

Speech of the Minister of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security, Ana Mendes Godinho at the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs (EMPL) Meeting: Strengthening and implementing the Social Dimension: How to integrate the Pillar of Social Rights into the recovery and resilience plans?

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Strengthening and implementing the Social Dimension: how to integrate the Pillar of Social Rights into the recovery and resilience plans

Dear European Commissioner, Nicolas Schmit

Dear Chair of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs of the European Parliament, Lucia Nicholsonová

Dear Pedro Roque, Chair of the Committee on Labour and Social Security of the Portuguese Assembleia da República

I begin by thanking the opportunity to participate in this annual European Parliamentary Week and in this session under a topic that is very much aligned with the priorities of the Portuguese Presidency.

The Portuguese Presidency begins in a very challenging context. In these unprecedented times, among a pandemic that hits directly on our health systems and brings heavy socio-economic consequences, the European Union must deliver a strong and decisive response.

For the past 11 months, we all have been focused on containing the pandemic and on guaranteeing the resilience of our health systems. It is essential to remain united and to

work together to ensure the implementation of a rapid and solid recovery of the European Union, minimizing the massive economic and social impacts that we all face.

2021 is a critical juncture and a turning point in the pathway to exit the COVID crisis. This is a delicate and difficult period for Member-States and the Union as a whole.

In this context, timing is of essence. It is a decisive moment in which the launch of European initiatives - policy tools and financial instruments - all falling into place to support a broad strategic response to the crisis and to deal with its impact, is most welcome.

The Portuguese Presidency motto is *Time to deliver: for a fair, green and digital recovery.*

A motto that really represents our ambition for this semester: putting social dimension and strengthening the European social agenda as our main priority; promoting a Union based on the common values of solidarity, convergence and cohesion, capable of acting in a coordinated way recovering from the crisis and to build a path of resilience for the future.

To this end, Portugal will put all its efforts towards the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan as a key instrument to overcome and respond to this unprecedented economic and social crisis. This will be the overarching priority of our Presidency.

The European Pillar of Social Rights has been, from Gothenburg on, a reference policy framework that enables us to address the social dimension of key issues and challenges in different policy areas.

The roadmap to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights to be proposed soon by the European Commission will be a key response to the current juncture.

Having a sound Implementation Action Plan will be critical not only as a political message for citizens but also for our joint capacity to move forward in the social field and thus helping to shape our pathways towards the aftermath of the crisis.

NextGenerationEU and the Multi-annual Financial Framework 2021-2027 provide also unprecedented resources to finance a social recovery and just twin transitions.

We believe that our recovery and resilience efforts should be strongly linked with the social aspects and impacts of the pandemic crisis. This is important for both political and policy reasons

Social Europe has always been at the centre of what has been the European Union's contribution to building democratic, just, cohesive and inclusive societies. Social dimension must be at the core of our national recovery and resilience plans.

It has been the social dimension that has accompanied the deepening of the single market, the single currency, the concept of European citizenship, guaranteeing a level playing field and essential rights in all Member States.

COVID-19 provided Europe with the biggest challenge in its history. That is why building a fairer and social Europe should be based on placing the European Pillar of Social Rights in the core of the European recovery.

The present moment is decisive for the future of our countries, but, above all, for the future of the European Union. We have the responsibility to show our citizens, our workers, our families and our enterprises that they are not alone, that they are at the centre of our measures and that we are taking care of their future.

We cannot let that the economic and social impacts of the Pandemic in our health systems, in our economies, in our social protection systems, in our workers and families, jeopardize all the work we've done in the last decades.

We must stay together and work individually and collectively. This is key to overcome the challenges we face.

Today, at the Informal Video Conference of the EPSCO Ministers that has just finished, a clear message was sent - we need a strong and ambitious European Pillar of Social Rights Action Plan.

An ambitious Action Plan, with adequate instruments and with specific quantitative targets and a strong commitment to measurable progress, aligned with this spirit of deliverance that I believe current times demand and we all share.

The areas that EPSCO Ministers, social partners and civil society identified to give further attention are the ones that must be at the core of our National Recovery and Resilience Plans and the ones we expect the Action Plan to underline:

First, jobs and employment as an economic and social priority.

In fact, the priority, after restoring public health, will certainly be to rapidly create employment opportunities that put Europe back on track in the trend of recovering high employment rates. Economic and job recovery, especially when combined with the right policies to promote job quality and sustainability based on effective social dialogue and social rights, will be a powerful driver to improve the social situation.

Second, accelerate qualifications - new skills, upskilling, reskilling - so that our citizens are actors and not victims of digital and green transitions; So that qualifications are the social elevator that is needed and that can cut the cycles of poverty

Third, strengthen social protection to ensure that systems are inclusive and are made for people and no one is left behind

Covid 19 has showed how fragile our systems are and how vulnerable groups were specially affected.

The role of social policies in reducing the impact and severity of poverty and inequality is determinant by:

- i) Promoting inclusive social security systems
- ii) Ensuring health systems for all
- iii) Guaranteeing access to affordable housing
- iv) Implementing new social answers and social equipments

This is a time of permanent challenges

But this is also the opportunity to act and to transform what needs to be transformed and to accelerate what needs to be accelerated.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The dices are rolled, we cannot lose this opportunity. I believe that together we will do it!

Thank you

Ana Mendes Godinho

Minister of Labour, Solidarity and Social Security

