

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.