the next legal basis will ensure continued support to address material deprivation through food and basic material assistance to the most deprived and also provide accompanying members supporting their social inclusion. We have an obligation in the regulation, which will enter into force at the end of June, whereby



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Member States should devote at least 3% of their national ESF+ resources to support the most deprived and this is one of the agreed thematic concentration requirements for the next period. We have an ongoing study that should be finalised this month and it also is looking at simplified cost options for food donations in order to introduce further simplifications and facilitate the administrative handling of food donations under the ESF+. In this respect, I would like to thank FEBA for the support that you have provided to our consultant, and we are looking forward for the final report very soon.

The objective of the thematic concentration requirements is to ensure the critical mass of your support from the funds is allocated to certain policy objectives, which have vast European importance. In particular, the thematic concentrations under the ESF+ should ensure that the fund contributes to the maximum extent for the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights. The European Pillar of Social Rights is our social strategy to bring fairness to all people in the European Union and the 20 principles of the Pillar are fully aligned with the UN Sustainable Development Goals, in particular in terms of employment, education and skills, fighting poverty and promoting equal opportunities. The European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan, which was adopted in March this year, provides for an EU-wide framework for tackling poverty with targets and clear actions. It sets the target of reducing the number of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion by at least 15 million by 2030, including at least five million less children, which is both ambitious, but we also know realistic, and we want to return to a good path of economic and social convergence.

The Action Plan puts forwards an integrated approach to address needs at all stages of life and target the root causes and manifestations of poverty and social exclusion. This integrated approach includes an update of our 2013 recommendation on investing in children through the adoption of the European Child Guarantee, the setting up of a European Platform on Combating Homelessness and the work for a new framework on minimum income.

As you know, today the informal leaders meeting of the EU Social Summit is taking place in Porto, starting today with a high-level conference. We expect that tomorrow's informal meeting on the social policy will provide first a clear message to European citizens that social rights and social cohesion must stand at the heart of the recovery together with the green and digital transitions. We expect them to confirm support for the targets at the highest political level and also send a strong political signal reconfirming our joint commitment to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights. It will be a moment to rally forces around the concrete delivery of the European Pillar of Social Rights and its Action Plan, with the aim of eradicating poverty and social exclusion, including through food security.

I want to thank you again for your invaluable work. And I can assure you that the European Commission is looking forward to continuing our fruitful cooperation with the



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European Food Banks Federation but also with its members nationally because we believe that they are our key partners and they have been so in the last years. So, thank you very much.



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