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Speech by Martin Jefflén, Liaison committee of Eurocadres – Council of European Professional and Managerial Staff & CEC European managers

Thank you Mr Vice-President. I represent the Liaison committee of Eurocadres – Council of European Professional and Managerial Staff and CEC European managers.

A year has now passed of living with the pandemic, and it has taken its toll. When our topic for discussion was relaunching Growth and Employment in the Aftermath of COVID-19 in the June Tripartite Social Summit I underlined the need to urgently address the mental health challenges that came with the crisis. I said that on top of the current already alarming mental health situation, a restart risks bringing the stress levels up to previously unseen heights. Well, we were further away from a restart than we thought, and the mental health situation has now deteriorated even more with reports of a drastic increase of depression and anxiety. Having battled this myself so being part of these statistics I find it important to continue breaking the stigma associated with ill mental health.

This can of course not only be tackled in the workplace, but European workplaces must become part of the solution rather than being part of the problem. For Eurocadres, the two main building blocks missing to improve the mental health situation focus on prevention.

What we have seen in this prolonged teleworking situation is that it matters how we organise work. And it matters that you can properly disconnect from work. The role of social partners is immensely important and the problems relating to not disconnecting must be addressed wherever possible, in social dialogue and collective bargaining. However, we need actions now, not later. Therefore, firstly, Eurocadres insists that the Commission launches without further delay a legislative initiative on the application and enforcement of the right to disconnect in form of a self-standing directive applying to all forms of workers, including professionals and managers.

Secondly, the stress epidemic must be tackled. After more than three decades with the occupational safety and health framework directive it is clearly not sufficient in improving the psychosocial situation, a dedicated directive is needed. Through our campaign [EndStress.EU](https://www.endstress.eu) which Eurocadres runs together with ETUC and others, we urge the EU Commission to propose a new EU directive which addresses psychosocial risks, violence and harassment and which improves work organisation.