

**Statement delivered by**

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**Chair,**

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union and its Member States.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro[[1]](#footnote-2)\*∗, Serbia∗ and Albania∗, the country of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidate Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well as the Republic of Moldova, Armenia and Georgia, align themselves with this statement.

First of all, we would like to thank the Bureau and the Department of Economic and Social Affairs for the preparatory work carried out in advance of this session. The Commission continues to have an important mandate as the principal United Nations forum for the discussion of social development issues, and we look forward to actively participating throughout the session.

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development provides a historic opportunity for the EU and its Member States to play a crucial role in ensuring sustainable development, both in Europe and beyond its borders.

Work is already underway in two work streams:

The first is to fully integrate the Sustainable Development Goals in the European policy framework. This includes human capital and the social areas. The European Union has always been a social project at heart. It is about our values and the way we want to live. Indeed our Treaty requires the EU to work for sustainable development based on balanced economic growth and a social market economy with full employment and social progress.

The European economy is in its sixth year of recovery, now reaching all EU members. Growth has been accompanied by gradual improvements in labour markets and in the social situation across the EU.

We will use this opportunity to go further: to ensure the sustainability of our recovery; to further improve our resilience to future economic shocks; to tackle social challenges; and to maximise the benefits of new opportunities that the new world of work give rise to.

People should be able to seize these new opportunities and be effectively protected no matter what type of job they are in.

This is also the underlying rationale of what we call the European Pillar of Social Rights which the European Union leaders have solemnly proclaimed last November at the Social Summit for fair jobs and growth in Gothenburg, Sweden.

The European Pillar of Social Rights anchors a strong social dimension in the future of the European Union. It reiterates our common values and sets out twenty principles and rights, to deliver a positive impact on people's lives in the short and medium term. From the right to fair wages to the right to health care; from lifelong learning, a better work-life balance and gender equality to a minimum income: with the European Pillar of Social Rights, the EU stands up for the rights of its citizens in a fast-changing world in full conformity with social goals of the 2030 Agenda.

The Pillar will also help ensure that nobody is left behind:

- It confirms that young people have the right to continued education, apprenticeship, traineeship or a job offer of good standing within 4 months of becoming unemployed or leaving education. In Europe, millions of young people have benefited from the Youth Guarantee, which is supporting the gradual improvement we see in youth employment. In net terms, there are now 1.5 million fewer young unemployed in the EU compared to 2013;

- A new initiative under the Pillar, the `New Start`, will help address the challenges of work-life balance faced by working families. While also addressing women's underrepresentation in the labour market and supporting their career progression through modern work-life balance policy, this initiative will contribute to EU objectives of equality between men and women with regard to labour market opportunities and equal treatment at work. The New Start initiative will also further intensify our efforts to combat violence against women.

- The Pillar also confirms that persons with disabilities have the right to income support that ensures they can live in dignity, with access to services that enable them to participate in the labour market and in society, and a work environment adapted to their needs. In addition, disability concerns are mainstreamed into the principles related to education, training and long-life learning, equal opportunities, work-life balance, childcare and support to children, long-term care, housing and assistance for the homeless and access to essential services in line with the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, to which the EU is a party. Furthermore, the EU will continue to mainstream disability issues in actions to combat unemployment and works towards the full participation in society of persons with disabilities, on an equal basis with others. With this aim in mind, a new proposal is in the pipeline for a European Accessibility Act to ensure accessibility for persons with disabilities to essential goods and services in the single market.

All these efforts are part of our proactive and coherent strategy to anchor sustainability in regulation and policymaking with a view to ensuring a future-proof society. For example, we need to do better at equipping all our people with the skills and training to compete in open and changing markets. Our education systems need to provide the skills that meet labour market demands. In adult learning, average participation remains stuck around 11%, despite a fast-evolving variety of needs, and low-qualified adults are only half as likely to participate in learning as others. Soon, even the most basic tasks in our economy will increasingly require a broader set of digital, service and people-oriented skills. The New Skills Agenda for Europe offers the framework for our governments, stakeholders and our citizens, to make that shift.

Going forward, a second work stream will launch reflection work on developing further the European Union longer term vision and the focus of sectoral policies after our current policy cycle ending in 2020. This work will help revamp partnership and enable citizens, governments, civil society and social partners to define and give meaning to a social dimension for Europe that builds on sustainable development and is fit for 21st-century realities.

In addition, the European Youth Strategy is an ongoing and dynamic process to develop and empower youth issues in all policies in the European Union. Following the "Council Resolution on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018)", the European Union has set up the "Structured Dialogue", a procedure that is unique in the EU and ensures systematic inclusion of young people in the political decision making. In the 2nd half of 2018, the EU Youth Strategy will be renewed with the objective to be even more cross-sectoral and sustainable. This includes aiming to develop "Youth Goals" and pursue the Structured Dialogue as an outstanding participation instrument for young people in policy making at all levels.

Important fields of youth policy are, among others, participation and inclusion, education and learning, and mobility. Mobility programmes like Erasmus+ give young people the possibility to get to know other people, countries and cultures. These experiences provide opportunities for non-formal and informal learning in different contexts and empower young people to participate in society. Therefore, these programmes play an important role to help overcome prejudices and in short build a cohesive European society.

The EU and its Member States remain fully committed to implementing the 2030 Agenda abroad, too. For example the new European Consensus on Development, the EU's new development policy, is framed around the ‘five Ps’ of People, Planet, Prosperity, Peace and Partnership – and seeks to support the achievement of all 17 Sustainable Development Goals in an integrated manner.

It underlines our intention to work more strongly and effectively with all our partners – including by forging new relationships. This includes countries at all stages of development. We will continue to target our assistance to the least-developed and conflict-affected countries. And we will also strengthen our partnerships with Middle Income Countries, including the more advanced developing countries. They will be critical in achieving the 2030 Agenda and for addressing social development and the rising inequalities within countries.

**Thank you!**

1.  *The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Montenegro, Serbia and Albania continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.* [↑](#footnote-ref-2)