

## Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Working Group 5

### Online Meeting, 22-23 June 2021

#### Report

EaP CSF Working Group 5 met online between **June 22 and June 23, 2021**. Made up of three online sessions, the meeting included an introductory “Meet & Greet” session, a session covering thematic updates from the six EaP countries and the EU, and one policy session dedicated to the importance of the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR). The meeting was open to all WG5 members and delegates. In total, 43 WG5 members and delegates registered for the online sessions of this WG5 meeting.

#### Meet & Greet Session

**Tuesday 22 June, 09.30 – 10.30 CET**

Power Point Presentation available [here](#).

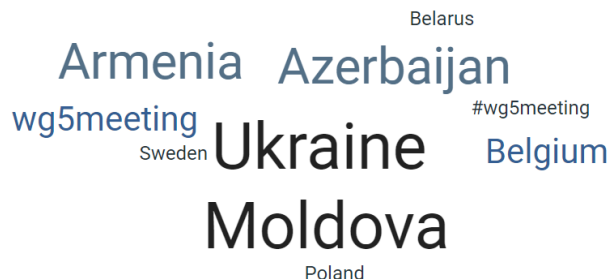
The opening remarks of the “Meet & Greet” session were delivered by the WG5 coordinator, Goda Neverauskaite.

The updates from EaP CSF referred to organisational and structural updates in the Forum. With the start of the implementation of the new 3-year grant, EaP CSF will focus on several new activities. **The CSO Academy** will create new digital solutions for capacity building activities across policy silos, building on previous capacity building work for members and coordinating with planned training activities at the NP level, as well as

those provided by other projects (i.e. technical assistance to CSOs in the EaP). A **new strategy of the Forum** is also under development; among others, the new Forum strategy (2022-2025) will look at proposals on **how to increase efficiency and optimise the work of the WGs**.

**The Annual Assembly (AA)** will be held online between **November 29 - December 3, 2021**. Given the current sanitary situation and travel regulation being unpredictable, the AA will be held **online**.

Where are you joining us from this morning?



**Re-granting** was briefly covered during the session, with the **new FSTP (Financial Support for Third Parties) EaP CSF re-granting to members for 2021-2023** explained and changes and similarities from previous re-granting highlighted. The maximum allocation remains at EUR 240,000 per year and the distribution is made via three lots.

- *Lot 1 - Monitoring EaP deliverables;*
- *Lot 2 - Addressing the Forum's strategic advocacy priorities;*
- *Lot 3 - Strengthening the linkage between EaP CSF's members;*

For **Lot 1**, there will be one selection procedure for 2021-2023 and one multi-annual grant. For **Lot 2**, two calls are envisaged in 2021 and 2022. For **Lot 3**, the call for 2020 is already closed and [four projects](#) have been selected for implementation. There will be a call open for Lot 3 in 2022 and 2023.

In 2021 (as well as in 2022 and 2023), WG5 will also benefit from the support of a **WG5 consultant**, who will provide technical/ research and operational support to the group. The recruited consultant is **Kiryl Kascian**. Further details regarding his work will be shared with the group soon.

**Kristina Pitalskaia**, the new Grants and Membership Manager at the Secretariat introduced herself to the participants. As a Membership Manager, Kristina will be in frequent contact with the members. Members can contact her at [kristina.pitalskaia@eap-csf.eu](mailto:kristina.pitalskaia@eap-csf.eu).

**Laura Ponikelska**, the new Communications Manager at the Secretariat also introduced herself to the members of WG5. She can be contacted by email at [laura.ponikelska@eap-csf.eu](mailto:laura.ponikelska@eap-csf.eu).

Following a short presentation of the EaP architecture and advocacy channels delivered by **Alexandra Sabou**, (Administrative and Statutory Affairs Manager) briefly introduced the **advocacy updates** on EaP policy processes, focusing on *Human Rights Dialogues in Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Ukraine, EURONEST, [the COVID-19 policy papers](#)* series presenting the opportunities and policy solutions to be harnessed in the EaP region and COVID-19 vaccines for the EaP as part of [#PrepareEaP4Health](#).

Looking ahead, **the main EaP policy process milestones for the second half of 2021** will include:

- *Publication of the EU Joint Staff Working Document (JSWD) on EaP implementation between 2021-2025 based on the Joint Communication "EaP policy beyond 2020 - Reinforcing Resilience" (beginning of July 2021):*  
[https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/swd\\_2021\\_186\\_f1\\_joint\\_staff\\_working\\_paper\\_en\\_v2\\_p1\\_1356457\\_0.pdf](https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/swd_2021_186_f1_joint_staff_working_paper_en_v2_p1_1356457_0.pdf)
- *Discussion in the Foreign Affairs Council on EaP policy,*
- *Meeting of the EaP Foreign Affairs Ministerial Meeting (27+6),*
- *Senior Officials Meeting (SOM),*
- *EaP Summit (14-15 December 2021).*

The Steering Committee Members will be able to deliver the message of the EaP CSF at the EaP Ministerial and SOM. In September, a EURONEST resolution addressing the EaP Summit is expected and the Forum plans to contribute with its ideas. The EaP Summit itself will take place at the end of the year. EaP CSF plans to contribute to the debates and policy discussions around the EaP Summit during the online EaP CSF Annual Assembly.

### Policy country updates:

Power Point Presentation available [here](#).

Invited to deliver short presentations on behalf of local WG5 structures in each EaP country and the EU, local WG5 coordinators answered to the following guiding questions:

- *Please mention any significant changes in the labor relations within last year (i.e. labor legislation, occupational health and safety regulations, labor inspections, etc.);*
- *Please mention any measures adopted at the national level to fight the effects of the pandemic on the labor market and how/if social partners were involved in process.*
- *Please indicate significant changes in terms of employment statistics (depending on available data – annual, since start of pandemic);*
- *Please indicate the most affected sectors and what were the most significant effects of the pandemic in those sectors. What was the most significant effect on the health sector?*
- *Have any changes been made regarding salaries since last year (i.e. minimum wage change / average on national level or specific sectors)?*
- *What is the national situation regarding teleworking / remote work? What were the guarantees provided for workers during social /sanitary/ movement restrictions?*
- *Please add any significant information not mentioned above.*

### ARMENIA

The policy country updates were delivered by **Hasmik Aslanyan**, local WG5 coordinator in Armenia.

Referring to changes in the labour environment over the past year, WG5 was informed that several laws have been adopted lately in Armenia, including:

- Amendments to the Labor Code of the Republic of Armenia,
- Law on the legal regime of the State of Emergency,
- The Law on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities.

To fight the effects of COVID-19, several measures were taken to mitigate the impact of the crisis, including tax exemption for businesses and significant reductions for both income and corporate tax rates.

A system of taxation for microenterprises has been introduced to exempt enterprises with a turnover of up to 24 million drams (approx. 40,000 EUR) from almost all taxes.

Due to the pandemic and the 44-day war with neighboring Azerbaijan, several challenges became more acute within the Armenian society and included, among others, increased unemployment rates, high poverty levels namely among displaced people, restrictive access to online education for children from vulnerable backgrounds, and difficulties regarding the return of prisoners of war back to Armenia.

To respond to the diversity of crises that emerged in the second half of 2020, CSOs and international organisations operating in the country mobilized and offered support to those in need. More examples can be found in the presentation.

For example, several WG5 members contributed to the advocacy efforts to strengthen the legislative answer to the socioeconomic impact of the pandemic. Moreover, public awareness campaigns to protect workers from COVID-19 were implemented. 15 webinars were organised for social workers; 900 families were supported during the war period and during its aftermath; Online training and counselling, including dissemination of information about government programmes to the population, were carried out.

## **AZERBAIJAN**

The policy country updates were delivered by **Mirvari Gahramanli**, local WG5 coordinator in Azerbaijan.

Referring to changes in the labour environment, WG5 was informed that throughout the last 10 years, the Labour Code in Azerbaijan suffered many changes, out of which many have not been advantageous to employees.

Recently, an important development worth mentioning is the fact that the Ministry of Labour and Social Protection of Population of Republic of Azerbaijan (DSMF) announced the creation of a digital job portal, a sort of matchmaking platform for employers and employees, which aims at reducing the usual paperwork associated with labour contracts and administrative procedures.

Referring to measures taken to mitigate the effects of the pandemic, following a Presidential Order from March 2020, several actions have been taken to support the economic stability of the country, including employment and entrepreneurship. During the emergency regime, a one-time payment of 190 Manat (approx. 85 EUR) was distributed to approx. 600,000 Azerbaijanis who lost their jobs due to the pandemic/ or did not have any income to cover their daily expenses. In 2020, economic actors affected by the pandemic were exempted from paying property and land taxes.

Despite the pandemic, statistics show that the employment rates increased by 2.7% in Azerbaijan. This may be a positive consequence of the governmental financial incentives to support employers, eliminate informal work, strengthen social benefits schemes and encourage the extensive use of the online government portal to register work contracts.

However, when zooming in the unemployment rates, it is important to notice the remaining gap between women and men and the urban-rural divide, as well as other categories excluded by statistics.

From an economic perspective, like everywhere in the region, the most affected sectors remain tourism, culture, and education, HORECA and transport. Not only SMEs and small entrepreneurs suffered from the effects of COVID-19 on the economy, but also large state-owned enterprises like SOCAR which employ many workers in Azerbaijan.

Referring to the living costs in Azerbaijan, it was mentioned that the minimum wage remains at 250 Manat (approx. 125 EUR/ month). The average salary levels increased from 634 Manat in 2019 (317 EUR/ month) to 710 Manat in 2020 (365 EUR/ month in 2020. In 2021, the average salary is expected to stay at 692 Manat (346 EUR/ month).

The transition to online work in the field of health, education, and emergency services to support vulnerable segments of the population remains an important part of the country's response to the pandemic and more needs to be done.

## **BELARUS**

The policy country updates were delivered by **Siarhei Antusevich**, WG5 local coordinator in Belarus.

It is very well known that the effect of the COVID-19 pandemic on the social and economic aspects of life has been minimized in Belarus. Against the background of social unrest after the August 2020 elections, the health emergency became secondary for the country.

Referring to changes in the labour environment, an amendment to the Labour Code from 2019 provided the possibility of remote work and many enterprises used it before and during the pandemic. In 2020, the need for independent trade unions became even more prominent than before. However, currently over 200 trade union activists are facing charges or are in prison. Criminal cases have also been opened against strike committee members. Several changes in the Labour Code have worsened the employers/ employees' situation. For example, disciplinary charges prevent the right of employees to go on strike or to participate in meetings which according to the regime's taxonomy are not allowed.

Given all these changes in the labour legislation, many Trade Unions are forced to continue their activity underground.

## **GEORGIA**

The policy country updates were delivered by **Lasha Bliadze**, WG5 co-coordinator in Georgia.

Referring to changes in the labor environment, from January 1, 2021, the Labor Inspection department became an independent agency, now referred to as "Labor Inspection" (LI, or Labor

Inspectorate). The LI has the mandate to hire additional staff, expand its coverage in the regions and operate more effectively. Also, every employer is obliged to provide a monthly timesheet for its employees to record the hours they work. Many changes in the Labor Code were introduced, notably with elements like breaks, equal pay for women and men, benefits for pregnant women, or regulation on unpaid and paid internships.

The Georgian government implemented an anti-crisis economic stimulus package of over 300,000 USD to support several industries, such as tourism infrastructure, as well as exemptions from property and income taxes for tourism businesses - covering over 18,000 companies and 50,000 workers. The Government paid approx. 400 Euro to employees who lost their jobs during the pandemic and about 70 Euro to the self-employed individuals who proved a loss of income.

The GTUC was involved and provided legal services to employees, notably with access to unemployment subsidies or unlawful dismissals.

The Georgian economy decreased by 6% in 2020, and it has further decreased by 11.5% since January 2021. International investments have also significantly decreased in value which makes the current period comparable to 2008 economic crisis.

The current economic crisis has impacted employment, with more than 150,000 workers losing their jobs since the start of the pandemic. The tourism industry lost almost 3 billion USD in 2020, and the forecast for 2021 is also grim. The average salary has been increased in the first quarter of 2021 since the pandemic started. It is 1473 GEL (approx. 390 Euro) for men, and 1022 (approx. 273 EUR) for women.

## **MOLDOVA**

The policy country updates were delivered by **Tatiana Marian**, WG5 local coordinator in Moldova.

In 2020, many normative acts were adopted by the Moldovan Parliament, although they did not necessarily reflect the suggestions proposed by the Trade Unions. Several changes in the labour environment occurred, including: amendments to the Labor Code, the adoption of a new law on remote work, and of a law on Labor State Inspectorate supported by TUs. The Labour State Inspectorate resumed its control functions in occupational safety and health in accordance with ILO conventions. The National Confederation of Trade Union of Moldova advocated for the ratification of ILO Convention 161, which was approved by the Parliament in March 2021. The Government also approved minimum requirements setting standards for personal protection equipment at work.

TUs in the Tripartite Working Group on the Labor Code managed to gain many advantages, including determining in the event of staff reduction a longer notice period for employees with lower job opportunities.



The minimum salary increased in 2021 from 130.14 to 137.65 EUR/month. Medical staff were given indemnities for their work, students were offered scholarships, and the threshold for tax exemption was raised. Workers received unemployment benefits during the emergency period, and trainings were organised on the creation of local employment partnerships.

In 2020, 3 collective agreements were concluded by the social partners at national level. They will improve regulation of labor relations and ensure correct application of labor code provisions. To mitigate the impact of the pandemic, the government has introduced measures which included subsidies, deferrals of taxes and duties, reduction of the base rate of credit. Unemployment saw a slight increase in 2021, with 1.6 thousand more people unemployed compared to 2020.

Actions were taken in the medical sector increasing salaries, recognizing COVID-19 as an occupational disease, and reducing the retirement age for medical staff.

## UKRAINE

The policy country updates were delivered by **Svitlana Vnuchko**, WG5 local coordinator in Ukraine representing the Ukrainian Trade Union of Workers in Tourism, Spa areas and Hotel Industry.

Referring to significant changes in labour relations, it was mentioned that several laws regarding employment registration in an electronic format and remote work, as well as a national action plan to reduce the percentage of undeclared/ informal work have been adopted recently. Several other draft legislative acts and laws are under consideration and discussed by the Ukrainian Parliament. They refer to the deregulation of labour relations, trade union activities, and the simplification of labor relations for SMEs.

On 4 February 2021, the Ukrainian Parliament adopted Law of Ukraine “On Amendments to Certain Legislative Acts regarding Improvement of Legal Regulation of Distant Work”, which entered into force on 27 February 2021. This law formalises the possibility of remote work with the use of adequate online technologies, creates the legal environment for hybrid work (a mix of online and offline work) and flexible work schedules.

Referring to measures adopted at the national level to combat the effects of the pandemic, the Ukrainian authorities have taken several measures to prevent the rise of unemployment rates and unlawful dismissals. However, according to the State Employment Center, in April 2021, 450,000 Ukrainians were jobless and competed for 77,000 available vacancies. In the same period, 1.2 million Ukrainians applied for the services of unemployment centers (out of which 450,000 were unemployed). Unemployment benefits were provided to 385,000 persons.

In April 2021, the average nominal salary was 29.8% higher than in 2020 and was valued at approx. 400 EUR/month

## EU

The policy country updates were delivered by **Goda Neverauskaite**, WG5 coordinator and representative of the European Trade Union Confederation in the Forum.

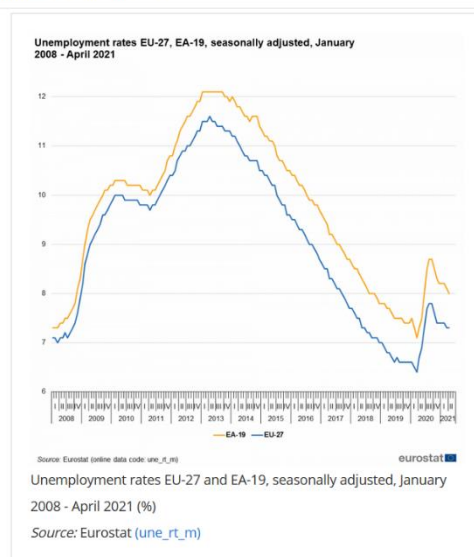
The COVID-19 crisis has seriously affected all European member states, with many companies struggling to survive the crisis and workers losing their jobs.

On the background of the pandemic, in several member states, governments and /or employers pursued actions aiming at diminishing or limiting the workers' rights, seeking to bypass labour laws and collective bargaining principles.

**“The prevention of the third wave of COVID - 19 pandemic depends on reaching agreements between social partners on work organization with strong attention to occupational health and safety. Now in most European countries we can see a re-opening of workplaces and we can notice cases of violation of Occupational Health and Safety regulations.”**

Goda Neveraukaite, WG5 coordinator

EU-27 unemployment at 7.3 % in April 2021.



COVID-19 is the biggest health, economic and social challenge in the history of the European Union. The dimension of Occupational Safety and Health (OSH) is a fundamental part of the European strategy for limiting the spread of the virus and for maintaining economic activities. Numerous national measures have been implemented to fight the spread of COVID-19, also including those appertaining to workplaces and commuting to work.

Since the COVID-19 outbreak, workers in many sectors (most of them female workers) have continued being physically present at their workplace, at the frontline, fighting the virus, in sectors such healthcare, elderly care,

education, transport, manufacturing, construction, retail, agriculture, and food manufacturing.

At European level, the social partners of the food manufacturing sector (EFFAT and Food Drink Europe) have developed guidelines to support their members in dealing with the COVID-19 outbreak. The guidelines include recommendations on hygiene practices in the workspace, review of work regulations, management of employees' medical leave, transport and delivery of food, and commute to and from the work space.





[SURE \(the European Instrument for temporary Support to mitigate Unemployment Risks in an Emergency\)](#) is available for all MS that need to mobilise large financial resources to mitigate the effect of the pandemic outbreak on their territory.

The SURE instrument acts as a second line of defense, supporting short-time work schemes and similar measures, to help Member States protect jobs and thus employees and self-employed against the risk of unemployment and loss of income. Loans provided to Member States under the SURE instrument are underpinned by a system of voluntary guarantees from Member States. Each Member State's contribution to the overall amount of the guarantee corresponds to its relative share in the total gross national income (GNI) of the European Union, based on the 2020 EU budget.

With the latest disbursement (25 May 2021), the EU has provided nearly 90 billion Euros in back-to-back loans. All 19 EU Member States which have asked to benefit from the scheme have received part or all of the requested amount. Other Member States can still submit requests to receive financial support under SURE which has an overall firepower of up to 100 billion Euros.

Referring to remote work, it was highlighted that despite the hype around this concept during the pandemic, a Framework Agreement on Telework was adopted back in 2002. Given the number of those who needed to adopt a remote work regime for longer periods, the current period is a good time to learn from the huge efforts made by workers during the COVID-19 pandemic. Collective bargaining is fundamental to facilitating a safe return to work and a quick and fair recovery.

**Policy session: EPSR – what's in a word?  
Wednesday, 23 July, 13.00 – 15.00 CET**

*Power Point Presentation available [here](#).*

This session was kicked off with introductory words from **Goda Neverauskaite**, WG5 coordinator and ETUC Policy advisor, and **Tatiana Marian**, head of the Mass media and international relations at the National Trade Union Confederation of Moldova, who were there as moderators. After a brief overview of the previous sessions, Goda reminded members and delegates of WG5's objectives:

- Establishing a new EaP policy pillar focusing on social dialogue, labour migration and employment policies
- Promoting stronger social dialogue as an essential dimension and moves toward sustainable, resilient and integrated economies;
- Promoting the adoption and implementation of European norms and international standards defined by the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union, the European Social Charter, the European Pillar of Social Rights and the International Labour Organisation;
- Raising awareness on the benefits of strong social dialogue among EaP governments and civil society and promoting fundamental social values such as social justice, cohesion and equality;
- Supporting a fair labour mobility between the EU and EaP countries, as well as among EaP countries, focusing on a fair pay and decent working conditions.

In line with the priorities and objectives of WG5, a discussion on EPSR in the aftermath of the Porto Social Summit, was more than timely.

**Bruno Ribeiro**, Counsellor for Social Policy at the Portuguese Permanent Representation to the EU, started his speech by presenting the objectives of the ongoing Portuguese presidency of the Council (PPC). The PPC has been centered around EU recovery through EU strategic guidelines, with the ambition of strengthening resilience and setting the EU on the path of green and digital transition. To this end, the EU must reinforce its social model through 5 general priorities:

- Resilient Europe; to recover economically while preserving the EU as a space of solidarity and values
- Social Europe; increasing cooperation
- Green Europe; to pursue the goals of the Green Deal and a climate neutral Europe
- Digital Europe; make Europe ready for the digital age
- Global Europe; to strengthen multilateralism and partnerships.

The PPC put Social Europe at the heart of the agenda: the EPSR responds to the social dimension of the current crisis. A fairer, more social Europe needs to have the EPSR at the core of EU recovery. It is more about people than the economy today compared to 2008, when the EU response was inadequate and led to a decade of austerity measures. To do that, the EC has drafted an Action Plan for the EPSR with specific instruments for a stronger social Europe. The social dimension of the EU was reinstated with the Porto Social Summit, at the political and institutional level, in May 2021. It promoted a debate on strengthening the EU's social model, namely on how to achieve the basic 20 principles of the pillar that were defined in 2017. The summit had two key moments: a high level conference and an informal European Council. This event was historic for two reasons:

- First, the conference agreed on the Porto Social Commitment, signed by national and EU officials as well as social partners;

- On the second day, leaders agreed on the Porto Declaration, the first statement devoted exclusively to social policy issues. It offers a solid basis for jointly achieving common social goals with all partners.

Here are the most important takeaways: first, the 20 principles of the EPSR will be fundamental elements of post-COVID-19 recovery.

The PPC put many objectives at the core of the agenda. Its first and most important priority was children's rights. The Council has unanimously adopted the recommendations on Child Guarantees. The commission's action plan stated to reduce by 50 million the number of people under the threat of poverty or social exclusion, of which 5 million are children. EU child guarantees are relevant in the context of the pandemic, mitigating its effects.

Its second priority was to promote a debate on the new EU Disability Strategy. The PPC hosted high level conferences on this topic in April. The EU also adopted Council conclusions endorsing the strategy, inviting Member States to support its implementation. Member States and the EC were also invited to combat stigma and discrimination.

The third priority was to put homelessness on the EU agenda. The EU needs to address homelessness' root causes and invest in prevention through strategies. The EU institutions and ministers conjoined with civil society signed the Lisbon Declaration to launch the EU Platform on Combating Homelessness. The declaration sets out a series of principles and objectives, such as "none should be discharged from any institutions without offering appropriate housing" or avoiding evictions. The platform will facilitate exchanges between policymakers and monitor changes.

The 4th priority of the PPC is ageing. Older people are more affected by COVID-19. Again, the EU adopted Council conclusions on ageing mainstreaming in public policies in March 2021.

Finally, the PPC wanted to promote the social economy. Most notably, it organised a conference on social economy on 29th March 2021, focusing on the role of social economy in creating jobs and implementing the EPSR.

**Dumitru Fornea**, Secretary General of the Meridian National Trade Union Confederation, EESC Workers' Group, and President of the Eastern Neighbours Follow-up Committee began his presentation talking about EPSR. He referred to EPSR as a continuation of the guidelines and principles previously established by the EU.

In the EU, social inequality challenges are also stemming from EU processes which accelerate the need for rapid change. For example, it is worth mentioning that the European Single Market and other economic policies have no social layer. For this reason, the speaker highlighted that there should be more convergence between East and West on topics such as minimum wage.

With the emergence of new technologies, disparities are tougher to bridge than ever before. Many people will be left behind because of the existing and ongoing digital divide. Alternative solutions are needed today. During the pandemic, the universal revenue was discussed a bit; if it comes with a loss of freedom, few people will agree with it.

The sustainability of the social policy depends on the economic environment that today is based on international corporations. The challenge is that negotiations with such entities are very tough. Their practices have a very disruptive impact on social policy. The EPSR should be based on European solidarity, freedom of association, and collective bargaining, for the decade ahead.

The next speaker **Marina Monaco**, policy advisor at the European Trade Union Confederation, mentioned that according to her, this is a “period of firsts” for the EU: it has never experienced such a closure of economic activities and such high amount of people left without the possibility to work.

The reaction from the EU was unprecedented. The SURE instrument was enacted a few months after the pandemic; the allocation of funds for recovery and upgrade of the EU economy and social dimension has been put together in record time. All these reactions were genuinely European reactions: the EU acted as one instead of having divisive positions.

In comparison with the 2008 crisis, thanks to SURE and emergency measures, the EU has avoided the worst-case scenario on topics like unemployment.

It has been acknowledged that if there is no social recovery, there will not be any economic recovery. In that sense, the reaction was very different from the one in 2008. Last decade has been marked by complete austerity in social expenditures from the EU and its Member States. The EU Semester imposed shrinking investment in many items such as public services, pensions or the support to unemployment benefits.

Currently, all initiatives are taken in the opposite direction. The austerity is over, and society is ready to invest in the social dimension to make the economic dimension flourish. The Porto Summit and the Action plan for the implementation of the 20 principles of the EPSR show the commitment for social rights to be upheld. These principles were declined in a series of concrete commitments on topics such as jobs, fair wages, higher employability of women, people with disabilities, vulnerable people, or the reduction of poverty.

This moment is perceived as particularly important for the EU and its neighboring countries. Implementing social principles in the EU should foster, enhance and encourage countries to reach the standards of better performing countries. An EU with too many gaps or inequalities can only stagnate economically and socially. The pandemic taught all partners that a lack of collective action irremediably leads to failure. On the labour market, this is also true. Somewhere, labor costs are lower and principles are depreciated. Thanks to collective measures, the best performers in implementing the social parts of the pillar are also the best economic performers today.

The EU is ambitious, showing it through the MFF; the EU social fund has a series of precise objectives and targets that serve the objectives of social Europe. There is a strong commitment to reduce extreme poverty, and all these considerations are made on the basis of monitoring through reference to the EPSR.

It is true that the Council has not signed the Porto declaration. The Council decides through unanimity thus if one country is against, it means no adoption. But generally, there is a will to embed the pillar principles into the whole architecture of the post pandemic recovery.

Porto was not only an endorsement of the EC's action plan. Partners also agreed on an informal commitment to measure the progress in terms of rights and wellbeing of people looking at not only the progress of GDP but instead to move to an approach prioritising people's well-being. The ESF+ and the EU Semester are officially considered as the tools to allow financial implementation of certain rights and to monitor the development and foster achievement of new rights.

The EU today cannot expect to reduce poverty cutting on social fronts for citizens in need. Member States must be allowed to spend what is necessary to lift people out of poverty and ensure human dignity. A series of reforms should be made; in many Member States, a reform of taxation policy is necessary.