

EP OFFICE OF
TAMÁS MESZERIC

European Pillar of Social Rights
November 17, 2017

Consequences of the economic crisis have not ceased to affect European countries. It is clear that measures solely aiming at economic growth and financial stability are not sufficient to reach social welfare. For Europe, it is of utmost necessity to reaffirm the role of social protection and social rights. European politicians, but more importantly national leaders have to address inequality between the East and the West, enduring shortage of labour and social dumping. Social policies, including housing policy, are mainly member state competences, which leaves limited room for the European Union to improve the living standards of people. However, the harmful consequences of wage gaps between member states, lack of effective social integration are problems that need coordinated and harmonized measures throughout the European Union. For an equal and fair Union, competences have to be reconsidered.

Following 9 months of public consultation, a report from the European Parliament and the Commission's proposal to adopt an inter-institutional proclamation, the European Pillar of Social Rights was adopted by European leaders at the Social Summit on 17th of November, 2017, Gothenburg. The Social Pillar consists of 20 main principles and social rights. These include equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions and the stressed role of social protection and inclusion. The declaration is ground-breaking in the sense that it stresses the equally important role of the social dimension besides the monetary and financial elements of the crisis. Therefore, the declaration introduces a paradigm shift that can lead to social unification and decreasing wage gaps in Europe.

Even though the Declaration of the Social Pillar is innovative, the initiation should not be limited to a political declaration. As the European Union has limited legislative power in the social dimension, the declaration is a political act that does not include concrete

measures. Therefore, the principles and social rights are not legally binding, cannot be legally enforced. The final outcome of the Social Pillar is to be seen in the upcoming years. The future of Social Europe depends on the degree of further harmonisation of social and housing policies.

The European Greens strongly support the legislative implementation of the Pillar. The social rights have to be guaranteed for every worker throughout whole Europe. Special attention should be paid to new forms of work (platform economy) and non-traditional work (flexible working hours, distance work, seasonal work, temporary work agencies). The Greens want adequate social security and protection for all workers irrespective of status or type of contract. We want equal opportunities and access to labour market, living wages and decent working conditions, social protection and inclusion for all.

According to Mr Meszerics, “wages must be sufficient to maintain a decent life, but the European reality is that many people remain under the poverty line even with a full time job. For a functioning European welfare state we need strong binding agreements on European living wage, European social standards and adequate minimum income.” The existing gap between different classes of society is increasing, especially in Eastern Europe. Even though the number of the unemployed is gradually decreasing in the EU, we are facing the new challenge of in-work-poverty, meaning workers earning less than the real living wage. To reach universal social welfare, living wages have to be coordinated on the European level, taking into account local distinctiveness in each state. As Mr Meszerics noted, “member states sooner or later must realise that the principle of subsidiarity in the case of social policy means that we need more European harmonisation to save the sinking European Social Model”.

In conclusion, the Social Pillar, in its present form, serves as a framework for policy-makers in the member states and in the Union. Even though it does not guarantee concrete implementation, it can be decisive in future social and housing policy of the Union. It

would be essential to further acknowledge the role of social policy for a more equal and fair Union.