

Speaking points by Commissioner Thyssen on the 2019 European Semester Spring Package

Ladies and gentlemen,

The real novelty of this year's European Semester exercise is that we deepen our focus on investment.

By identifying investment priorities for each Member State, we operationalise how we want to streamline the use of EU funds.

Many of these investment priorities can and will be supported by the Cohesion Funds for 2021 to 2027.

It is clear that this support cannot cover everything, but we are forcefully moving towards a stronger link between the European Semester and EU funding.

So that a part of the EU budget is used to support the reforms we have agreed with the Member States.

Today's country specific recommendations allow us to focus on the main issues that need further attention.

Almost half of them address labour market and social affairs – a further sign of how social the Semester has become.

I would like to focus on five key issues we have identified.

(1) Employment, including quality of employment. Even though employment is at a record level, we see large differences between countries, regions and population groups. Some regions are left behind. Temporary and atypical work is disturbingly frequent in some countries. In-work poverty is increasing.

(2) Social protection. The rise of non-standard work and self-employment forces us to rethink how we make sure all people in work are adequately covered. An erosion of social protection leaves workers insufficiently protected and our social security poorer.

(3) The rapidly changing world of work demands from us to adapt and to innovate. Investing in people is key for sustainable and inclusive growth. But we also need to address inequalities in education and training. Everybody must have equal access to quality education. This includes life-long learning. Otherwise we endanger the long-term prosperity of our societies.

(4) And then we have another challenge: With our ageing societies, sustainability of pensions, healthcare and long-term care require a hard

think. We must ensure positive reforms are not retracted, costs don't balloon and intergenerational fairness is maintained.

(5) Equality between men and women keeps improving but with a persisting gender pay gap and employment gap, it is clear that we are not there yet. The new rules on work-life balance are a milestone that can help improve the situation. But Member States will need to implement this on the ground. And complement it with affordable and quality childcare and long-term care facilities.

While there is work to do, we have built a stable ground on which the next Commission can continue this effort.

The employment and social outlook in Europe is developing in the right direction:

We are still at record levels of employment with now 241 million people in jobs in Europe. Unemployment, at 6.4% in April, is now below the lowest point attained before the crisis. The improvement is even more remarkable for young people, whose unemployment rate went from a peak of almost 24% in spring 2013 to 14.2% today. And poverty and social exclusion are going down.

This shows that our policies are bearing fruit. The European Pillar of Social Rights is crucial to continue delivering. It is the basis for all future policies and investment priorities for improving working and living conditions across the EU.

Our recommendations adopted today are essential to build a more equal and prosperous future. They will guide the Member States in using EU cohesion money wisely in the period 2021-2027.

I call on Member States to translate these recommendations into action.

Thank you.