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SOCIAL EUROPE

Contribution to the European Commission reflection paper in the context of its White Paper on the Future of Europe

There will be no future for the European Union without a strong Social Union. Europeans should rightfully be able to re-identify the European Union with the protection and the reinforcement of their labour and social rights, and, thereby, of their quality of life. This will, in coming years, require strong political commitment and more concrete action in the social policy field from the European Commission, and from the other institutions alike. The Commission's reflection paper should make this clear. It should promote specific progress, notably including:

- **A directive on decent working conditions in all forms of employment**
- **The creation of a living wage index**
- **Action to ensure the respect and the promotion of collective bargaining across the whole of the EU**
- **A social protection floor for all European citizens**
- **A European Child Guarantee**
- **Legislation to ensure the reconciliation between personal and work life**
- **A Social Protocol to be annexed to the Treaties to ensure that fundamental rights take precedence over economic freedoms**

The Rome Declaration commits Member States and institutions to a Social Europe by addressing unemployment, poverty and social exclusion as priorities in order to promote sustainable growth and to reduce inequalities. However, it clearly falls short of the Treaty obligations as well as Europe's obligations related to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations (UN), to which all EU Member States signed up to in 2015. Furthermore, it remains an open question as to whether any of the five scenarios presented by the Commission in the White Paper on the Future of Europe may provide the necessary conditions for substantial social progress. However, what is clear is that any attempt to reduce the European Union solely to its economic or monetary dimension or to an appendage of the Single Market will only further fuel the rise of populism and Euro-skepticism.

Europe must fulfil its commitments under the Treaties such as promoting the well-being of people, full employment, social progress, social cohesion, social justice and protection, fair competition, equality between women and men, solidarity between generations, protection of the rights of the child, the development of quality education¹ and the knowledge and dissemination of the European cultural heritage². The Union shall pursue these objectives by appropriate means that ensure the constant improvement of the living and working conditions of their peoples.³ In addition, the Union must contribute to the preservation and development of the fundamental rights included in the Charter, and to strengthen its protection.

Likewise, the European Union must deliver on its commitment to be a frontrunner in implementing the UN SDGs⁴. However, the achievement of these goals will only be possible by devoting the necessary legislative, institutional and financial means to ensure true social progress in the years to come.

The S&D Group has been strongly demanding genuine and concrete initiatives to strengthen a European Social Model⁵ based on solidarity, integration, social justice, sustainable growth, a fair wealth distribution, quality employment, gender equality, access to culture, high-quality public services, including education and health systems. We are fighting for a model that ensures the respect of fundamental social rights, equality and social protection as well as fair mobility and the empowerment of vulnerable groups. The same purpose also motivates our fight for strengthening upward economic convergence across the EU and the Eurozone as well as for developing a powerful European investment strategy, as highlighted in the S&D letter to President Juncker concerning the key initiatives that should be pursued in connection with the White Paper on the future of the EU.⁶

Many of our demands have already gathered wide cross-party support in the European Parliament in the Resolutions lead by S&D members, such as the Rodrigues report on the European Pillar of Social Rights, the Balas report on Social Dumping, the Ždanoka-Blinkevičiūtė report on Work-life balance, the Ward report on intercultural dialogue and the adoption of the 2018 European Year of the Cultural Heritage. The expectations of the Parliament are high. Now it is time to deliver and to come forward with concrete proposals. In due course they should be complemented by relevant proposals concerning the deepening of the EMU and the future of the EU finances.⁷

The Commission's reflection papers aim at taking a long term view. However, Europeans need to see the launch of a more social Europe emerging right now. Therefore, we urge the Commission to take responsibility and present legislative, institutional and financial proposals in order to make Social Europe a reality as soon as possible. These proposals should focus on the following areas: job quality, social protection, equal opportunities as well as fair mobility and migration.⁸

¹ Article 165 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

² Article 167 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union

³ Articles 3 of the Treaty on European Union (TEU) ; Preamble and articles 165.1 and 167 of the TFEU

⁴ Commission's Communication on Next steps for a sustainable European future: European action for sustainability https://ec.europa.eu/europeaid/sites/devco/files/communication-next-steps-sustainable-europe-20161122_en.pdf

⁵ <http://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/position-papers/progressive-european-social-policy-returning-focus-people>

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<http://www.socialistsanddemocrats.eu/sites/default/files/SD%20letter%20to%20JCJ%20on%20the%20White%20Paper%20on%20EU%20future%2020170215.pdf>

⁷ The S&D contribution on the area of the social dimension of the EMU will be part of a separate document dedicated to the Deepening of EMU, and similarly for the future of financial instruments supporting EU employment and social policies.

⁸ The S&D contribution on the area of the social dimension of the EMU will be part of a separate document dedicated to the Deepening of EMU

1. Quality Jobs and Social Cohesion

The deterioration of the quality of jobs all over Europe is unsustainable. Action is needed to improve living wages, job security, access to education training and lifelong learning - especially to keep skills up-to-date including with regard to digitalisation - occupational health and safety, the appropriate balance between work intensity and job autonomy, employee participation and empowerment as well as an adequate balance between work and private life.

A precondition in this context is the existence of strong trade unions, the participation of employees in company matters and a strengthening of collective agreements, as well as dialogue with the actors of the social economy. The quality of social dialogue must be boosted at the European level as well, including in the framework of the European Semester as well as in the legislative process and pre-legislative planning.

The S&D Group demands:

- **A Directive on decent working conditions in all forms of employment**, guaranteeing every worker access to a core set of labour and social rights, following the principle of equal pay for equal work and taking into account the impact of the platform economy on labour markets.
- The creation of a **living wage index** to help in defining appropriate minimum wages in each Member State in the context of the Annual Growth Survey (AGS) that will subsequently be the basis for binding targets on Member States action plans.
- **Respect and promotion of collective bargaining** and its coverage to reach as many workers as possible while at the same time also aiming for better wage floors in the form of collective agreements or minimum wages that are set with the strong involvement of the social partners in accordance with existing practices of industrial relations at the national level. While the economy becomes more digital, it is of paramount importance that the right to collective action of genuinely self-employed workers is equally respected. We urge the Commission to re-examine existing EU competition laws, which are currently hampering the right to associate for workers treated as independent contractors. We support the Greek demand for the re-establishment of collective bargaining system and the respect of the Charter of Fundamental Rights.
- **Access to social protection for all employed people in Europe**, who should accumulate their social entitlements via a personal activity account.
- **A rebalancing of the economic governance** with a view to ensuring that social and economic indicators and targets are treated with equal importance in the European Commission's surveillance activities and related scoreboards. Such modifications of the economic governance framework must lead to the development and introduction of a macrosocial surveillance procedure that, as part of the European Semester, serves to define Country-specific Recommendations for National Reform Programmes and the Stability and Convergence Programmes. To underpin a social rebalancing of the economic governance, it will also be necessary to make better use of flexibility under the Stability and Growth Pact as well as complementary means to be provided by the Community Budget and, eventually, the Eurozone fiscal capacity to support investment, including social investment, and job creation.

2. Social Protection

In many Member States social security and social protection systems have been severely undermined by austerity measures. High quality welfare systems and social investments are extremely important if Europe wants to remain competitive.

Universal access to public, solidarity-based pension systems must be granted to all. The Commission must dedicate its efforts to help Member States strengthen public and occupational pension systems which provide an adequate retirement income well above the poverty threshold and allow pensioners to maintain their standard of living.

The S&D Group demands:

- a European legal framework in line with the related ILO recommendation to guarantee every European citizen a **social protection floor** with universal access to health care, basic income security and access to essential goods and services. This social protection floor should be assessed in the Annual Growth Survey, alongside poverty levels.
- a decent, adequate income for all Europeans through a **European minimum income framework** to cover basic living costs, while respecting national practices.

3. Equal opportunities for all

We need urgent and more decisive action and policy coordination to reduce inequalities and promote equal opportunities, to fight poverty - especially child poverty - and to tackle unemployment.

The S&D Group demands:

- A **European Child Guarantee** to be put in place ensuring that every child at risk of poverty will have access to free health care, free education, free childcare, decent housing and adequate nutrition.
- A **legislative framework for reconciliation between personal and work life**, including: a revision of maternity and parental leaves, new paternity leave and carers' leave.
- Inclusive labour markets ensuring **equal treatment and non-discrimination in employment and occupation** on the grounds of sex, sexual orientation, disability, age and religion or belief. The full implementation and revision of equal treatment legislation and compulsory requirements for companies to draw up **measures or plans on equality** addressing all grounds of discrimination
- An **inclusive and accessible approach to educational systems**, with particular attention to people with special needs.
- A **truly accessible Erasmus + programme** for all citizens of all ages notably by increasing financial aid for those who are unable to participate due to financial constraints. The recognition of skills, competences and knowledge acquired through **non-formal and informal learning, including volunteering**.

4. Fair mobility and migration

The right to free movement of citizens and workers is a core European value and a fundamental right of European citizens. It is also a pillar of the success of the European Union's single market. We are firmly committed to fight social dumping, discrimination and the exploitation of workers, especially those who are posted.

The principle of equal treatment for both intra EU mobile workers and third country nationals is fundamental in order to tackle both the non-discrimination and integration of migrant workers, as well as to avoid social dumping.

It is of utmost importance, and our obligation according to law, to ensure solidarity with refugees. We need a common European approach and coherent policies in order to tackle challenges such as the lack of financial resources, access to the labour market and social protection, sustainable legal protection system for irregular workers, as well as identification and punishment of severe labour exploitation of migrants.

The S&D Group demands:

- A **Social Protocol** to be annexed to the Treaties to ensure that fundamental rights take precedence over economic freedoms. Article 9 TFEU and the Charter of Fundamental Rights must be respected.
- **Better coordination of social security systems** to ensure that the right to move freely within the European Union can be exercised without discrimination, also when it comes to the portability of rights, i.e. maintaining acquired rights and receiving entitlements.
- The introduction of a **European Social Security Card** in order to facilitate information exchange, provide people with a track record of their entitlements and prevent abuses.
- The establishment of a **European Labour Inspection** for cross-border activities.
- The development of **an adequately financed, common European approach to the current migration and refugee crisis** to be drawn up in close cooperation with Member States that are called upon to act swiftly and in full respect of fundamental rights. As part of this common approach, it is essential to implement coherent policies to ensure timely access to quality housing, the labour market, social protection, health care and education.
- Provisions to ensure **equal treatment in terms of wages, social security rights, and working conditions** as a precondition for labour migration schemes, also in the framework of trade agreements, as well as the recognition of skills and competences of migrants.
- Establishment of a **European Student E-card** to support and facilitate student mobility and their access to educational and cultural services and products, housing and public transport, with special attention to vulnerable people.