

# Chinese provincial legislator under investigation

Wei Minzhou, a senior legislator in northwest China's Shaanxi Province, is being investigated for severe disciplinary violations, the Communist Party of China Central Commission for Discipline Inspection said Monday.

Wei has been vice head of the Shaanxi Provincial People's Congress Standing Committee since January 2017.

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# Remarques du Commissaire Moscovici à la conférence de presse sur le paquet « Printemps » du semestre européen 2017

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## **Remarks by Vice-President Dombrovskis at the European Semester Spring Package press conference**

Ladies and gentlemen,

Today, we have adopted the spring economic package – the highlight of the country-specific phase of the European Semester. The package includes recommendations for 27 Member States – so all Member States except Greece – and fiscal decisions concerning several countries.

This year, the spring economic package comes against a positive backdrop: the European economy continues its recovery, now for the fifth consecutive year.

GDP growth, for the EU as a whole, is expected to be at 1.9% both this year and the next. All Member States are expected to grow. Employment has reached the highest number ever and public finances are improving.

We should use this as an opportunity to make European economies more competitive, resilient and innovative. And we need to make growth truly inclusive, so that all people feel the recovery.

This is the overall objective of the reform efforts we are recommending today.

They are targeted to address the specific socio-economic challenges in each Member State. They focus on how to use reforms to make growth more inclusive and reinvigorate productivity.

There is no quick fix. Inclusive growth requires time and a mix of policies.

Our experience shows that labour market reforms bring good results. Several Member States have implemented reforms to strengthen the performance of their labour markets and the sustainability of social protection systems. More needs to be done to provide well-targeted assistance to job seekers, which was also shown in our country assessments. We need to work to optimise social spending.

Social protection systems must be better targeted to provide wide and adequate income support to all people in need.

Income inequality needs to be addressed when designing policy reforms across the board. For example, well-designed tax and social benefit systems contribute to increasing employment and reducing poverty. We traditionally recommend shifting the tax burden away from low-paid labour to a tax basis less detrimental to growth and this is reflected in our recommendations to several Member States.

Relevant skills, effective education systems and life-long learning are essential not only for creating inclusive growth, but also for lifting productivity. Robust productivity is our guarantee for rising living standards.

So how do we raise productivity?

We need to support innovation and we need more investment. Many of our recommendations are targeted at addressing barriers to investment – for example, disproportionate regulatory requirements and burdensome administrative systems. For many countries we recommend opening up product and services markets, in a way to boost innovation and lift productivity growth.

Speaking of macroeconomic imbalances in specific countries, in February we left open the cases of Cyprus, Italy and Portugal – all experiencing excessive imbalances. After having scrutinised their National Reform Plans and following additional clarifications, we concluded that our analysis does not provide ground for moving these countries into the corrective arm of macroeconomic imbalances procedure.

On fiscal, although the overall picture of public finances continues to improve, several countries still have high levels of private and public debt,

which need to be set on a downwards path.

Today we have positive news for Croatia and Portugal – we recommend the Council to abrogate the Excessive Deficit Procedures for the two countries as they have brought their budget deficits below the 3% of GDP and this for the whole forecast horizon.

As regards the preventive arm, there are 8 countries – Germany, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Sweden – that are projected to be at or above their medium-term budgetary objectives both in 2017 and 2018. These countries have no SGP-related CSR.

Unfortunately, we also see that there are Member States diverging from their budgetary objectives – this is why, for example, Italy had to take additional structural measures worth 0.2% of GDP this year.

And – we are recommending the Council to give warning to Romania on the existence of a significant observed deviation from the adjustment path towards the medium-term objective in 2016.

I will now pass floor to Marianne who will focus on employment and social aspects in this package.

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## [Speaking points by Commissioner Thyssen on the 2017 country-specific recommendations as part of the European Semester Spring Package](#)

*Speech by Commissioner Thyssen in charge of Employment, Social Affairs, Skills and Labour Mobility*

Ladies and gentlemen, good morning,

Indeed, we have the highest employment rate ever measured in the European Union, and we have now nearly 233 million people employed.

Since 2014, when this Commission started, over six million jobs have been created in Europe.

While over 19 million people are still looking for a job, unemployment is now at 8%. This is the lowest level since 2009.

And last week our spring economic forecast confirmed that we are firmly on the path towards economic recovery and delivering on our priority number one: **more jobs and growth.**

But this growth needs to reach each and every one in our societies.

This Commission has made clear from the beginning that the social dimension of Europe is at the heart of our work. This means putting people first and delivering for them.

The core of our concerns is to address inequalities, both within and between Member States. Inequalities do not only divide our societies, but also put a break on our competitiveness and economic growth.

We are working on two fronts to make this happen. We have introduced a strong focus on **social considerations into the European Semester**.

We clearly ask Member States to pay greater attention to the social impact of their reform efforts— this is both a matter of democratic legitimacy and of economic sustainability.

Since its start, this Commission is itself also paying greater attention to the social impact of all our Commission policies and initiatives. This is even more so following the presentation of the **European Pillar of Social Rights**. Coordination through the Semester is one of the options to apply the principles of the Pillar and **make them a reality in practice**. Let me give you a few examples.

The first principle of the Pillar stresses the importance of education, training and lifelong learning. This is not *“par hasard”*, this is not a coincidence. It is a political choice in light of our improving economy, with employment picking up and a growing labour force. To keep pace with this evolution, we call for more **reforms to up-skill and re-skill people in Europe** in our Semester recommendations.

Improving the access and quality of education and training is essential to fight poverty and inequalities, but also to attract investment and provide our businesses with a skilled and productive labour force. We need inclusive societies and **labour markets, which leave no one behind**. In the new world of work we need all people on board.

The Pillar also calls for “a right to fair wages that provide for a decent standard of living”. In some Member States now, we recommend that the context of economic growth should be more reflected into the wages of workers, such as Germany and The Netherlands. Social partners of course have a fundamental role in this process. This is why we also call upon Member States to enhance the capacity of social dialogue where needed.

And of course the Pillar calls for social protection systems which represent a genuine investment in people in Europe; and which empower all people in Europe to live to their full potential. In the Semester this is translated for instance in our recommendations to some Member States to **improve** the adequacy of their **social protection systems**, among which Bulgaria and Hungary. Or to provide affordable and good quality childcare services, for instance for Spain and Ireland.

We have also recently launched the **new Social Scoreboard**, which tracks key

societal trends and performances across the European Union. Having a clear overview of where every Member State stands as regards the social dimension, will for sure enrich the debate, strengthen our ability to learn from each other and also motivate Member States to accelerate necessary reforms. This important analysis will in the future also guide us in preparing the Semester recommendations and making concrete progress towards a “social triple A” for the EU.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Our societies, economies and labour markets are changing radically. We must **be ready to harness the new opportunities** and **adapt** to the **challenges** these changes are bringing. The European Pillar of Social Rights provides the reference framework. The European Semester is key to drive the necessary process of reforms at national level. Now it is for national and local governments, the social partners and civil society at large to follow up and work with us for a prosperous and social Europe.

Thank you.