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By **Maria João Rodrigues, MEP**

Back in 2007, the Lisbon Treaty set the following main objectives for the European Union (EU): “full employment and social progress in a social market economy, the combating of social exclusion and discrimination, solidarity between generations, the promotion of economic, social and territorial cohesion, and solidarity between the Member States”. Is this the case right now? Are we even close to accomplish these goals? The numbers show a cruel reality: 1/3 of total wealth in the EU is in the hands of only 1% of Europeans, while 40% of Europeans only hold 1% of its total wealth.

In fact, since 2008, the situation has even worsened, the EU has suffered a major blow and only recently it is gradually getting back on its feet. During this period many fragilities of the EU integration were exposed, which have led to waves of populism and euro scepticism in our continent. Furthermore, we are living in an increasingly globalised and digitalised world. This, on the one hand, provides us with a great amount of new possibilities and increases our quality of life. On the other hand, globalisation and the digital revolution have created new and atypical forms of employment, where social rights and employment conditions are at stake.

After years of blind austerity, where hard and wrong budgetary and economic policies led to alarming growing of socioeconomic inequalities, Europe needs to send a strong message in defence of its citizens. It is too much at stake to keep things as they are.

The European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), proclaimed in Gothenburg on the 17th of November 2017, must mark a social turn for Europe. The time is now. Many Europeans are asking a very legitimate question: what tangible improvements will the Pillar bring? Was the Gothenburg proclamation just symbolic?

This is why we defend that to deliver on the promises made we must implement a proper Social Action Plan, outlining clear measures and tools for each of the Pillar's twenty principles.

With the implementation of the EPSR we want to reactivate the EU as a protective shield: preventing child poverty, strengthening the youth guarantee, guaranteeing basic social rights, also to people working in new forms of employment, and eventually introducing an EU social security card to help them keep track of their contributions to social schemes wherever they work in the single market.

Due to the action of the Socialists and Democrats (S&D) political family the light at the end of the tunnel is becoming clearer and the revision of the so-called "Written Statement Directive" has started.

The Commission's proposal is a welcomed step in this direction but we have to ensure that all workers, no matter what type of job they have, should be guaranteed two basic rights: a clear and decent labour contract and full access to social protection throughout their life.

The proposal has the potential to contribute to the integration of non-standard work into social protection systems and address challenges arising from increased flexibility, uncertainty and instability of employment relationships. Combined with a proper proposal for a directive on social protection, we can aim at making sure that all workers have access to at least a minimum safety net. However, much more needs to be done and we have to stay vigilant. For instance, the current proposal does not properly cover the self-employed worker and it keeps a worrying degree of uncertainty for many platform-workers who are formally considered self-employed. We cannot leave anyone behind.

We need new legislation in order to enforce more ambitious social and labour standards. At the same time we must continue the efforts to redirect economic policies towards more investment and job creation, backed by proper financial means, otherwise we keep insisting in the same mistake, social policies will only serve as palliatives for wrong economic policies. This is why we need to use the Social Pillar to make the European Semester a process to upward social and economic convergence to be supported by stronger financial instruments in the public budget at national, European and Eurozone levels.

The time has come and we need the involvement of everyone. Social partners and civil society must engage in this debate, they are the ones who better know the reality on the ground!

#### **About the author:**

Maria João Rodrigues, currently Member of the European Parliament, S&D Group Vice President in charge of general coordination and interface with the other EU institutions and member of the Committees of Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) and Economic and Monetary Affairs (ECON), was Minister of Employment in Portugal and has been a policy maker working in several posts in the European Institutions since 2000, notably in the leading teams of EU Presidencies. During her work she has helped deliver important outcomes areas such as: the Lisbon Strategy and the EU2020 Strategy; the EU agenda for globalisation and the strategic partnerships with the USA, China, Russia, India and Brazil for a new growth model; policy; the new Erasmus for mobility, New Skills for New Jobs, The European Pillar of Social Rights, responses to The Eurozone crisis. More recently, The Road Map and Annual Programming for the European Union.

In academic terms, she was professor of European economic policies in the European Studies Institute - Université Libre de Bruxelles and in the Lisbon University Institute. She was also the chair of the European Commission Advisory Board for socio-economic sciences. She is author of more than one hundred publications.

In 2017 she was also elected to become the President of FEPS, The European Foundation of Progressive Studies, with around forty foundations across Europe and the world.

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