



The **social dimension** of Europe

The response of CEC European Managers to the reflection paper issued by the European Commission

November 2017

Managers in Europe



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Executive Summary

- As the economy recovers, Europe must focus on answering the real needs and expectations of the people as a tool against Euroscepticism. The model of social market economy needs to be reinforced, with more attention to social progress.

- An educational campaign to counter fake news and Eurobashing is needed: the EU must clearly explain what it is able to do, showing that isolationism is not an answer. A new narrative of Europe is necessary.

- In a fast-changing world of work, make sure that innovations in this field do not unfold to the detriment of quality employment. Social protection mechanisms need to be adaptive and evolve rapidly, to continue guaranteeing protection to all. To design the best policies and anticipate the future needs, skilled leadership is essential.

- Promote "smart" administrations and invest in education, to support students better face a labour market where professional statuses change more rapidly with new, transversal skills.

- Facing the growing diversity of our societies, we need to ensure fair and equal conditions to all to make the most of all potential (yet too often unused) pools of competences. Integration must become a priority, both in the workplace and at societal level, dealt with in a professional way. In a diverse society, the need to ensure a fair representation of all its actors become fundamental.

- The EU is more than the sum of its policies: it is an irrevocable political space for liberty, shared rights and common identity covering more than 500 million individuals. Any option aiming at limiting its scope and function to the simple dimension of the single market would be anachronistic and dangerous. Member States wishing to do more in selected domains should be given the opportunity to do so, paving the way for others to join at a later stage.

1. Introduction

As a European social partner organisation representing the interests and voice of a specific category of workers, managers and professionals, CEC European Managers wants to contribute to the current debate on how the European Union should prepare to face the future challenges that await it. More in particular, this position paper comes in response to the reflection document issued by the European Commission on the future of the EU social dimension, following a path initiated last year with the consultation on the European Pillar of Social Rights. CEC is in line with this ideal continuity, as it considers it vital to ensure that any deep-level discussion on the future of Europe does not take place without a parallel reflection on the current strengths (and flaws) of the European social model and the possible impact of global factors, as well as its consistency with policy proposals in other fields and an analysis on how it should evolve.

The people we represent take determining decisions in public and private companies, and therefore bear major responsibilities to ensure the economic sustainability and the social well-being of the undertakings they work for and the communities they live in. We would now like to prove this responsibility participating in this debate, presenting our vision and suggesting our proposals.

This paper is structured around three sections: we will first have a look at the current background situation, with a specific attention to the macro-economic and the more general political and global context of these days. Secondly, we will deal with the social aspects and realities taken into account by the European Commission in its reflection paper. And finally, we will discuss what of the three alternatives presented could be most effective for Europe.

2. The current context - what do we see?

According to the issue of the standard Eurobarometer published in August 2017, citizens' perception and feelings about the European Union are improving: trust in the EU is rising, with 42% of European citizens trusting it and overall displaying better results than those concerning the trust in national authorities, while **the majority of respondents have a "positive" perception of the EU** (40% against 37% having a "neutral" opinion and 21% having a negative perception). Even more telling of this current positive trend is the percentage of EU-citizens who are optimistic about the future of the EU: 56% (against 38% of them being pessimistic and the remainder having no opinion).

These positive figures can probably be explained by the "sense of relief" that many EU-citizens might have felt after that overtly anti-European political movements have been defeated in recent elections, combined with the positive outlook for the European economy. Faced with the concrete option of leaving the European Union, European citizens have decided to stay. These encouraging results should however not be perceived as the demonstration that the European project has conquered the confidence of its citizens, and that anti-European political rhetoric and attitudes have subdued. **Now the time is for action and delivering concrete responses to the questions raised by European citizens** – there are encouraging signals from different national governments that new initiatives to relaunch the European project could be envisaged; this is clearly good news, but extra-care is necessary to avoid heating up people's expectations with unrealistic proposals that are distant from the real needs of citizens. We will come back to this at a later stage of the present document.

Time for action: relaunch the European project

For the debate about Europe to become transparent and solid, it is in the first place necessary to counter frequent "Eurobashing" attempts, the practice (so popular among certain national politicians and media outlets) to blame European institutions and policy-making processes for every problematic issue arising in the society. As the **need to counter "fake news" increases**, it is essential that more and better information about the real competences and powers of the European institutions is made available to the public. Only when it is clear to citizens how decisions are taken, what authorities (either at national or European level) intervene in the decision-making process and to what extent such decisions impact on the way the other levels act and react to them, it will be possible to allow for a mature and fully aware debate about what the advantages and disadvantages of being part of the Union are.

Transparent decision-making

Launching a European-wide "educational" campaign on the functioning of the European Union should become one clear priority for EU institutions, as it will help put the public debate back on the right track demonstrating that the EU is not an autonomous, separated centre of power, but rather a supra-national institutional complex where the decisions taken are the result at a large extent of the political will of national governments. And, based on this simple acknowledgment, **a new way of narrating Europe** should find its place, attributing responsibilities and roles to the right decisional level. If Europe can explain clearly what the real range of its competences is, and what role national governments have in influencing the adoption of decisions and the implementation of its acts, then it will be possible to contrast that increasing feeling of "Euro-frustration", according to which the Union is perceived at the same time as almighty and powerless.

A new European narrative

Going back to the content of the Eurobarometer, the two main concerns of European citizens are international terrorism and the control of migratory movements (for respectively 44% and 38% of the population). These figures remind us of that the challenges we are asked to face are in most cases global challenges, which put Europe in the perspective of its wider relations with the other parts of an increasingly interconnected world. Global challenges cannot be dealt with by recurring to domestic-only policies, as **no national country, however economically strong and geopolitically powerful it can be, will be able to tackle these issues alone**. It is of course very difficult to foresee what the consequences of these global trends will be, let alone pretending to be able to prevent them from happening.

Common challenges, common approach

What the EU should be able to do, complementing the action of Member States, is to propose a vision of what the consequences of these trends could be on our common "structures" (of economic, social, demographic and cultural nature) and elaborate on how these should evolve to remain functioning and capable of delivering the results we expect. **Isolationist approaches can be no sustainable, long run solutions** to the issues we are facing: the new narrative mentioned earlier should include this acknowledgment.

Finally, this reflection needs to be framed within the context of the current macro-economic situation. All main indicators are positive: from the “classical” GDP, which has increased by 2.2% in the Euro area compared with 2016 (second quarter), to unemployment, decreasing to 9.1% in June down from 10% in July last year. The same positive outlook applies to the confidence rate, which has reached 5.1 for the industrial sector this August (compared with -1.8 in 2016) and -1.5 for families (compared with -8 in 2016). Although of course data vary from country to country, there is proof that **the economy is recovering** pretty much everywhere in Europe, and that we are in many aspects exiting the crisis (with some indicators, like for instance EU28 unemployment rates, having reached pre-crisis level). As European economy stabilizes, it is fundamental to “secure” the recovery with strong measures to preserve the confidence of the industry, focusing on developing a common industrial strategy that can reinforce the manufacturing fabric of Europe while intercepting the new drivers for growth of digitalization and environmental sustainability. At the same time, **the foundations of the single market need to be consolidated in all their aspects**, to create the most favourable conditions for private economic initiative to flourish. Creating wealth for the society is a precondition to growth, and we believe that in market economies (like Europe is), it is the responsibility of private economic initiative to fuel growth. Of course, Europe’s economic model is the one of a social market economy, with public authorities intervening to **guarantee social progress and protection**, as well as a **fair distribution of wealth** – the pillar on which the European social model stands and that we, as European social partners, so strongly want to see thrive. But no real social progress is possible in our model without sound economic conditions.

Secure the economic recovery

Once the current phase of consolidating the recovery is concluded, the next priority for the European Union in the economic field will have to be to make sure that the **convergence process**, after its peak in the late 90’s – early 2000’s, regains momentum. Intervening on the social dimension of the Union is, clearly, one of the levers of reactivating convergence, especially when looking at the need to review the approach to financial and fiscal policies adopted so far that a growing number of politicians now openly discuss.

Revitalise the social market economy

3. The social dimension – how do we respond to the issues raised?

Our response to the different issues raised in the document will be articulated around three main domains: how to respond to current and future changes to the world of work, how to modernize our education and training systems and, finally, some reflections on the evolution of culture and society.

In presenting our ideas, our starting point is the acknowledgment of **diversity** as one of the founding values of the Union. The countries that are Members of the Union are diverse, although they share in many respects historical, cultural and religious traits. And all together, these countries are part of a global community that is itself based on diversity, too. This awareness reflects also on the necessary preliminary assessment of the characteristics and functioning of our current social systems. When looking at possible policy orientations, we must acknowledge that there can be no one-size-fits all policy solutions; nor can it be feasible to adopt an “uniformisation” approach in policy making that can be effective for all domains.

Diversity as one of the foundations of the EU

CEC European Managers is convinced that for our societies to be able to face these challenges effectively, innovative practices will be required by both private and public organisations. Here, irrespective of and in addition to their specific individual professional assignments, **managers play a key role as bridge builders between employers and workers**: they set business strategies, help cultivate democratic practices in companies and facilitate spaces for innovation. In that role, managers have a particular responsibility in accompanying the digital transformation and efforts towards a more inclusive and sustainable society.

a) The world of work

As already highlighted in our contribution to the debate on the European Pillar of Social Rights, the continuous application of technological advancements to the way we produce and work is intrinsic to the modern and contemporary economic model. New jobs have always been created, while other professional profiles have been made obsolete by the introduction of new technologies to the productive process. What is more characteristic of the current phase of technological transformation is the rapidity at which it is happening, and the fact that it is touching all economic sectors. The **digital “ubiquity”** that underpins the wave of changes we are experiencing is a phenomenon that cannot be impeded, and is very difficult to manage and regulate – it’s a reality, with which our social structures have to come to terms. As the legislative option is not always technically feasible – let us simply think of the rapidity at which ever-new applications of platform economy mechanisms create new types of occupations – **public administrations will have to find new, smarter ways to respond to the increasing speed of change**. The European model also applies in this domain: it is about **finding the right balance** between letting innovation unfold in a free market economy and being prudent about potentially irreversible damages caused by disruptive technologies.

*Increasing
speed of
changes*

*Smart
adminis-
trations*

Besides legal considerations, there are also potential consequences caused by market reconfigurations led by digital giants. As information becomes ubiquitous and the major source of economic value in the 21st century, particular attention should be devoted to **avoiding market concentration and information monopolisation** by big players. Europe should guarantee that company policies do not prevail over public law, also in digital public spaces. Data protection alone will not be sufficient to deal with the encompassing social, psychological and economic consequences of an entirely digital future. Transparency, critical digital education and new kinds of civil rights, such as mechanisms guaranteeing the possibility of disconnecting, have to be envisioned. Furthermore, **a European “Industry 4.0” approach** is needed to accelerate the development of this major industrial process while taking regional development considerations into account.

*Avoid
market
concentration*

*A European
Industry
4.0
approach*

The diffusion of such new forms of work can have a positive impact on overall growth and individual employment perspectives: for many newcomers to the labour market, and especially for those with low skills, the applications of the platform economy can represent an effective way to access the labour market, and develop a professional expertise as well as an entrepreneurial mindset that can prove useful in supporting a career advancement. On the other hand though, it is undisputable that the adoption of these **new employment models is often accompanied by a degradation of working conditions** and a reduction of the labour rights and provisions associated with more traditional forms of employment that is not acceptable. The “uberization” process of our economies and societies can be a positive phenomenon if it serves as a tool to create new employment opportunities and new sources of economic demand, but it cannot become the model towards which our economic systems should evolve, especially if we think of the fiscal implications for the sustainability of social protection systems of a shrinking financing base that come as a consequence of the reduction of employment contracts. Furthermore, legal compliance issues raised by game-changing newcomers should not question our legal systems and the rule of law. As the European Commission itself highlighted in several occasions, the flexibility of the labour market should serve as a tool to make it easier for individuals to move on a professional transition path whose ideal end is traditional, open-ended employment.

*Sustainable
quality
employment*

If we look at the social consequences of the diffusion of new forms of work, it is unhelpful to delve into the heated debate about whether such digital transformations will create more jobs than they will destroy. The future is not carved in stone. By contrast, decision makers, including managers, need to take the right decisions **to anticipate and shape future trends for desirable outcomes**. Therefore, managers will need to be trained to act in and make sense of an increasingly complex world, where orientation becomes scarce. The **new kinds of skills** needed by decision makers do not only include digital skills, but also transversal, systemic and personal skills (emotional and social skills). Without competent managers, the best labour market and educational policies will fail – during the implementation phase in companies or the public sector, but also when analysing market and public needs.

*Invest in
new kind of
leadership
to tackle
challenges*

To face the reality of an ever-changing employment context we have to intervene on those structures that accompany individuals and provide them with the necessary assistance and support they need. At the same time, we need to consider that the traditional scheme on which such structures have been built over time – being involved in a traditional employment situation – is accessible to a decreasing share of the population. For this reason, Europe has to **develop innovative solutions to allow for social protection schemes the necessary level of flexibility to cater for the needs of a pool of users** with increasingly diverse characteristics, and irrespective of the employment condition they find themselves in. Only with **adaptive “safety nets”** that can be activated for anyone (whether he/she is in transition between jobs, needs to be “activated”, is independent or has a standard employment profile) will we be able to avoid that the (presumably) accelerating flexibilisation process of employment statuses translates automatically into a social downgrading of the many.

*Adaptive
safety nets
needed*

The “digital ubiquity” is not the only trend with major impact on the way people perform their professional activities. The ageing of the population, as the reflection paper correctly puts it, has a long series of consequences in many fields, with its demographic effects having an influence on the future geopolitical balance and weight of our continent on the global scene. We will discuss again the issue of ageing in the context of the reflection on the society; in this paragraph, we point out how the inevitable extension of professional careers will require from working environments to increase in flexibility and adaptability, not only in physical terms (new and more diverse office equipment, for instance) but also in terms of how individual career paths are built and developed over time. Larger pools of elderly workers will be only one of the **many sources of diversity that will characterize more and more workplaces**. To respond to this fact, we believe we will have to make more use of the many possibilities offered by technology to **improve the flexibility of working arrangements**. This will eventually help accommodate other needs and expectations deriving from other changes to the family structures and other non-directly work-related drivers for societal change (including ensuring family responsibilities and improving work-life balance for all).

*Flexible
working
arrangements*

b) Education and training

As the weight of digital “dependency” increases and spreads to a larger set of domains and professional sectors, there is a proportional need to **improve the capacity of our education systems to provide individuals with the necessary set of skills**. Digital literacy is no longer a professional requirement, the lack of which represents a serious limitation to employment opportunities: it is now becoming a precondition to enjoy fully one’s own social citizenship. Consequently, people who are unable to make use of the many digital applications that are present in our daily life run the risk of being victim of social exclusion. **Digital mainstreaming into education patterns** (both in formal and informal education) should become a priority for every country, and Europe should focus on further raising awareness about the necessity to modernize education structures.

*Digital
main-
streaming
is a
matter of
citizenship*

Next to digitalization, there is another main driver that will shape the way individuals work for which new set of skills will be necessary: as career paths become less predictable and linear, people will be required to develop more quickly and more frequently new competencies to be applied to new professional profiles they will be asked to perform. Traditional education channels need to incorporate in their curricula the notion that pupils and students will be experiencing several professional transitions in the course of their professional career, and that accumulating knowledge will no longer be sufficient to increase their employability: a whole **new set of skills like creativity, critical thinking, adaptability, empathy and other forms of so-called “character skills” will become essential**.

*New set
of skills
requires
new kinds of
learning*

With the omnipresence of descriptive information, it will become of crucial importance to assess, structure and make sense of this information as the whole debate on fake news highlights. These skills require **new ways of learning, including informal, experimental and project-learning**.

A long debate could of course be started on how to “identify” these skills. From our perspective, we would like to **focus on leadership and entrepreneurship**. The first one is essential as the degree of diversity and interconnectedness that is inherent to our societies increases, requiring more individuals who can elaborate a vision while integrating in an effective way the many sources of diversity present in working team. The second feature – entrepreneurship – would serve to accompany and professionalize the possibilities in self-employment that the application of digital resources brings along.

Finally, next to providing people with the right skills and knowledge to find their place in a rapidly-evolving social and economic context, future education models will have to integrate effective mechanisms to ensure a continuous re-training of those who are already in activity, either via formal mechanisms or informally.

c) Culture and society

The reflection paper issued by the European Commission describes a set of social phenomena relating to domains that do not pertain to traditional areas of competence of the European Union. Reflections on the evolution of “family patterns”, for instance, or the emergence of possible risks associated to the loss of “cultural identity” as a consequence of globalization can be associated to a more general assessment of a **process of “social evolution” that is common to all European countries**. This debate might over the long run **extend to other domains of the society**, like for instance reflections on bio-ethics, so-called “fourth generation rights” or family legislation.

Inter-connected issues require to think them together

Those who share the opinion that the Union needs to re-focus on its initial scope, i.e. ensuring the functioning and the respect of the provisions of the single market (and all those by-side regulations that are strictly ancillary to it, like for instance the free circulation of workers) might consider this possibility as far-stretching and misleading. We will go back to this analysis in the next part of this document, when dealing with how we believe the European Union should go forward. But as we illustrate here our position on how Europe should respond to the changes happening in its society, there is room to illustrate our conviction that **the Union is a community that shares principles, beliefs, values and an image of itself that goes beyond simple economic implications or the political and juridical settings that come with its institutional framework**.

The EU: an economic, social and democratic Union of values

The European Union is already a common area of shared democratic principles, collected in the Charter of Fundamental Right of the European Union that have full legal value, ensuring the protection of individual rights and freedoms - the recent exchanges between European institutions and some national governments on internal decisions that would represent a breach to **“commonly shared democratic values”** are a proof of how deeply rooted this awareness is. And throughout the history of European enlargement, the prospect of adhering to the Communities first and the Union then has represented for many countries a push towards a modernisation not only of the economic and political infrastructures, but also of the society.

In this respect, the European Union is also an area of shared identity and community values that shape the collective self-identification of its peoples, marking a European “character” that in many cases adds to the domestic national sense of belonging. The initiatives on the establishment of a European pillar of social rights can potentially represent a **turning point in the process of European integration**. This step highlights the EU’s commitment to making social progress a concrete objective for Europe; the long-neglected fundamental **values of solidarity and equality** now find their legitimate place in the debate on the future of Europe.

Our societies should therefore prepare for assessing whether there is a need, and sufficient room, for a European debate on issues concerning the evolution of societal values that so far have been considered as strictly pertaining to national competence. In this respect, the discussion about digital and bio ethics will prove particularly important considering the global impact that decisions in these areas can have. This is of course a major cultural and societal challenge, which requires a separate forum for discussion and innovative tools to involve all European citizens. As far as digital ethics are concerned, a compromise between **sufficient freedom for research and development** on the one hand, and the **precautionary principle** (as established in bioethics) will have to be found. The speed of technological development should not leave policy-makers and managers blind of its **potential unforeseeable dangers** at global scale.

Innovation and precaution

A careful examination of the right policy level to deal with these fundamental questions should be the first step in this process.

Once more, we believe that the key word to refer to when discussing about the future prospects of societal change in Europe is **diversity**. Diversity applies when it comes to integrating the often unused pools of competences that are already present in our societies and economies – **enforcing gender equality and equal opportunities is the first and most striking example of the necessity to contrast this harmful waste of resources that is underusing the many talents of our societies**. Our organisation has always strongly supported the case for increasing the share of women participating in the labour force, demonstrating (with European projects, consultation and position papers but also in our internal practice) how the presence of more women in decision-making position is first and foremost a good economic choice, benefitting companies and the society in the first place. And next to the gender one, other forms of equality need to be enforced through the full integration of other groups of vulnerable persons, like the disabled or the elderly.

Providing equal opportunities creates growth

Diversity increasingly concerns individuals that come from outside our borders, too: the current geopolitical situation puts our continent at the center of a vast and impressive movement of people, which poses major challenges under many points of view (not least, the consequences on cultural identity referred to above), but also great opportunities. Without entering into the debate on the principles underpinning EU migration and asylum policies, and irrespective of the formal legal status of those arriving in Europe, it is a reality that the current demographic trends of our countries do pose a risk for our societies in terms of ensuring the “sustainability” of labour markets and welfare systems. **Welcoming newcomers, integrating them in our social and economic fabric is a way to balance the shrinking workforce** and countering the demographic decline that the reflection paper so clearly identifies. And when it comes to the contribution of migrants to the workforce, we need to point out how profoundly misleading the “traditional” understanding of the phenomenon is. The majority of the public discourse highlights how usually low-skilled migrants are, indirectly contributing to reinforcing the risks of social exclusion and “ghettoization” these individuals often experience and exacerbating a certain populist approach towards them. In truth, as no reliable EU-wide statistics exist on the level of professional expertise these persons have, here too there is a tremendous risk of underusing potentialities that are strongly needed in times of skill-shortage and skills-mismatch like these.

Newcomers balance demographic decline

Because an effective integration also happens through a meaningful implication of migrants in the labour force, **managers in Europe are one of the main actors of the process of European integration** as they arrange for the welcoming newcomers in the workplace. They are often the first who introduce foreign-born workers to work life, often also social life, and are thus a key stakeholder when it comes to successfully integrate them. However, **managers need the right tools, skills and training to be able to assume their responsibilities**. For diversity and inclusion to be practiced effectively, it needs shared experiences, knowledge about diversity and integration and an open attitude towards these issues.

Managers have a key role in integration

Finally, appealing to diversity applies also to the richness and variety of the political debate, and to the mechanisms that regulate the participation to the public life of people and interest groups. In this context, our reflection relates to the functioning of industrial relations, and more in general to how the groups that compose of the forces interacting at economic and social level can express their views and participate in the decision-making processes. Social dialogue is the cornerstone of the current system of industrial relations everywhere in Europe, with the role of social partners recognized by legislation and their direct interaction encouraged as a means to effectively tackle all work-related issues. Today, the system needs to ensure **a fair representation of all involved forces**, taking into account their diversity as a means to improve the capacity of the system **to be effectively representative of the increasingly complex reality of the world of work**. Spaces for social dialogue exchanges should be further opened up, also through a reinforcement of the institutional framework and operational structure of its actors.

Fair representation, strong social dialogue

Like many other aspects of the word of work, social dialogue might likely be impacted by the diffusion of digital technologies and the undergoing flexibilization process – several studies and projects are being carried out on this aspect, and it will certainly be a most interesting topic for internal debate and reflection for all European social partner organisations. But whatever the direction in which our role in the society evolves, the value of social dialogue as a “technical” arena where to discuss and find commonly agreed solutions should be preserved, increasing the possibility for all voices to be heard. Once more, the increasing diversification of job profiles and their “legal” classification could bring along the **creation of new types of labour categories** and new forms of organisation, which all legitimately demand to be heard.

4. How to get forward - assessing the **different alternatives**

Before considering what should be the preferred option for the advancement of the European Union, it would be necessary to take stock of the current status of the “social dimension” of the Union, analysing the legislative acquis and assessing whether its implementation is being performed accurately and in a satisfactory way. The credibility of institutions is also measured by the capacity to assess the effectiveness of the “legislative” production, to respond timely to the evolution of those social facts for which legislation was considered necessary.

Any discussion about the future evolution of the European Union is also inevitably a discussion about the legal basis on which it is founded. Member States remain sovereign in deciding whether and how to modify the Treaties to enlarge the competences of the Union or, rather, “repatriate” some of the existing powers of the institutions as mentioned in previous passages of this paper. The current debate on Europe is accompanied by rumours about the availability of national governments to increase further the levels of European integration in areas like economic governance or defence. **But until the Treaties remain unchanged, it would be a mistake to push for an “extensive” interpretation of the legal basis of the Union that would sneakily enlarge its scope of competences.**

*Stable
legal basis
needed in
any case*

Of the three scenarios indicated in the paper, **we oppose the restrictive one limiting the social dimension to the free movement of workers.** Its logical pre-assumption – the European Union should go back to its initial function of single market – does not even seem to be a reasonably feasible option (as the great uncertainty about how to operate the “disentanglement” between the United Kingdom and the rest of the European Union shows) and would definitely be the worst solution we could adopt to face the many global challenges awaiting us. Those who plead for this scenario – recovering sovereignty in a growing number of fields to be able to adopt policies uniquely addressing the national interest – risk paradoxically of further weakening their country, as the resulting isolation and lack of clarity would probably push countries to drift further away.

On the other end of the spectrum, the third scenario – deepening the scope of social Europe (or selected areas of it) for all Member States – also presents significant challenges in terms of feasibility. Some of the examples quoted in the document, like the possibility of developing a European unified collective bargaining mechanism (with inevitable consequence on the levelling of wages) or setting a unified retirement age, simply do not take into proper account the fact that divergences among Member States are still too high to allow for such a level of integration. In its paper, the European Commission expresses too much of optimism on the “political” feasibility of this alternative, when it comes to (not) realizing how difficult it would be to reach the necessary political agreement among 27 on very sensitive topics like those relating to the social and labour domains. Most likely, **a particularly ambitious approach would result in a harmful political immobilism due to the risk of mutual vetoes and other forms of opposition among Member States**, which would represent a major blow to the credibility of this new, deepened Europe and a source of further criticism for Euro-sceptical movements.

*Conver-
gence also
needs
differen-
tiation*

The second option – those who want to do more can find the mechanisms to do so – is already possible within the current legal context thanks to the provisions of art. 20 TFUE on the establishment of an enhanced cooperation. Many successful European initiatives (from the Schengen agreement to the whole common defence and security policy) have started as “restricted” forms of deeper cooperation among selected Member states, and have then successfully been integrated into EU-law valid for all. If this procedure might somehow be in contrast with the original “spirit” of the Community method (and therefore contribute to increasing divergences among Member States), letting individual member States adopt joint provisions to **regulate more “deeply” their mutual relations could be an effective way** to test the validity of the proposed measures and “convince” over time other countries to join and benefit from the advantages that would derive. Importantly, opening up existing examples of enhanced cooperation to increasingly more Member States should be encouraged, provided that these demonstrate the capacity (and the willingness) to reach the conditions set by the other Member States as “benchmarks”.

*Test and
extend
policy
options*

Of course, any consideration on the way to proceed in this respect should be done in coordination with the overall reflection on how Europe should go forward. We therefore look forward to the future next initiatives to bring this debate further, and to better understand how this document is logically connected with the other reflection papers presented by the European Commission, and how the many interconnections between the different domains will be dealt with.

Irrespective of the different alternatives for action that the results of the debate will present, we would like to conclude by reminding all European institutions the role of social partners in assisting and inspiring the definition of the new rules and mechanisms to prepare the future of our social systems. As a recognised European social partner representing the managerial workforce, we are ready to work together with the other social partners and policy-makers to take up the challenge.



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