



After the UK referendum: a call for a more Social Europe Declaration of PES Ministers for Social Affairs and Employment Adopted in Bratislava – 15 July 2016

On 23 June, a majority of the people who voted in the referendum in the United Kingdom have spoken out against EU-membership. We regret this outcome.

Today, Europe is faced with huge challenges that require a better European Union: creating quality jobs and growth, fighting poverty and social inequalities, guaranteeing security and handling migration flows, promoting and strengthening the rule of law, empowering and protecting citizens, ensuring energy security and sustainable climate policies, and fostering economic, social and territorial cohesion. These challenges take place against a backdrop of growing instability and geopolitical changes at our European borders. In this light, we strongly reaffirm our joint commitment to the European Union, firmly believing that Europe is successful when we overcome narrow self-interest in the spirit of solidarity.

Nevertheless it is also clear that part of our citizens, in the UK and in all EU member States feel that the EU has not protected them enough from rising inequalities, increased precarious work, low wages, or unemployment and they deserve an answer. Our answer is clear: there is an urgent need for a more social Europe, for a Europe against inequalities, for a Europe of decent working conditions, and for a Europe of strong social protection. The EU needs to take a clear stance on strengthening its social dimension. We are ready to take leadership in this historical moment to set this new agenda for the EU.

Our proposals are ready, they have always been at the core of our political engagement: we want to strengthen our social model, reduce inequalities and guarantee high social standards. The Commission's proposal of March 2016 on a European pillar of social rights offer an important occasion to strike such a new balance in favour of a more social Europe. Our priorities for it are clear:

- Progress towards a **Social Progress Protocol** that protects fundamental social and labour rights by giving them at least the same legal weight as economic freedoms.
- The prevention of and **fight against poverty and social exclusion**, notably with a **European social protection floor** that guarantees universal access to essential quality health services and basic income security.
- **The consolidation of social standards** in Europe, ensuring they also cover new forms of work.
- The existence and, where adequate, an **increase of minimum wages** in all Member States, to be reached either by law with the strong involvement of social partners or through collective bargaining.
- **Equal pay and equal rights for work of equal value for all**. In particular, progress quickly on the revision of the Posting of Workers Directive.
- Non-discrimination as a core principle to guarantee all EU citizens, including mobile workers in a host state, **equal access to social security and social assistance**.

- A **real gender equality**, closing the **gender pay and pension gap** with clear and binding targets, and **better work-life balance for all**.
- Boosting the **skills of Europe's workforce** and equipping people with the skills necessary to face the challenges of a fast changing labour market, with a well-funded implementation of the skills guarantee.
- **European standards to manage restructuring** in a social and responsible way, supported by adequate funding in the European Social Fund and the European Globalisation adjustment Fund and considering a European employment initiative for refugees.
- A strong **social dimension in the Economic and Monetary Union, anchored in the European Pillar of Social Rights**, to prevent wage and social standards being used as mere variables of adjustment for internal devaluation.
- **Progressive reforms and social investments** increasing and improving employment as well as the economic, social and environmental sustainability of Europe's development. Our model is more balanced than the neoliberal export-oriented and austerity-focussed one, it is not only oriented to GDP growth but also to increasing each and everyone's well-being.

To reach these objectives two elements are essential. First, we want to make full **use of flexibility within the Stability and Growth Pact to put an end to mere austerity. We want to combine fiscal stabilisation with employment friendly macroeconomic policies. Investments in the real economy have to be seen as a productive factor.** Second, we want to have a **strong social dialogue**, with social partners directly involved in the development and **implementation** of these policies.

Next to this ambitious social agenda, we support an equally ambitious **European Youth Plan**:

- We want a **permanent and extended European Youth Guarantee**, with a funding of 21 billion EUR to be made available in the Youth Employment Initiative until 2020, to widen the scope of beneficiaries by raising the age limit to 30 years and to ensure good implementation and quality and sustainable offers.
- We want a true **'Erasmus for all'** by broadening Erasmus+ in order to enable all secondary school pupils and students engaged in vocational education and training to gain experience in international exchange programs.
- We want a **European Youth Culture Cheque**, to be spent on any cultural activity of the young card holders' choice, to facilitate access to culture.
- We want to create a **European Child Guarantee**, a specific European fund to ensure children's rights to healthcare, education, childcare, housing and nutrition.

With this set of proposals, we are ready to demonstrate the added value of the EU to all its citizens, that European policies can be people-focused and that we bring change for the future of Europe. We are determined to create a EU that fulfills its core objectives as laid down in Article 3 TEU and thus promotes peace, its values and the well-being of its people.