

European Pillar of Social Rights - one year on - slow progress and disappointments



(15 November 2018) It is now one year since the European Pillar of Social Rights was declared in [Gothenburg](#). Time to take stock.

Following years of coordinated austerity, especially but not only in the Eurozone, the European Commission, the Council and Parliament understood that something needed to change. Trade unions and social movements had been protesting long and hard against cuts in wages and attacks on bargaining rights, lower pensions and the lack of funding for public services and social security that were part of austerity. Seeing support for the European Union decreasing, Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker announced he wanted a fairer European Union with more social dialogue and social progress and in September 2015 came up with the idea of the EU Social Pillar.

Under [3 headings and in 20 principles](#), the Pillar sets out in which direction the EU should evolve, becoming the benchmark for all policies. There were optimistic

expectations that this would be followed by a social action programme to implement the principles, a demand supported by the [European Parliament](#). Others argued that since the political and economic power balance had not changed, we could only expect some proposals on the margins, important but not structural change.

Following last year's declaration in Gothenburg, the European Commission came up with a package of proposals to implement the Pillar – a directives on *Transparent and Predictable Working Conditions* and *Work-Life Balance for Parents and Carers*, the setting up of a *European Labour Authority* and a stronger *Posted Workers Directive*. If we look at the initial resistance of the employers to these proposals, you would think something had changed. But in the same period the Transport Commissioner [attacked the right to strike for air traffic controllers](#), forcing our sister Federation, the ETF, to organise a petition against these proposals. The same European Commission that claimed to be the Commission of social dialogue, [rejected the outcome of the social dialogue in central government administrations](#) to transform an agreement into legislation as the Treaty allows. And we are now in Court with this Commission over this very fundamental issue, in defence of a meaningful European social dialogue.

Of course, in one year it is impossible to root out precarious jobs, improve poverty wages, end the persistent gender pay and pensions gaps and undo the years of underinvestment in public services. Recognising this is a task largely for Member States, a European social action programme would go some way to address these issues, put real action behind the Pillar and ensure that European cooperation leads to a Europe for workers. That is [the message of ETUC on the anniversary of the EU Pillar](#).

The proposals that have been made by the Commission should produce results before the European elections next May. However, the political right, including the European People's Party (EPP) in the European Parliament, and in the Member States where it is in government, is mobilising against progress on the Transparency Directive, for example. The next months will show if the EPP, the party of Commission President Juncker and Employment Commissioner Thyssen, is seriously committed to their proposals. We also want to see all candidates for the Presidency of the European Commission to commit to the Pillar of Social Rights, to a social action programme and to information and consultation rights for all.

A year on, progress on the social pillar has been slow and full of disappointment. To

build a Europe for workers we will need real and substantial change. The European Parliament elections in May 2019 will be a moment to build for that change.

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