



**To: Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission**

**Cc: Valdis Dombrovskis, Executive Vice-President for an Economy that Works for People; Paolo Gentiloni Commissioner for Economy; Nicolas Schmit, Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights**

**Subject: Open letter to the European Commission, - Call to reinforce the social dimension of the European Semester, the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the National Recovery and Resilience Plans**

Dear Honourable President and Commissioners,

We are facing unprecedented health, economic, employment and social crises caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Social Platform, the largest network of civil society organisations in the EU advocating for a social Europe, represents the interests of people and organisations, including those who are most vulnerable among the most strongly affected by the impacts of the pandemic.

Social Platform acknowledges some of the efforts pursued by the European Commission, Parliament and Council in ensuring a rapid response to the pandemic. With regard to the European Commission's publication of the Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy (ASGS) 2021, which links the European Semester to the Recovery and Resilience Facility and the National Recovery and Resilience Plans, we are strongly alarmed by the lack of earmarking for the fairness chapter that should be set at least 25%. The ASGS does not put the social dimension on an equal footing with the economic, digital, and environmental dimensions. In our view there is also not enough weight and prominence given to the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) for building the National Recovery and Resilience Plans.

We welcome that the National and Recovery and Resilience Plans will continue the temporary suspension of the Growth and Stability Pact to foster public investment and policy reform to support sustainable growth through the digital and green twin transition, to strengthen health and social care systems, to protect the economy in the recovery from the pandemic, and to keep the validity of the Country Specific Recommendations for 2019 and 2020. However, the social dimension should be strongly embedded in the National Recovery and Resilience Plans to ensure that they do not exclude anyone, especially those who already face inequalities and found themselves in the most vulnerable situations in COVID-19.

The transition period marked by the Next Generation EU is not only relevant in terms of financial allocations, but also for setting the tone of long-term investments in structural reforms which the next EU Multiannual Financial Framework will support. It is vital, therefore, that investing in people and leaving no one behind is embedded in the priorities of the Recovery and Resilience Facility (RRF). Thus, we regret to see that, despite the announcements, the ASGS 2021 does not underpin the commitment to the full implementation of the EPSR, as well as the focus on investment to address inequalities and mitigating the social consequences of the current crisis. The EPSR is

mentioned in the ASGS 2021 only in relation to the need for the EU MS to “adopt measures to ensure equal opportunities, inclusive education, fair working conditions and adequate social protection”, but no explicit reference is made to social or human rights as a whole.

We are also concerned by the lack of mention of non-profit organisations as beneficiaries in the Commission guidance note, as they should be fully included as targets of the measures.

Here, we would like to express two main recommendations:

### **1. The Commission’s Annual Sustainable Growth Strategy for 2021 should foresee sufficient measures to tackle the current social crisis and to build inclusive societies**

In the whole package, we see a general lack of inclusion of social reforms, with the document dominated by priorities addressing the digital and green twin transition. Employment alone cannot tackle social exclusion, poverty and inequalities. The document shows a lack of inclusion of earmarking for fair investment, while green investments are earmarked at 37% and digital transition at 20%. Moreover, the social aspect is narrowly touched upon in only one of the seven flagship areas, with the focus on upskilling and reskilling, even though the social focus should be mainstreamed across all aspects. Furthermore, for disbursement of Recovery and Resilience Funds, the Commission assessment of member state progress on achieving the agreed targets and milestones will be assessed by the Economic and Financial Committee only with no input from the Social Protection Committee. This does not bode well for the inclusion and progression of social reforms throughout the recovery period.

We call for the inclusion of a 25% earmarking for social investment, as well as bringing back the implementation of the EPSR to the forefront of the European Semester, to ensure that recovery from the crisis is truly inclusive tackling social exclusion, poverty and inequalities. The European Semester process must recommend the right policy reforms for EU countries to undertake to improve their social protection systems and thus their resilience. These reforms must be people-centered, ensure that no one is left behind and build more secure, adequate and accessible social protection and active inclusion systems for all.

### **2. The reform of the European Semester process should provide a concrete space to enable the participation and consultation of civil society, guaranteeing democratic and accountable decision-making**

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, civil dialogue at all levels in the European Semester plays an even more important role. The temporary reform of the European Semester process that suspends Country Reports and Country Specific Recommendations creates an alarming lack of space for the participation and consultation of civil society at national and European Level. In the ASGS 2021, no reference to the role of civil society organisations (CSOs) and their structured and meaningful involvement is made, or to the legal basis in the Employment Guidelines, while the input of CSOs is only mentioned in the guidance for the RRF plans. Only if CSOs are fully involved in the process with structured civil dialogue at national and European level can reforms correspond to the situation on the ground and have the necessary impact.

CSOs bring together local, regional and national members working with, and representing the interests of, people and organisations, including those who are most vulnerable and are traditionally underrepresented in decision-making. These groups are now among the most strongly affected by the social, economic and health impacts of the pandemic. Inequalities have increased in the last months and risk to grow even more. It is therefore especially crucial now that CSOs are involved in all stages of the Semester Process to make sure that the reforms included in the National Recovery and Resilience Plans correspond to the situation on the ground. We see a need for improved cooperation and dialogue of EU institutions and Member States' governments with parliaments, social partners, and civil society organisations. While allocating funds, the European Commission should be vigilant and demanding towards the respect of the criteria of Member States' consultations with local, regional and national CSOs as at this moment, in some countries negotiations are ongoing behind closed doors giving no opportunities to these actors to input RRF plans.

In the spirit of collaboration to define a well-balanced approach to respond to systemic economic and social crises ahead of us, we would like to engage in a constructive dialogue with a meeting to jointly discuss possible solutions and address all of the concerns raised in our letter..

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Piotr Sadowski". The signature is written in a cursive style and is underlined with a single horizontal stroke.

Piotr Sadowski,  
President Social Platform

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