

MJR AT THE EUROPEAN ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL COMMITTEE (EESC)

Discussing new economic policy for Europe
with social partners & civil society

Brussels, 17 Feb 2016

On the eve of the vote in the European Parliament's ECON Committee on her report on EU economic priorities for 2016, Maria João Rodrigues was invited to discuss her proposals in the plenary session of the European Economic and Policy Committee (EESC).

Representatives of business associations, trade unions and civil society organisations shared their views on combining fiscal responsibility with stronger support for economic growth and job creation. They agreed that "competitiveness" needs to be understood in broad terms, i.e. not only in terms of wages but especially in terms of quality, energy efficiency and productivity based on knowledge, skills and innovation. They emphasised that the European Semester process for coordinating economic and social policies needs to be much better connected with Europe's 2020 Strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. They also stressed that unemployment, poverty and high social inequalities remain pressing issues which Europe needs to deal with. Even if economic recovery is slowly happening, the social situation remains worrying in most of Europe – and new major challenges now arise for Europe's public administration and social services as large numbers of asylum-seekers continue to escape violence and poverty in other parts of the world.

MJR got a great deal of support in the debate for her policy proposals, namely concerning the need to strengthen domestic demand in Europe by stepping up investment and reducing social inequalities. The EESC also supported her arguments for connecting EU economic policies with implementation of EU commitments to fight climate change and efforts to promote more efficient use of natural resources. There was broad agreement that all these aspects should form part of a "second generation" of structural reforms and investments, which Europe should now implement after years of austerity and labour cost-cutting.

The EESC subsequently approved its own opinion on the 2016 Annual Growth Survey. Among other aspects, it emphasised that the large influx of refugees and asylum seekers calls for measures "based on joint action and solidarity, respect for international law and values, equal treatment and the need to prioritise life over any other considerations primarily based upon security policies".