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Commission presents the European Pillar of Social Rights

Brussels, 26 April 2017

Building a fairer Europe and strengthening its social dimension is a key priority for this Commission.

Today, it delivers on its promise to adopt its proposal for the European Pillar of Social Rights. The Pillar sets out 20 key principles and rights to support fair and well-functioning labour markets and welfare systems. The Pillar is designed as a compass for a renewed process of upward convergence towards better working and living conditions in Europe. It is primarily conceived for the euro area but applicable to all EU Member States wishing to be part of it.

President of the European Commission, Jean-Claude **Juncker**, said: "*As Commission President, I have been seeking to put social priorities at the heart of Europe's work, where they belong. With the European Pillar of Social Rights and the first set of initiatives that accompany it, we are delivering on our promises and we are opening a new chapter. We want to write this chapter together: Member States, EU institutions, the social partners and civil society all have to take on their responsibility. I would like to see the Pillar endorsed at the highest political level before the end of this year.*"



The Pillar was prepared by the Commission, under the leadership of Vice-President Dombrovskis and Commissioner Thyssen, in close consultation with stakeholders at all levels. It reaffirms rights that are already present in the EU and international legal acquis and complements them to take account of new realities. The principles and rights enshrined in the Pillar are structured around three categories: equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions and social protection and inclusion. They place the focus on how to tackle new developments in the world of work and society at large so as to deliver on the promise of the Treaties of a highly competitive social market economy, aiming at full employment and social progress.

https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-1007_en.htm

Security Union: Commission delivers on interoperability of EU information systems

Brussels, 29 June 2017

As a first step, the Commission is proposing to strengthen the mandate of the EU Agency for the operational management of large scale IT systems (eu-LISA), enabling it to develop and roll-out the technical solutions to make the EU information systems interoperable. In addition, the Commission is also proposing further improvements to the European Criminal Records Information System (ECRIS) to allow Member States to exchange criminal records of non-EU citizens more efficiently.

https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-1788_en.htm

European Commission acts to defend judicial independence in Poland

Brussels, 20 December 2017

Despite repeated efforts, for almost two years, to engage the Polish authorities in a constructive dialogue in the context of the Rule of Law Framework, the Commission has today concluded that there is a clear risk of a serious breach of the rule of law in Poland.

The Commission is therefore proposing to the Council to adopt a decision under Article 7(1) of the Treaty on European Union (see Annex II).

The European Commission is taking action to protect the rule of law in Europe. Judicial reforms in Poland mean that the country's judiciary is now under the political control of the ruling majority. In the absence of judicial independence, serious questions are raised about the effective application of EU law, from the protection of investments to the mutual recognition of decisions in areas as diverse as child custody disputes or the execution of European Arrest Warrants.

The Commission has also today issued a complementary (4th) Rule of Law Recommendation, **setting out clearly the steps that the Polish authorities can take to remedy the current situation**. Should the Polish authorities implement the recommended actions, the Commission is ready, in close consultation with the European Parliament and the Council, to reconsider its Reasoned Proposal.

Furthermore, the Commission has decided to take the next step in its infringement procedure against Poland for **breaches of EU law** by the Law on the Ordinary Courts Organisation, referring Poland to the Court of Justice of the European Union.

Whilst taking these unprecedented measures, the **Commission maintains its offer for a constructive dialogue** to remedy the current situation.

The Commission's Recommendation invites the Polish authorities to address the problems within three months, and to inform the Commission of the steps taken to that effect. The Commission stands ready to pursue a constructive dialogue with the Polish Government. Should the Polish authorities implement the recommended actions, the Commission is ready, in close consultation with the European Parliament and the Council, to reconsider its Reasoned Proposal.

Under Article 7(1) TEU, the Council must hear Poland's position and obtain the consent of the European Parliament (on the basis of Article 354 TFEU, the European Parliament shall act by a two-thirds majority of votes cast, representing the majority of its component Members), before adopting a Decision by a four-fifths majority (22 of 27 Members of the Council entitled to vote on the basis of Article 354 TFEU), determining that there is a clear risk of a serious breach of the rule of law. The Council may also address recommendations to Poland, acting in accordance with the same voting procedure.

https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-5367_en.htm



Fair Taxation: Commission proposes new tools to combat VAT fraud

Brussels, 30 November 2017

The European Commission has today unveiled new tools to make the EU's Value Added Tax (VAT) system more fraud-proof and close loopholes which can lead to large-scale VAT fraud.

The new rules aim to build trust between Member States so that they can exchange more information and boost cooperation between national tax authorities and law enforcement authorities.

The most cautious estimates show that VAT fraud can lead to lost revenues of over €50 billion a year for EU Member States – money that should be going towards public investment in hospitals, schools and roads. Revelations in the 'Paradise Papers' have again shown how tax avoidance schemes can be used to help wealthy individuals and companies to circumvent the EU's VAT rules to avoid paying their fair share of tax. Recent reports also suggest that VAT fraud schemes can be used to finance criminal organisations, including terrorists.

https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-4946_en.htm

Countering online hate speech – Commission initiative with social media platforms and civil society shows progress

Brussels, 1 June 2017

One year ago, the European Commission and four major social media platforms announced a Code of Conduct on countering illegal online hate speech.

It included a series of commitments by Facebook, Twitter, YouTube and Microsoft to combat the spread of such content in Europe. An evaluation carried out by NGOs and public bodies in 24 Member States, released on the first anniversary of the Code of Conduct, shows that the companies have made significant progress in following up on their commitments.

By signing the Code of Conduct, the IT companies committed in particular to reviewing the majority of valid notifications of illegal hate speech in less than 24 hours and to removing or disabling access to such content, if necessary, on the basis of national laws transposing European law. The Code also underlined the need to further discuss how to promote transparency and encourage counter and alternative narratives.

The Commission will continue to monitor the implementation of the Code of conduct with the help of civil society organisations. Improvements are expected by IT companies in particular on transparency of the criteria for analysing flagged content and feedback to users.

https://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-17-1471_en.htm

Identity Politics in Europe?

By Gaitenidis Nikolaos

Being European in the Era of Identity Politics

Identity politics may be defined as the political activity or mobilization and political position based on the cultural, ethnic, racial, religious or social interests that characterize a group. This leads to the formation of political alliances by people of a particular religion, race, social background, etc., beyond the traditional broad party politics. The term 'identity politics' began to be used in the late 20th century with the rise of civil rights movements (mainly in the US and a little later in Europe).

It has been observed that in liberal democracies the preservation of one's "formal equality" is not sufficient to tackle social injustice and the exclusion of certain groups. AS a result, large political and social movements have led to the perception that individuals are more prone to poverty, violence and marginalization based on ethnicity, gender and other social divisions. Identity politics are based on the idea that certain groups are oppressed within society since different groups of society do not have all the same opportunities because of discrimination, stereotypes, historical injustice etc. On the contrary some groups have more privileges than others.

It is a common *topos* of identity politics that understanding politics as individuals rather than groups can cause injustice. There must be equality between groups in society as well as freedom within groups. What distinguishes identity politics from previous assumptions about cultural identity is the personal / subjective experience and perception of identity, especially the experience of oppression.

In Europe the process of European Unification and the emergence of the idea of European identity have brought new variables in the political processes of identity politics. Those variables are attributed to the notions of Common cultural heritage, Common constitutional identity, Common values and Common goals. At the same time the specificity of the cultural identity of the Member States and the policies for culture pose a dual perception of identity, the national and the European one. The importance of the concept of 'being European' lies also to:

- Minority claims
- Migration flows
- Claims across states in supranational institutions
- New generations of the principle of equality
- Combating racism and xenophobia
- Social protection

It should be noted that, In the European sphere the emphasis is attributed on legal claims and less on political claims (ex. Legislative exceptions)

Over the last years a backlash has been observed in the claims of identity politics due to the following factors: Nationalism and Euro-skepticism, Islamophobia, the fear of losing national identity, the fear of losing privileges as well as the backlash in the EU integration process due to the economic crisis, the humanitarian crisis and the Brexit.

What distinguishes contemporary identity politics from other approaches is the demand for recognition not as part of a universal community based on common human characteristics, nor the demand for respect "despite" differences. Rather, what is demanded is respect for the 'other' as different.

Europeans that made history

Simone Veil

(1927 – 2017)

The first female president of the European Parliament

Simon Weil was a French lawyer and politician. She served as Minister of Health under Valerie Giscard d'Estaing, a member of the Constitutional Council of France and the first female President of the European Parliament (1979-1982).

Simone Jacob was born on 13 July 1927 to a Jewish family in Nice, France. She and the other members of her family were arrested in 1944 and sent to the Nazi concentration camps at Auschwitz-Birkenau, Bobrek, and finally Bergen-Belsen. While she and her two sisters survived, her parents and brother died in the camps. She returned to Paris in May 1945 and began her studies in law and political science. She married Antoine Veil in 1946.

After the war, as a survivor of the Holocaust, Veil found it hard to understand how one European country could wage war on another. As her political career in France progressed, she became more committed to the idea of a Europe in which such atrocities could never happen again. So, when President Giscard d'Estaing asked Veil to head his party list in the first direct elections to the European Parliament in 1979, she jumped at the chance.

Veil was duly elected to the European Parliament, which chose her as its President, thus becoming leader of the first directly elected European Parliament and the first woman at the head of any EU institution. She also served as chair of the legal affairs committee and as a member of the environment, political affairs, foreign affairs and security committees, and the sub-committee on human rights. In addition, she was a member of the special committee on German reunification set up in 1990. During her time at the Parliament, she was also chair and vice-chair of the Liberal and Democratic Group, which later became the Liberal and Democratic Reformist Group. She won the Char-lemagne Prize in 1981, the award given to honour a person's contributions to European unity.



https://europa.eu/european-union/sites/europaeu/files/simone_veil_en.pdf

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Simone_Veil

<https://web.archive.org/web/20120220013419/http://www.ambafrance-uk.org/Politics-Simone-Veil>

<https://www.encyclopedia.com/women/encyclopedias-almanacs-transcripts-and-maps/veil-simone-1927>

Back to basics about the EU

Education, Training and Youth

Supporting quality education, training and social cohesion

The EU supports Member States in their efforts to provide the best education and training for their citizens. It also promotes multilingualism in Europe, helping with the teaching and learning of languages, encouraging mobility of students, trainees, teachers and young people, and facilitating exchanges of information and experience.

The EU sets out the framework for EU countries to exchange best practices and learn from each other, with an aim to:

- make lifelong learning and mobility a reality
- improve the quality and efficiency of education and training
- promote equity, social cohesion and active citizenship
- enhance creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship

To reach the objectives set out in the education and training framework, the EU implements policies in sectors such as:

- early childhood education and care
- schools
- vocational education and training
- higher education
- adult education

In the field of youth, the EU sets out a framework for cooperation among Member States through the EU Youth Strategy.

Through the Erasmus+ programme, the EU also provides funding, tools and resources for individuals, organisations and policy reform, in areas such as:

- study, training and development for students, trainees and education professionals abroad
- opportunities abroad for young people and youth workers
- opportunities for organisations to develop partnerships for innovation in education, training and youth
- knowledge exchange and policy reform to support growth, jobs, equity and social inclusion within Europe

The European Solidarity Corps creates opportunities for young people to volunteer or work in projects in their own country or abroad that benefit communities and people around Europe.

https://europa.eu/european-union/topics/education-training-youth_en

Brexit

The progress so far



On 17 December 2015 The European Union Referendum Act received Royal Assent. This provided for the holding of a referendum in the UK and Gibraltar on whether the UK should remain a member of the EU. Donald Tusk writes to Members of the European Council on his proposal for a new settlement for the UK within the EU. The European Council publishes its Draft Decision concerning a 'New Settlement for the United Kingdom within the European Union' on 2 February 2016. UK's Prime Minister announced the EU referendum date – 23 June 2016 – after securing a deal on Britain's membership of the EU.

On 23 June 2016 UK holds referendum on its membership of the EU, with the majority of voters choosing to leave the EU (51.9% of the vote versus 48.1% voting to remain). The question posed to the electorate: "Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?"

The next day Prime Minister David Cameron announces his intention to resign and a month later Theresa May becomes the new UK Prime Minister. David Davis is appointed Secretary of State for Exiting the European Union. In her Party Conference speech, Theresa May announces a 'Great Repeal Bill' and confirms Article 50 will be triggered before the end of March 2017.

On 7 December 2016, the House of Commons vote on respecting the outcome of the referendum is passed by a large majority. MPs also call on the Prime Minister to commit to publishing the Government's plan for leaving the EU before Article 50 is invoked.

Following these guidelines, the European Commission sent a recommendation to the Council on 20.12.2017 (Article 50) to begin discussions on the second phase of the United Kingdom's withdrawal from the European Union. The Recommendation sets out additional details on transitional arrangements. It specifically states that: There should be no 'selective choice': the United Kingdom will continue to participate in the Customs Union and the single market (with the four freedoms). The Union acquis should continue to apply fully to and within the United Kingdom as if it were a Member State. Any changes to the acquis during this period should automatically apply to the United Kingdom. All existing EU regulatory, financial, supervisory, judicial and enforcement instruments and structures will apply, including the jurisdiction of the Court of Justice of the European Union. The United Kingdom will be considered a third country from 30 March 2019. The transitional period needs to be clearly defined and time limited. The Commission recommends that it not last beyond 31 December 2020.

The recommendation also recalls the need to faithfully legalize the results of the first phase of the negotiations, as described in the Commission Communication and the Joint Report. It is also emphasized that work needs to be completed on all issues.

Correspondence from the Court

Judgment of the Court of Justice in Case C-442/16

Gusa

Social security for migrant workers

An EU citizen who, after more than one year, has ceased to work in a self-employed capacity in another Member State because of an absence of work owing to reasons beyond his control retains the status of self-employed person and, consequently, a right to reside in that Member State

Judgment of the Court of Justice in Case C-467/16

Schlömp

Area of Freedom, Security and Justice

In situations in which it is mandatory to have recourse to arbitration proceedings, a Swiss arbitration authority responsible for dealing with civil actions constitutes a court for the purposes of the Lugano II Convention

Judgment of the General Court in case T-61/16

Coca-Cola v EUIPO - Mitico (Master)

Intellectual and industrial property

Coca-Cola may oppose the registration of the sign 'Master' which uses the same font as its own for the marketing of beverages and food products

Judgment of the Court of Justice in Case C-413/14 P

Intel v Commission

Competition

The Court of Justice sets aside the judgment of the General Court which had upheld the fine of €1.06 billion imposed on Intel by the Commission for abuse of a dominant position

Judgment of the Court of Justice in Case C-610/15

Stichting Brein

Freedom of establishment

Making available and managing an online platform for sharing copyright-protected works, such as 'The Pirate Bay', may constitute an infringement of copyright

Judgment of the General Court in case T-410/16

Makhlouf v Council

External relations

The General Court confirms that the fund-freezing measures imposed on Rami Makhlouf, cousin of Bashar al-Assad, must be maintained for the period 2016-2017

Judgment of the General Court in case T-754/14

Efler and Others v Commission

Law governing the institutions

The General Court annuls the Commission decision refusing the registration of the proposed European citizens' initiative 'Stop TTIP'

Judgment of the Court of Justice in Case C-158/14

A and Others

Area of Freedom, Security and Justice

Actions by armed forces during periods of armed conflict, within the meaning of international humanitarian law, may constitute 'terrorist acts'

Judgment of the Court of Justice in Case C-638/16, PPU

X and X

DFON

Member States are not required, under EU law, to grant a humanitarian visa to persons who wish to enter their territory with a view to applying for asylum, but they remain free to do so on the basis of their national law

Judgment of the Court of Justice in Case C-219/15

Schmitt

Approximation of laws

The Court of Justice delivers its judgment in the case involving breast implants made of inferior quality industrial silicone

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