

European pillar of social rights

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The Committee on Employment and Social Affairs adopted an own-initiative report by Maria João RODRIGUES (S&D, PT) on a European Pillar of Social Rights.

The report noted that the European Social Model has contributed to important productivity gains and to Europe's competitiveness, based on a healthy and skilled workforce with a decent purchasing power to sustain a sophisticated internal market. However, European welfare states need to be updated and strengthened to catch up with demographic change, technology, globalisation and a significant recent increase in social inequalities.

Proposals for a solid European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR): the report called on the Commission to build on the review of the social acquis and of EU employment and social policies as well as on the outcomes of the 2016 public consultation on the EPSR by making proposals for a solid European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) which seeks to reinforce social rights through concrete and specific tools (legislation, policy-making mechanisms and financial instruments).

The report recalled that the Commission committed itself to achieving a social AAA rating for the EU and is expected to come forward in the spring of 2017 with a proposal for a European Pillar of Social Rights that will promote well-functioning and inclusive labour markets and welfare systems in participating Member States and serve as a compass for renewed upward convergence by (i) updating existing EU legislation, (ii) improving the EU's framework for economic and social policy coordination, (iii) ensuring relevant financial support at national and European levels.

Members are of the view that standards to be articulated by the European Pillar of Social Rights should apply to all countries participating in the single market in order to maintain a level playing field.

Moreover, the EPSR should:

- equip people living in the EU with stronger means of keeping control over their lives, enabling them to live a dignified life;
- make markets work for shared prosperity, wellbeing and sustainable development in the context of a highly competitive social market economy and making use also of an industrial policy at the EU level;
- promote relevant social standards and by empowering national welfare states to maintain social cohesion and equality across the EU;
- facilitate free movement of workers in a deeper and fairer European labour market.

Updating existing labour and social standards: Members called on the social partners and the Commission to work together to present a proposal for a framework directive on decent working conditions in all forms of employment, extending existing minimum standards to new kinds of employment relationships. This framework directive should improve enforcement of EU law, increase legal certainty across the single market and prevent discrimination by complementing existing EU law. It should apply to employees and all workers in non-standard forms of employment, without necessarily amending already existing directives.

Calls are also made for more effective and efficient implementation and control of existing labour standards in order to improve the enforceability of rights and tackle undeclared work.

The report recalled the right to healthy and safe working conditions also involves protection against workplace risks as well as limitations on working time and provisions on minimum rest periods and annual leave. Members urged the Member States to fully implement the relevant legislation and they await Commission proposals for concrete measures to uphold this right effectively for all workers, including seasonal and contract workers, and comprising also measures to prevent violence against women or harassment.

Building up the means to achieve results in practice: the report called on the Commission to build on the outcomes of the public consultation and on the EU institutions' views by putting forward a clear roadmap of concrete measures for full practical implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights and full pursuit of the Treaties' social objectives.

Member States are called on to sign and ratify the revised European Social Charter and the European Convention on Social Security (ETS No 78).

The report drew attention to the two-way link between social conditions and economic performance and called for the Europe 2020 targets to be directly and transparently taken into account in formulating country-specific recommendations and the euro area recommendation, as well as in the utilisation of EU instruments.

Adequate financing: the report stated that the European Pillar of Social Rights can only be credible if accompanied by adequate financing at national and European level. It reiterated its call for accelerated implementation of relevant operational programmes and revision of the MFF 2014-2020 where needed in order to cope with the increased needs.

The Commission and the EIB Group are called upon to develop further the Investment Plan for Europe in order to strengthen investment in economic recovery, quality job creation, sustainable development and social investment in people's current and future capacities to engage in the labour market.

Lastly, Members considered that the EPSR should be adopted in 2017 as an agreement between Parliament, the Commission and the European Council, involving the social partners and civil society at the highest level. The Commission is invited to propose mechanisms for adequate involvement of all the relevant stakeholders at all relevant levels in the implementation of the EPSR.