

In the upcoming two weeks the city of **Gothenburg, Sweden**, will become the “social capital” of Europe.

Next Wednesday, EU ministers of social affairs will meet to discuss, among other topics, equality of genders in terms of employment opportunities. The discussion has been put to the fore by the Swedish Government, an Executive that counts a majority of women among its Ministers. Moreover, on **Friday 17, the 2017 Social Summit** will bring together the Head of States of the EU. On the occasion, Prime Ministers will officially approve the **European Pillar of Social Rights**.

The Pillar defines the contours of a new “social framework” for the EU with reference to three key thematic areas: “equal opportunities and access to the labour market”, “labour conditions” and, last but not least, “social protection and inclusion”. Each thematic area groups together a set of specific “rights” which all together add up to **20 basic social norms**. The latter comprehend, for instance, the right “to high-quality education and professional training”, the right “to receive pay for work that guarantees the satisfaction of needs of employees and relative families”, or the right “to an adequate social protection, independently from specific contractual forms”.

Yet, the big question remains: **how will all this fit into the current economic governance of the EU and the Eurozone?** The European Commission developed a **“scoreboard” with the aim of tracking progress** (or deficits) in the application of each of the 20 social rights. The scores should feed the main economic governance tool of the Union, namely the European Semester. Ideally, the scoreboard should streamline the social dimension and thus guarantee an “equilibrium” between economic and social priorities.

The official proclamation of the Pillar of Social Rights and the renewal of the Posted Workers Directive are means to the specific objective: correcting the negative political and social spillovers the application of EU principles, such as fiscal discipline and freedom of movement, have had on national systems.

Notwithstanding the latter technical and practical applications, the approval of a common

European Pillar of Social Rights represents a milestone and a shared reference for governments, trade unions, employer associations, and stakeholders across the Continent. In other terms, as of now, **it is up to every social actor to foster the prominence of the social dimensions within public discussions, both at a national and at a European level.**

But there is more. Last month, the European Council agreed upon a “general framework” over the renewed **Posted Workers Directive** that has been approved by the European Parliament earlier this year. Head of States agreed upon the reduction of the maximum stay of posted workers in another Member States from 18 to 12 months (although, a notification from employers is sufficient to extend the period for another 6 months). But the most important news concerns the levels of pay of posted workers which will need to be in line with the legal requirements of the country of service provision.

The deal prizes the diplomatic efforts of the **French President, Emmanuel Macron** who, in a way, has been able to stay true to his electoral pledges. Indeed Central European and Eastern countries such as Bulgaria, Romania, Slovakia and Slovenia voted on the same side of “core” Member States such as Germany and France. And not by chance: last Summer, Macron visited the Capitals of the formerly mentioned countries to convince them to join his European reform project. Conversely, countries that were not involved in the diplomatic tour, namely Hungary, Lithuania, Latvia and Poland, found themselves in a minority over the issue.

The official proclamation of the Pillar of Social Rights and the renewal of the Posted Workers Directive serve a specific objective: **correcting the negative political and social spillovers the application of EU principles** – such as fiscal discipline and freedom of movement – have had on national systems. Yet, the objective is not the one of building a “federal and standardised European welfare system”. The latter would be as much unfeasible, as undesirable.

The point is rather to **“enrich” the EU institutional architecture with specific elements that can uphold national welfare systems**, and, at the same time, provide the latter with incentives to adapt to social change. Without any doubt, it will be a path full of hurdles and hindrances. But it appears the only political choice to restore the lost legitimacy to the EU.

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