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*Mr Gediminas KIRKILAS
Chair of the Committee on European Affairs
Gedimino pr. 53
LT – 01109 VILNIUS*

*cc. Mr Viktoras PRANCKIETIS
President of the Seimas
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Dear Chair,

The Commission would like to thank the Seimas for its Opinion on the 2020 Commission Work Programme {COM(2020) 37 final} and its adjustment following the outbreak of the COVID-19 crisis {COM(2020) 440 final}.

The Commission welcomes the Seimas' thorough analysis, its list of the most relevant initiatives and its continued support for the delivery on the six headline ambitions of the Political Guidelines. It is pleased that the Seimas consider that its priorities are well reflected in the (adjusted) 2020 Commission Work Programme.

The Commission takes note of the Seimas' assessment of a number of policy areas, ranging from our neighbourhood to infrastructure and taxation policies and is happy to provide the following clarifications.

Regarding the Eastern Partnership, the Commission and the High Representative adopted in April 2020 a Joint Communication 'Eastern Partnership policy beyond 2020 – Reinforcing Resilience – an Eastern Partnership that delivers for all'¹ providing for a comprehensive way forward for EU's engagement with Eastern partners. Taking into account the Joint Communication, the Council adopted in May 2020 Council conclusions on the Eastern Partnership². At the 18 June 2020 Leaders'

¹ JOIN(2020) 7 final

² <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/43905/st07510-re01-en20.pdf>

Video-teleconference³, the EU Member States and the six Eastern partner countries agreed to hold a physical Eastern Partnership Summit in March 2021 with a view to endorse the Eastern Partnership policy priorities post-2020, including a new set of deliverables.

Regarding infrastructure and energy objectives, the Commission has committed to several relevant actions under the European Green Deal to put the EU on a path to climate neutrality by 2050. The energy system is particularly crucial in this regard. The EU Strategy for Energy System Integration⁴, which is based on the coordinated planning and operation of the energy system ‘as a whole’, across multiple energy carriers, infrastructures, and consumption sectors, proposes concrete policy and legislative measures at EU level to gradually shape a new integrated energy system. A Hydrogen Strategy for a climate-neutral Europe complements this strategy to scale up the uptake of hydrogen in the context of an integrated energy system. As Europe needs modern, clean, secure, future-proof and smart energy infrastructure to deliver the Green Deal, the Commission will also revise the guidelines for trans-European energy infrastructure to ensure that they are fit for such purpose. The Commission also identified the importance of agreeing a new approach for exploiting Europe’s offshore renewable energy potential in a sustainable and inclusive way, which will be outlined in the European Strategy on offshore renewable energy later this year. Finally, climate neutrality requires that transport emissions decrease by 90% by 2050. Fuels decarbonisation and the deployment of adequate alternative fuels infrastructure are key requirements in this context. Therefore, the Commission is carrying out an evaluation of the Directive on Deployment of alternative fuels infrastructure⁵, which may be followed by a revision of the Directive.

The Commission takes note of the reservations expressed by the Seimas with respect to the initiatives on effective and fair taxation and the application of the qualified majority voting to this policy area. In the context of the COVID-19 crisis and its ramifications, it is more important than ever for Member States to have secure tax revenues in order to invest in people and businesses. Fair and efficient taxation will thus be crucial in the months and years ahead, as the EU and the global community seek to recover from the fallout of the COVID-19 crisis. On 15 July 2020 the Commission adopted the Tax Package, with the aim to reinforce the fight against tax abuse, help tax administrations keep pace with a constantly evolving economy and ease administrative burdens for citizens and companies. The Commission has also launched a debate about a progressive and targeted transition to qualified majority voting under the ordinary legislative procedure in certain areas of shared EU taxation policy, as is already the case with most other EU policy areas. This possibility is provided by the EU Treaties. Under qualified majority voting, Member States would be able to address more swiftly and effectively shared challenges. This would not entail any change in EU competences in the field of taxation or to the rights of Member States to set personal or corporate tax rates as they see fit.

³ <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2020/06/18/>

⁴ COM(2020) 299 final

⁵ Directive 2014/94/EU

On promotion of equality, the Commission would like to underline the initiatives in the 2020 Commission Work Programme on equality and non-discrimination. The already adopted Gender Equality Strategy 2020-2025⁶ sets out ambitious key actions for the next five years and commits to ensure that the Commission will include an equality perspective in all EU policy areas. To address gender pay discrimination, the Commission held a public consultation on pay transparency, which was recently closed, and will table binding measures by the end of 2020. The new LGBTI Strategy will build on the lessons learned from the Commission's previous actions to advance LGBTI equality, while the post 2020 EU Framework on Roma Equality and Inclusion strategies will be based on concrete recommendations provided in mid-term evaluation of the existing EU Framework that ends in 2020. The work on equality will continue with the adoption of the Action Plan on the European Pillar of Social Rights early next year. The European Pillar of Social Rights is at the heart of Europe's recovery strategy. The Action Plan will be instrumental to ensure socio-economic recovery and resilience in the medium and long-term, with a view to enhance social fairness of the digital and green transitions. Following the evaluation of the previous European Strategy for Disability (2010-2020), we will adopt a follow-up strategy for disability in early 2021 that will also take into account the experience and the lessons of the crisis.

The Commission looks forward to the involvement of the Seimas on the above topics and to continuing the political dialogue in the future.

Yours faithfully,

*Maroš Šefčovič
Vice-President*

⁶ COM(2020) 152 final