**Online seminar**

**"Impact of the the Covid -19 pandemic on employment and social dialogue''**

***The impact of covid-19 pandemic on enterprises in Albania***

**Ruzomberok 11- 12 June 2021**

**Dear colleagues,**

**Ladies and gentleman,**

I would like first of all on behalf of the Albanian delegation to thank Mrs. Lubica Cerna President of NKOS (Slovak Independent Christian Trade Unions) for attending this seminar, for the warm hospitality and convey the heartfelt greetings of Mr. Bilbil Kasmi, President of the Autonomous Trade Union of Food, Agriculture, Trade and Tourism of Albania ( SAUATT).

We certainly welcomed the invitation as a testimony of the excellent relationship between our Trade union and the NZK in terms of sharing experiences in protecting the interests of employees and social dialogue.

The Independent Trade Union of Food, Agriculture, Trade and Tourism (SAUATT) is an independent union and has an organizational structure from the local level to the central level. It operates throughout the territory of Albania.

SAUATT is the only trade union in the bread and flour sector and covers four main branches of the Albanian economy: food, agriculture, trade and tourism. The number of its members is 8000 (of which 1/3 are women and young people). We have signed 100 collective agreements with employers' organizations.

SAUATT is a member of the National Labor Council and the Social Insurance Institute. Our union has good relations with the main confederations in the country such as BSPSH and the confederation of trade unions of Albania.

Despite the problems and difficulties currently facing the Albanian society, SAUATT aims to develop and improve its trade union activity in accordance with European Union and ILO directives.

Referring to the topic of this seminar I would like to make a brief presentation of the impact of covid-19 on enterprises in Albania

Our Trade Union since the beginning of Covid-19 pandemic in the march of last year follows with concern the situation of the employment of its member particularly of young workers. Pandemic of Covid-19 has had a negative impact in the Albanian economy.

Pandemic of Covid-19 and its spreading since month of last march has dominated the developments in the Albanian economy during the first 9 months of 2020, being reflected in even in economical fall with 5.5%, increase of unemployment, loosing of jobs, bankruptcy of business, fall of purchasing power, of local production and commercial exchange, difficulties in the fulfilling of contracts and financial obligations.

The impact of Covid-19 resulted with negative effects for the GDP in the second semester of 2020, a long lockdown period when the constraints established in order to stop the transmission of the infection in the country was more strong.

SAUTT follows with concern the employment situation of its members, especially in the youth. The covid-19 pandemic has had a negative impact in in the Albanian economy.

The sectors most affected by the pandemic situation are the tourism and trade sectors, creating huge economic losses for enterprises as well losing jobs, especially for young people.

Referring to the official figures the contribution of the tourism in the GDP for 2019 was 21.2 %.In Albania the workers in the sector of tourism represents 22 % of overall number of the workers in the country.

According the data of Bank of Albania during the pandemic it was lose 50 thousand jobs.

The shock in Albanian economy from Covid-19 was feel in higher level in branch of trade, transport, accommodation and food service”, and particularly in the hotels and bar-restaurant, which was affected from the lockdown, constraints in the international movements and distant social measurements.

During the period of covid-19 the priority of SAUATT is the protection of worker's interest members of our Trade Union. As member in National Labor Council as well in the Board of National institute of Social Insurance the leadership of our Trade union requested from the Government the protection of the workers of the sector hotel-restaurants, trade and agro processing with financial aid in order to reduce the negative economic effect caused by the Covid-19 pandemic crises.

The financial aid package provided by the government as support for the enterprises and workers was insufficient.

**Dear Colleagues**

In our country social economy enterprises contribute to employment, social cohesion, regional and rural development, environmental protection, consumer protection, agricultural, and social security policies. Social economy entities are mostly micro, small, and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

The small enterprise's economy which account for over 90% of total enterprises and have over 33% of the total number of employees.

Challenges are not few, but where there are challenges, there are also opportunities. Our enterprises continue to perform below potential. Increasing productivity is a challenge that requires adressing through long-term policies.

**Dear colleagues,**

The period of lockdown during the pandemic created difficulties in the union's contacts with its members. The period of lockdown, constraints in the urban and interurban transport during the pandemic covid-19 created difficulties in the union's contacts with its members.
The last months have been a challenge for all of us and there are many changes, especially in the area of "work". Young people are under a lot of pressure and look into a difficult and uncertain future.

Albanian young people are looking for opportunities to migrate and work outside country in western countries mostly in Germany as they are unhappy with low salary level and the high cost of living in Albania.

According official data the highest rate of unemployment among young people, up to 29 years of age, which was 26% in the third quarter of 2018.

Pandemic Covid-19 has strongly shock Albanian economy. During the last month it is noticed that Albanian economy and enterprises is showing sign of recovery, although the effects of pandemic Covid-19 in the economic activity yet remains present.

The rhythm of recovery of economic activity is accelerated and the prospective of the development is going to be improved during the two last quarter. Since the last week there is no any case of death from pandemic covid-19 and the measurements of protection are facilitated by the national committee of public health. The number of infection cases in the country remains in low level.

With the opening of tourism season during this week it is expected a recovery of the branch of tourism.

Although recovery of the economy still is not complete and the support factors are not yet consolidated.

The following of vaccination process will open the way to the progressive enlargement of economic activity during the years 2021-2022. The experts thinks that the high rhythm of recovery would be slow and they hope that normality to be returned in the year 2022-2023.

As an EU candidate country we are currently waiting for the opening of negotiations with the European Union where it is known that social dialogue is an important chapter with the social partners.

**Dear colleagues,**

Evaluating the presentations of the trade union colleagues present at this online seminar, we are convinced that the exchange of experiences and ideas serves to increase the capacity of trade unions in the countries of the Western Balkans. Undoubtedly, this will lead us to strengthen trade union structures for social dialogue to protect the interests of employees.

In conclusion, I would like to express the readiness and commitment of our union leadership to further expand and strengthen cooperation with unions in our region and to take joint action between our unions with EU member states and the Western Balkans to speed up the process of the integration of the countries of our region in the European Union.

*Thank you for your attention.*

**Ruzomberok, 12 June 2021**