Dear Vice-President Dombrovskis,

Dear Commissioner Thyssen,

Dear Prime-Minister Straujuma,

Dear President Schulz,

Dear colleagues,

• Let me start by thanking President Juncker and his team for the organisation of this conference.

• In 1985, representatives of our organisations met with President Delors in Val-Duchesse, to lay down the basis of a genuine Inter-professional Social Dialogue at European level.

• Today, we are here to support President Juncker in making his wish of being ‘President of Social Dialogue’ a reality, and to discuss a new perspective for Social Dialogue.
• It has become a necessity: industrial relations in Europe are today as complex as policy-making at European level, since the European Union developed from 10 Member States in 1985 to 28 nowadays.

• “United in diversity”, the EU’s motto since the year 2000, is now also reflected in the very different forms of social dialogue at national, regional and local levels.

• That is why the real competitive advantage of today’s event is the presence of so many national Trade Union and employers’ leaders: national social partners’ involvement in shaping Europe’s policy making is a pre-condition for its legitimacy.

• The last seven years of European-wide economic and financial crises did of course also put the social partners in each member state under pressure. But especially these times of crisis did show the essential role of social partners as such.

• It is a matter of fact that countries which better managed the crisis are those with well-established social dialogue systems.
Let me now say what CEEP and its members can bring into the picture.

For public services employers social dialogue is not an end in itself. It is the best way to bring growth back to Europe. A sustainable growth, able to last and compete.

Public services have a long tradition of social dialogue, but we are not shy in saying that many things need to change.

As employers we can be self critical: we know that we can do more for improving effectiveness and efficiency in public services.

Too many of the reforms undertaken in some Member States in the last seven years are the result of the public sector not having been able to anticipate change.
• Of course, because of their firm belief that through social dialogue we achieve better results, our members have tried hard, while reforming and improving effectiveness and efficiency of our services.

• We tackled the crises by minimising as much as possible the social costs of these reforms.

• That is why my concrete offer today to the Juncker Commission, but also to you Prime Minister Straujuma and to you President Schulz, is the strong support of public services employers to effective industrial relations.

• High level of social dialogue is necessary, both at tripartite and bipartite level, especially in Member States where modernisation of public services is the mostly needed.

• This is the best contribution we can bring to our social market economy, which remains the pillar of the European project.