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**EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT DEBATE - Minutes**

**THE ROLE OF SOCIAL SERVICES IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE EUROPEAN PILLAR OF SOCIAL RIGHTS**

**24 April 2018**

Hosted by MEP Georgi Pirinski (S&D)

**INTRODUCTION**

**Georgi Pirinski (MEP, S&D):**

There are two approaches to the European Pillar of Social Rights:

1) Recognition that the social agenda of the EU was highlighted in the aftermath of the crisis. It impacted the ones most in need.

2) Social Rights have been included in previous documents

**Luk Zelderloo (president Social Services Europe, secretary-general EASPD):**

Social Services Europe represent over 100 000 organisations all around Europe and together with the heath sector, social services employ 11% or Europe’s workforce.

The EPSR brings a new force to a social Europe “It seems as social is back at European level after 10 years of underinvestment.” And we should use this window of opportunity to speak about the importance of social services to achieve the goals set up by the Pillar “We should not hide our head in the sand. We should clarify what the role of social services could be.”, we need to prepare the next steps This only works if it works for the European citizens.

Other policies at EU level have to help to achieve the EPSR goals. The 3% rule in the stability Pact is hindering social investments, we should stop putting social as last on the list.

**PRESENTATION OF THE PAPER**

**Heather Roy (Eurodiaconia):**

Heather Roy presented the paper of Social Services Europe on ways to engage on the implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights.

It is good that the social seems to be back, but actually, social should always be on the table. We should go out of the hierarchical model that brings always first the economy and stability and last social policies: they go hand-to-hand. In this stage “implementation is key”. The 20 principles are of great ambition and 10 out of 20 principles cannot be achieved without social services – that means we need to invest in financing those services and improving the policies.

“Social services are needed by each and every one of us” at all stages of life – from child care to labour market support, support for the active participation of people with disabilities, supported housing, rehabilitation services, etc.

* Social Services support equal opportunities, support children (e.g. through providing child care facilities, schooling), social services support provision of long-term care, supporting people at risk of losing permanent housing or have already lost permanent housing
* Recommendations: building-up partnerships, not only at EU level but at national and regional level to improve policies and access to finance (also thinking about the funding in the next-MFF). “We don’t have to re-invent the wheel when we talk about social services. We can build on good practices (that are already happening)”.
* We should emphasize quality. It is important to focus on how existing legislation provides quality. Furthermore, it is important to look across legislative framework.

The EPSR is a tool that requires national engagement to be successful: *“If we don’t have the political will of all EU Institutions and member states, we will not achieve our ambition.”*

**REACTIONS AND DISCUSSION**

**Ruth Paserman (European Commission):**

* There are already some legislative proposals that go in the direction of achieving the goals on the European Pillar of Social Rights.
* For the Semester the idea is to reduce the number of recommendations and to create recommendations that don’t contradict each other;
* Regarding investment – there’s a priority of the expenses but we push for putting social services in the beginning: investing in **people should be the most important thing** and we can see this investment will improve directly two topics**:**

1) Importance of accessibility of social services (financial, reachability)

2) Issue of employment (what can we do to make employment a quality employment)

**Rudi Van Dam (Social Protection Committee):**

* The implementation of the European Pillar of Social Rights should build on effective strategies
* The active inclusion approach consists of the following:
* Minimum income
* Leading towards the labour market
* Access to social services
* The SPC is already working on mandatory issues and is trying to develop indicators on the European Pillar of Social Rights and social services. Social Services are very diverse among the member states. This makes it difficult to find comparable figures.
* We shouldn’t forget the tool developed by the SPC, the Voluntary Quality Framework for Social Services as an essential tool to promote quality among member states.

**Sofia Ribiero (MEP, EPP):**

* “For me, the European Semester is the 1st key step to implement the European Pillar of Social Rights.” For this there should be a balance between the economic and social dimension. As mentioned by Luk and Heather, Europe is made of people, and that’s where we should invest responsibly in people – the achievement of the EPSR is not possible without investment.
* However, “the Social Pillar cannot act alone”. To allow the implementation of the Social Pillar at Member State level, the Semester is the main tool to drive this.
* We should allow social services to have an active role in providing voice to social policies, not only at EU level but also at national level. The way to guarantee that EU policies correspond to what people really need is to listen to the people that provide those services.

**Georgi Pirinski (MEP, S&D):**

* Money spent in services is an investment and social services should make this point. responsibly in people – the achievement of the EPSR is not possible without investment.
* Currently there is a trialogue on the integrated European Social Statistics System happening that will try to harmonize some issues on data collection for the social sector that can help, for example in the CSR.

**Discussion with the participants**:

* Alex Elu (Eurodiaconia) asked about the link between social economy and the EPSR and if the Pillar could be behind future initiatives of social economy. On this, Sofia Ribeiro spoke about the way that social policies help to recover the economy (using Portugal as example) and mentioned that in the CSR there not only should be indicators but that they should trigger in-depth analysis (not punishments) and they should come as impositions as the other indicators are;
* Mike Stannett (Salvation Army) pointed out that it is interesting to check the quality but we might want to look more at the effectiveness of the services – how effective are the services? And how can the Pillar improve that? Undocumented migrants are not protected by this (gap in the pillar). Ruth Paserman answered this saying that they are included in the European Pillar of Social Rights. Heather stated that social services providers are told that they cannot provide services to undocumented migrants in some countries, that being the problem.
* Monika Chaba (EC) launched the idea of creating a debate between stakeholders on the quality of services, not only at EU but also at national level.
* Hendrik Meerkamp (CESI) questioned what to expect in the next budget package, taking in account these raised needs of more investment.
* Sofia Ribeiro also mentioned that the MS are willing to put in cause the cohesion policy, what can cause even more problems for the implementation of the EPSR. It is crucial that social services (national services) pressure the MS to avoid this.
* Rudi Van Dam reinforced the important gaps that exist in monitoring MS data at sub-national level, there’s a lack of available data in the EU and MS already feel overburden with the data that is collected.
* We have to implement the Pillar through other areas such as fair taxation, social economy. We should also invest in monitoring tools but we face the challenge of quality of data.

**CONCLUSIONS**:

**Conny Reuter (SOLIDAR):**

Conny reminded that the countries that make the EU have different histories, different backgrounds and systems, so this has always to be taken in account when applying any set of rules from the EU. Regarding the EPSR we want it to be a set of rights, not a set of principles.

In implementing the Pillar, we need to explain it to the local members, but that’s not easy. We need to take the conclusions of this meeting outside it but that’s not easy at national/regional level. Financial aspects are as well of extreme importance: questions of competition with private companies and the issues of quality employment of staff. There’s a consensus in the importance of social services in implementing the EPSR, but there’s a need of investment!

**Georgi Pirinski (S&D, EPP):**

This set of 20 principles are indeed rights. As an example, principle 18 clearly states that “Everyone has the right to affordable long-term care services of good quality, in particular home-care and community-based services”. As such, with so strong commitment from the Member States, we should also push for this in the Semester, not through penalties, but with strong recommendations.

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