

2017: A DECISIVE YEAR FOR SOCIAL EUROPE

by Maria Joao Rodrigues, FEPS President

2017 is a crucial year for social Europe. After years of economic and social hardship, the gear is finally shifting. It is high time we ensure our progressive goals are heard and make sure social standards are updated.



Since 2008, the European Union has suffered a major blow and only recently is it gradually getting back on its feet. Many fragilities of the EU integration process have been exposed in recent years, which have led to waves of populism and euroscepticism on our continent. It is now high time we discuss what we want for Europe. Our Europe. We need to firmly engage in the debate that has been launched at EU level: the European Commission has put forward a White Paper on the Future of Europe as well as a reflection paper about the social dimension of the EU.

The European Commission has proposed 5 scenarios for the

Future of Europe. I believe that none of these scenarios are good enough. We should fight for a 6th scenario: Doing much better together on priorities people care about!

The European Commission has also recently put forward a proposal for a European Pillar of Social Rights, following a public consultation as well as the important European Parliament report, that was adopted in January. This is the first time since the crisis began that social issues are being put back on the table and that we are finally discussing how to ensure upward social convergence in the EU. Let's be frank. This is, for the moment, an opening as such a proclamation is not binding but discussing this is

absolutely crucial at this juncture. We must remember that on top of an economic crisis which has put social welfare at stake, we are living in an increasingly globalised and digitalised world. This, on the one hand, provides us with a large number of new possibilities and increases our quality of life. But on the other hand, globalisation and the digital revolution have created new and atypical forms of employment, where social rights and employment conditions are at stake.

We must engage in ensuring that social standards are updated and that the European Union adopts a European Pillar of Social Rights, re-launching upward convergence and rebalancing the path of European integration. The joint

Proclamation by the Council, Parliament and Commission is foreseen for the EU Social Summit in Gothenburg in November. It will be a good signal.