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Speeches by EVP Timmermans, Commissioner Ferreira and Commissioner Simson at the Just Transition Platform Launch Event

Brussels, 29 June 2020

Executive Vice-President **Timmermans**, in charge of the European Green Deal:

Good morning colleagues and welcome to our first meeting of the Just Transition Platform,

I know many of you have already met and worked together under the Coal Regions in Transition Initiative and I have been looking forward to meeting you all in person. I was also looking forward to personally welcoming those of you who come from carbon-intensive regions and who are now also part of this journey towards socially fair transition.

The world has changed in ways, which we couldn't have imagined only five months ago, and the change to our daily lives has come at a pace which we have not seen in modern history. Many of your regions have been particularly affected by the COVID19 epidemic, especially where it is so difficult to enforce social distancing in coal mines. Work in many essential industries had to continue.

As we rebuild our economies and our societies we will have to resist falling into the trap of rebuilding old structures. We simply cannot afford paying to go back to business as usual and then paying again to transform. Instead, we should grasp this opportunity to rebuild a more sustainable economy. We owe it to our children and to our grandchildren who will continue paying off the debts we take now to save Europe from an economic decline and give everyone a better future.

Inclusive growth for present and future generations, for cities and rural regions, for coal and carbon-intensive regions is at the heart of the European Green Deal.

Myself I come from a coal mining region in the Netherlands, South Limburg, where the last coal mine shut down in 1974, when I was 13 years old.

I understand the risks of unmanaged and unprepared transition. Mass unemployment can shutter communities and affect regions for several generations.

Some have never recovered because all unmanaged transitions are also unjust.

Our Green Deal ambition is to demonstrate a new model for inclusive transformation, which is based on just transition, and then work with our partners in the Western Balkans, Ukraine, Southern Africa, India and Asia who are faced with the same challenges. We want to make sure that no region is left behind.

And frankly, I hope that we can be even more audacious in our aspirations because your regions are not only endowed with natural resources but also with skilled workforce, technicians, engineers and people of great work ethic who get up early.

You can be at the forefront of the Green Deal and we want to help you bring this vision into reality.

I trust that you are here today because you want to see a successful transformation of

your regions, and because you want to turn this challenge into an opportunity.

Coal and carbon-intensive regions, your regions, have been the backbone of industrial growth in Europe for decades. There is no doubt that the Green Deal is a challenge, but one which also brings new opportunities.

Yes, we want to become the world's first climate neutral continent by 2050. But we also want to become the world's industrial powerhouse for innovative clean and circular solutions, which the world so desperately needs.

The Green Deal is our Europe's new growth strategy and my message to those who work in coal mines, peat bogs, oil shale mines, steel plants, fertilizer plants and other carbon-intensive sectors is that we need your skills to build a new industry. We will protect nature, climate and biodiversity but we will not let Europe become a museum. Rather, it will be at the forefront of the new world economy, based on innovation and clean energy.

We have all benefited from your work and it is time we also support you in challenging times.

Myself, Commissioner Ferreira and Commissioner Simson will be your champions in the European Commission and will do everything we can to support you.

This Platform brings together a very diverse group of people. But diversity is our strength and in order to be strong we all need to commit to an honest constructive and outcome-focused dialogue over the next five years.

I would like to welcome mayors and representatives of regions who join our dialogue. You are at the forefront of this transformation and I am committed to cooperate closely with you over the next five years to help you build a sustainable future for your communities.

I would also like to welcome representatives of national administrations. Every major economic transformation needs strong support at the national level. I trust your commitment to use the next few months to empower the regions, to prepare a vision for transition, and to translate it into Territorial Just Transition Plans.

I also welcome the representatives of industries, coal mines, steel, cement and fertilizer plants and the energy industry. I know you are in the starting blocks and are here today because you see the European Green Deal not only as a challenge but also as an opportunity.

I would also like to thank the NGOs for joining us. Your local presence and commitment to Just Transition is a great resource and we want to work with you so that you can help just transition happen on the ground.

Finally, I would like to welcome the representatives of the trade unions. I make it my goal for the first year of my mandate to improve our dialogue and to see more of your colleagues sit at the just transition tables in all regions where transition is happening or is about to start. Your voice is important!

Dear Colleagues, this Commission made the Green Deal, with its twin climate and environmental challenges, a top priority for Europe. Just transition is part of the deal we propose.

At the beginning of this year we adopted a proposal for a Just Transition Fund and a Just Transition Mechanism.

Last month as part of the European Recovery Plan we proposed to step up our support for just transition, taking our investment ambition for your regions from 100 billion euros to 150 billion euros over the next seven years. Elisa and Kadri will tell you more about these opportunities later this morning.

We know that the current crisis deepened the existing challenges and we can expect the

transition to accelerate.

The Just Transition Fund and Territorial Just Transition Plans are at the core of our proposal. We offer 40 billion euros of fresh money for grants which we want to channel to those territories which are facing the biggest challenges.

But the challenge is only just beginning and we all know that it will be a difficult process.

You will have to build local ownership and a shared understanding of the direction of travel. You will have to build projects which can bring sustainable jobs and bring new technologies. You will need to bring new skills and future-proof infrastructure.

The Just Transition Fund, the Just Transition Mechanism and the Platform, which we are building here together, will help.

But beyond that we will also mobilise all funds at our disposal to support Green Deal transition:

- the Modernisation Fund, which will help modernise the energy sector
- the Innovation Fund, which will help bring cutting edge technologies such as hydrogen based steel production and low-carbon cement production to your regions.
- LIFE programme, which this year already will finance three large just transition projects in Poland, Ireland and Hungary.
- and the broader Cohesion policy which closes the gaps between EU countries and helps us move together in the same direction.

Today we celebrate a formal start of the Platform work, but we will see each other again. For my part, I personally give you my commitment:

- to travel to your regions and to meet you in person
- to working closely with you over the next five years
- to continue the work with the coal, lignite, peat and oil shale regions
- and to step up our efforts in carbon-intensive regions

I will mobilise Commission resources to provide tailor-made support through dedicated Country Teams. Let's call them Just Transition Teams from now on!

My office will be always open and I will listen to your concerns and to your ideas.

This week you will discuss the most pressing challenges, exchange best practices and share ideas. I hope you will make the best out of it despite difficult circumstances.

Then, we will have to roll up our sleeves and make sure we deliver on the first important milestone – the territorial just transition plans and the selection of regions.

Today's crisis is a lesson of resilience to us all: when facing challenges, we need to be prepared, to get ahead of issues, and to act decisively to ensure that we protect our citizens and our economy. Just transition is no different.

So let's prepare, let's get ahead of the curve – if we want to flatten it, let's start now.

Let's take it step by step and move ahead together to make this a just transition and a Green Deal for all, not just the lucky few.

Commissioner **Ferreira**, in charge of Cohesion and Reforms:

Ladies and gentlemen,

In my first trips as European Commissioner, I wished to visit several mining and carbon intensive regions. I made it a priority to see the reality on the ground and to talk with factory workers, miners, and mining unions, with local people and their representatives.

Time and again, I heard the same message, best said in the words of a 50 year old miner: "I understand that this green transition needs to happen, I also want a healthier world for my children and grandchildren, but I've been working in this mine for over 20 years: what will happen to me?"

You will find the same concerns in peat-producing regions, in oil shale regions and in old industrial regions where greenhouse gas emissions are very high. These are regions where livelihoods are threatened by the loss of competitiveness of old, carbon-intensive technologies .

This world has been vanishing, and it hurts. It is not vanishing because we so decided. It is vanishing as a result of technological change and loss of competitiveness in the latest decades. And because today we are faced with the need to provide a cleaner, healthier world to our children.

But we can act. The transformation is inevitable; what should not be inevitable is the social hardship. We must ease this transition by supporting coal and other carbon intensive regions to regenerate their economies and train workers for new, better jobs.

We shall leave no one behind in this needed shift to a carbon-neutral economy. That is what cohesion policy is about. Cohesion policy works daily to reduce regional disparities – in Europe and in each member state – to accelerate convergence and improve the lives of all Europeans, regardless of where they live.

However, our present instruments are not enough.

There are some 230,000 Europeans working in coal mines and coal-fired power stations. Many more are working in the production of other fossil-fuels and in carbon-intensive industries, from steel to cement, or chemicals.

What will happen to these regions? They were in the last decades the economic backbone of our growth and they need to be supported to seize the new opportunities. This is why we have proposed the creation of the Just Transition Fund and the Just Transition Mechanism.

We are all too aware that the Covid pandemic has made the already painful situation of these regions even more precarious and even more pressing. This awareness led us, in the Commission, to increase the amount endowed to the Just Transition Fund from 7.5 billion euros to 40 billion. This increase will treble its investment capacity, making it better equipped to deal with the challenges of the transition.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I started my career as a junior official and researcher in a cohesion programme. I worked in a region – the North of Portugal – going through a transition. From a labour intensive, low wages model into a technologically and higher value added production. I later became the Minister responsible for regional policy in my country. So, I know the weight of this responsibility and the necessity of developing more sustainable growth models, that people and workers have alternatives.

I also know the importance of having the right tools and to be able to use them to the full.

This is why we need to accompany the funds and grants with technical support, peer exchange and regular interaction between local stakeholders, the national and European levels, different countries and the civil society.

This is what I believe the Just Transition Platform can bring and why it can greatly contribute to the success of what we will be doing.

Concretely, the Just Transition Platform provides 3 key services - which are the kind of support I could only have dreamed of as a young professional:

First, **the platform will provide comprehensive technical advice** throughout the process.

This has already started: for example, in May we approved applications from 18 countries for technical support in preparing their territorial just transition plans. These plans will be essential for success. The journey is a long one. The transition will not happen overnight: we are talking of a decade, at least, and probably more.

Second, the Platform will coordinate the Commission's support. In the European Commission, we have a wide and diversified pool of technical expertise and advice. To support you, we are going to mobilise them all.

To make this support quick and easy to navigate through, the platform will be a one-stop-shop, a single access point for support and information at the EU level. You will find links to all relevant sources in the Commission, from funding to knowledge sources; from regional policy to energy policy; from climate change to research: they will all be there. Any user can contact the Commission to ask about just transition issues.

Third, the platform will provide the sharing of knowledge and experience. There will be opportunities to bring peers together, to discuss how to catalyse change, accelerate the transition and create a pipeline of high quality projects. I ask you to be ready to share your good practices, so others can benefit.

This builds on very good existing work with the coal regions. Kadri will say more on this. I will simply note that the focus will become much broader, and remind you of the technical meetings today and tomorrow and the first stakeholder seminar, online, Wednesday.

In conclusion: The Green Deal is a historic moment for Europe:

for all of Europe, not only part of it. No region should be left behind, no European should feel forgotten.

The Just Transition Mechanism is Europe supporting the regions at risk from climate transition. The Just Transition Platform is Europe supporting all those who can make that a reality.

Ladies and gentlemen, the road ahead is long, but our commitment is for the long haul. Cohesion policy has been at your side in facing previous transitions and promoting convergence. This is also our goal with the Just Transition Fund and Mechanism and of the Platform we are launching today.

Thank you very much.

Commissioner **Simson**, in charge of Energy:

Executive Vice-President Timmermans, Commissioner Ferreira, thank you.

And ladies and gentlemen, good morning. It's a real pleasure to be speaking to all of you today.

We have set our sights on a clean energy transition because we want to advance as a society. But, our position is clear:

Nobody can really advance until everybody advances.

A clean energy transition where only a few see opportunities or only improves the lives of some and not all, is not a success. It is a failure.

Many of you listening today come from different Member States. Each with a different starting point for the clean energy transition.

Some of you have had a head start rolling out clean energy sources. Others are more vulnerable.

Some regions concentrate many carbon-intensive industries. Others have a unique reliance on fossil fuels.

Your regions are as unique as the individuals that populate them.

That said, you also have much in common. Citizens and businesses in your regions face the same challenges, and have similar backgrounds.

And that's why it is so important that we come together, show our support for one another, connect, collaborate, and cross the finishing line together.

That's why today is so important.

As you have heard from my colleagues just now, the Just Transition Platform aims to ensure that.

Now, my colleagues have outlined the most important aspects of the Just Transition Mechanism and its Platform, from the overall vision of why we need it, to the funding and the broad framework that will make it come to life.

So, I won't spend any more time going into the detail of how it will work.

But I will speak briefly on the concrete examples of how this way of working can and will function.

When it comes to supporting regions, we are not beginning at the beginning. On the energy side of things, the Just Transition Platform will be an extension of work that was already ongoing under the Coal Regions in Transition Platform. Just on a different scale.

That Platform has fulfilled three key roles:

First, it has been a place where coal regions could **share Knowledge and Experience**. Exchange project ideas. It creates bonds and ties between regions across Europe. One good example is the tripartite cooperation between Germany, Poland and Czechia where the border regions of these countries have set a common vision for transition and share and collaborate on what could help their regions prosper, like alternative fuels or tourism. Everybody keeps their own pace for transitioning, but a common vision of the future emerges beyond the borders.

Second, Country Teams were created, just like the ones to continue under the Just Transition Platform. But as Frans already said – due to expanding scope, we will call them Just Transition Teams from now on. They act as a meeting point between the Commission and Member States at national, regional and local level, between public and private sector and trade unions to discuss strategy and project development. These teams have created a

space for dialogue where there was none before, between the Commission and the local stakeholders.

These projects cover so many areas that could support local citizens. From spatial planning, to clean air, or cultural heritage. All related to moving beyond their coal mining past.

You've heard about the sharing of experience, country teams and technical assistance.

With the New Just Transition Platform, we will build on the political momentum and experience of the Coal Regions Platform. We will build on what we got right and go even further.

This is an evolution, not a revolution. The activities under the platform will not change radically. But it will cover new regions. Not only those facing coal, but also other solid fossil fuels like oil shale and peat. Most importantly, we are moving beyond looking at only the energy sector and extending the platform to all carbon-intensive regions, whether they are producing steel, cement or something else.

A good precedent has been set. Now we are aiming to amplify its potential to help these regions.

Ladies and gentlemen,

We talk about the clean energy transition as a natural, necessary progression for Europe. Europe is leading the way at global level on climate neutrality and clean energy technologies. But Europe also stands for fairness and solidarity.

We know there are entire communities across Europe built around energy and carbon intensive industries.

We know the challenges you face, we admire your determination to build a different future.

If we want to see a climate neutral Europe by 2050, it is Europe's task to support you so that we all reach a more sustainable future, and nobody is left behind.

Thank you for your attention.

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