



Delivering on the European Social Pillar: a territorial and civil society perspective

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Speaker

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Ladies and gentlemen,

Esteemed colleagues,

Thank you for inviting me here today.

Just like the Committee of the Regions, the European Economic and Social Committee has dedicated - and will dedicate - a great deal of attention to the European Pillar of Social Rights. Its implementation concerns us all.

Since its proclamation, the Commission has launched proposals on work-life balance, on access to social protection, on transparent working conditions and on the labour market authority. The legislators are still struggling to achieve agreements on these dossiers, which would reinforce very concretely the social dimension of the European agenda.

With only six months to go before the European elections, a strong agreement would send a positive message to European citizens.

The EESC has delivered opinions on all of these proposals. Also, we have used our structure and the powerful network of the National Economic and Social Councils to organise national events in 2016 to trigger contributions of European civil society. (I wish to thank the Commission for the efficient cooperation in this exercise.)

We are now planning, in the spirit of today's event, an own-initiative opinion in the first half of 2019, to evaluate first implementation measures.

Now, I would like to take this opportunity to comment on today's topics.

As regards the first session, we can all agree that the major tools the EU currently has at its disposal to implement the social pillar are legislation, guidance, funding and cooperation.

Despite the fact that social, education, health and housing policies fall under the remit of national competences, the EU level has been providing guidance to the development of these policies. The Social Pillar itself, but also the Social Fairness Package and the Education Package are recent examples.

While I have praised the proclamation of the European Pillar - to which I was pleased to be personally present - I think that its momentum must be linked to the European Semester. The Semester has proved to be a powerful and efficient governance tool and has developed an increasingly social dimension, which the EESC welcomes.

Furthermore, I am convinced that the European Semester should be instrumental in promoting the Agenda 2030, adopted at United Nations level and fully endorsed by the European Union.

This new horizontal strategy should be the guide for the next decade.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Another crucial tool is funding. The EESC, in accordance with the European Parliament's and the Committee of the Regions' positions, has proposed that the level of commitments in the next EU budget reaches 1.3% of the gross national income. We consider that the proposed level of 1.14% is too modest.

Concretely regarding the European Social Fund Plus, the EESC called for 30% of total resources for economic, social and territorial cohesion policies to be allocated to this fund and for 30% of the ESF+ resources to be earmarked for social inclusion measures.

Commissioner Oettinger was kind enough to join our plenary session in September - and I know that my friend, Mr Lambertz knows him even better than I do. We told the Commissioner that we need realism - but

also ambition. We asked him to dare for more and to try to have the MFF adopted in 2019. Probably not an easy task - but he is definitely the man who can do it!

And then there is another major political priority, on which we need to continue investing: education, training and life-long learning.

It is for this very reason that the EESC welcomed the initiatives presented by the Commission for the creation of a European Education Area, which encourages governments to improve access to high-quality and accessible early childhood education and care for all.

The EESC has also welcomed the European Skills Agenda's focus on upskilling pathways, encouraging digital skills and promoting vocational training.

Investment in learning mobility is not any less crucial. The EESC is in favour of the cross-border recognition of learning periods . The EESC also welcomed the Erasmus+ programme and called for the programme's budget to be tripled .

Therefore, we can only welcome the proposal of the Committee of the Regions for an "alliance for skills and education".

Please allow me still a word on the role of the actors on the ground- on 'who does what'.

The Services of General Interest are an integral part of our European Social Model. I therefore fully agree with the president of the Committee of the Regions when he calls for the concept of services of General Interest to be enlarged to include social services .

Since the services provided by the local and regional authorities (LRAs) are essential and determinant for citizens' trust in the institutions, and since over one third of all public expenditure and over half of public investment is carried out at sub-national level, the LRAs deserve support.

But... they aren't the only ones: the EESC has also recommended that public authorities facilitate the access of civil society organisations to the available resources of the new ESF+ fund to help implement the pillar .

In this sense, we have great expectations in the announced InvestEU programme .

Today's event conducted a reflection on how the social pillar could be best implemented and focused on Education, training and lifelong learning, the pillar's first principle.

But: the social pillar has another 19 principles to explore. In the EESC's first opinion on the social pillar (of which I was rapporteur, together with two colleagues) we identified several areas which would gain from cooperation between the EU, national, regional and local levels .

In this sense, I would like to personally suggest to Mr Lambertz, my dear counterpart at the Committee of the Regions, to join forces to reflect on the other key principles of the social pillar.

If we want this pillar to deliver for the wellbeing of all citizens, who is better placed than our committees to assess implementation from a territorial and civil society perspective?

Thank you all for your attention.