

European pillar of social rights

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The European Parliament adopted by 396 votes to 180, with 68 abstentions, a resolution on a European Pillar of Social Rights.

Members recognised that the EU needs to develop further a European social model and respond swiftly and visibly to increasing frustration and worry among many people about uncertain life prospects, unemployment, growing inequalities and lack of opportunities, in particular for young people.

This debate can help to draw attention to the EU's basic values and the fact that Europe has, in a worldwide comparison, advanced labour and social standards and social protection systems. The debate can also help to place the European project on stronger foundations.

Proposals for a solid European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR): Parliament called on the Commission to build on the review of the social acquis as well as on the outcomes of the 2016 public consultation by making proposals for a solid European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) that is not limited to a declaration of principles or good intentions but reinforces social rights through concrete and specific tools (legislation, policy-making mechanisms and financial instruments).

The resolution 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.

In addition, the Pillar should:

- equip people living in the EU with stronger means of keeping control over their lives, enabling them to live a dignified life and realise their aspirations by mitigating various social risks arising over the course of their entire life ;
- make markets work for shared prosperity, well-being and sustainable development in the context of a highly competitive social market economy, aimed at full employment and social progress 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 through adequate, accessible and financially sustainable social protection systems and social inclusion policies;
- facilitate free movement of workers in a deeper and fairer European labour market.

Updating existing labour and social standards: Parliament 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.

Working conditions: Members called for the framework directive on decent working conditions also to include relevant existing minimum standards to be ensured in certain specific relationships, in particular:

- proper learning and training content and decent working conditions for internships, traineeships and apprenticeships;
- a clear distinction between those genuinely self-employed and those in an employment relationship;
- limits regarding on-demand work: zero-hour contracts should not be allowed, in view of the extreme uncertainty which they involve.

The resolution also stressed the need to for the gender pay gap to be closed throughout the EU and 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.

Social protection: Parliament insisted on the need for:

- adequate social protection and social investment throughout peoples lives;
- universal access to timely, good-quality and affordable preventative and curative health care and to medicines;
- investments in active ageing and of arrangements enabling people who have reached their pensionable age to have the option to continue working at their desired level of intensity while being able to draw partially on their pension if they work less than full-time;
- providing an adequate minimum income in all Member States and to consider further steps in support of social convergence across the European Union, taking into account the economic and social circumstances of each Member State, as well as national practices and traditions.

Building up the means to achieve results in practice: Parliament called on the Commission to put forward a clear roadmap of concrete measures for full practical implementation of the EPSR. It called for a social protocol to be introduced in the Treaties when they are revised, in order to strengthen fundamental social rights in relation to economic freedoms.

The resolution 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: Parliament declared 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, whilst calling for further strengthening of the Youth Employment Initiative.

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 and quality job creation.

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.