



11 December 2012

Open letter to Herman Van Rompuy - President of the European Council, and Jose Manuel Barroso – President of the European Commission

Dear President,

We, PES and progressive Ministers of Employment and Social Affairs unite our voices to express our concern ahead of the upcoming European Council of 13-14 December. This European Council will formalise the early steps of one of the most important reforms of recent years, that is the reform of the Economic and Monetary Union. Such a reform is indeed urgently needed to tackle the ongoing economic, social and financial crisis. The continuing rise in unemployment and youth unemployment in particular and the rise of poverty in Europe are some of the worrying effects of a crisis that is hitting young people, women and vulnerable groups the hardest. This reform poses many challenges, but it can only be successful if it is used as an opportunity to restore the balance between stability and growth that was intended, but has been lost. This is an opportunity that Europe cannot afford to miss.

We would like to remind you of our declaration of 04 October 2012 in which we called for the introduction of a Social Union as a precondition for relaunching sustainable growth, social cohesion and improving the lives of Europe's citizens, and as a tool to strengthen the support for the European integration project amongst our citizens. We maintain that this should be our ultimate goal to achieve a balanced and sustainable Union, aiming at a social market economy and the promotion of justice and social protection, as clearly stated in article 3 of the Treaty.

We are concerned however that the approach that is being developed for the December Council goes in the opposite direction. The proposed sequencing reinforces and perpetuates one of the elements of the crisis: that of the primacy of sanctions over solidarity.

The direction in which Europe is heading still prioritises budgetary consolidation through discipline, austerity and sanctions. We fear that the proposed "individual arrangements of contractual nature" constitute the latest step of this approach. Our approach is based instead on achieving sustainable balance through responsibility, solidarity, and growth. We need the elements that will break the recessionary cycle with a comprehensive programme of productive and social investment. We need the elements that will ensure budgetary responsibility and recovery by promoting the European social model rather than by

dismantling national social systems. The growth-oriented targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy should remain a primary target for all Member States and supported by all available instruments. We need the elements that will make economic convergence and upward social convergence cornerstones of our economic policy.

What we would like to see from the Council is not an agreement on the principles. We want to see an agreement in which solidarity is built concretely into every stage of the way, with specific measures and mechanisms to restore the balance that will contribute to bringing Europe out of the crisis.

We welcome your efforts to find compromise, and we urge you to promote a balanced and socially oriented approach that will ensure that those efforts are not in vain. We reiterate our deepest conviction that every step towards greater integration must be matched by a step towards greater solidarity.

Nicolas Schmit,



Nicolas Schmit, Minister of Labour
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Monica De Coninck,
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Cc: Demetris Christofias, Presidency of the European Union