



*Employers entrusted to deliver
Sustainability Growth Innovation*

PORTO SOCIAL SUMMIT

Speeches by SGI Europe (check against delivery)

Friday 7 May 2021, 15:00-19:30 CET

SGI Europe President Pascal Bolo during the closing session

Chers collègues,

Je me dois de commencer tout d'abord par remercier la présidence portugaise pour l'organisation de cette ambitieuse journée et je me réjouis d'avoir pu participer et assister aux débats du sommet social de Porto.

Il était crucial pour l'organisation que je représente, SGI Europe de démontrer à quel point les services d'intérêt général tels que le logement, la santé, l'éducation, le transport public et bien d'autres sont des acteurs clés de l'Europe sociale.

Les enjeux auxquels nous faisons face, la crise sanitaire, mais aussi les transitions numériques, écologiques et démographiques, impliquent une mise en œuvre ambitieuse du plan d'action du Pilier des droits sociaux.

Cette mise en œuvre doit être fondée sur deux éléments :

- Un nouveau paradigme : où les investissements productifs dans les services dits « essentiels » et dans la protection sociale sont des leviers d'une relance qui ne laisse personne de côté.

- Un nouvel élan pour des réformes nationales du marché du travail. Celui-ci doit être fondé sur le dialogue social et la confiance renouvelée et claire de tous les États membres dans la capacité des employeurs et des organisations syndicales à trouver les compromis nécessaires à une relance équilibrée.

Il est également important de connecter les discussions que nous avons eu aujourd'hui avec celle qui auront lieu demain entre les chefs d'État et de gouvernement. Notre outil pour opérer cette connexion est la déclaration du sommet de Porto qui marque cette journée.

Nous appelons en ce sens les États membres à approuver les trois nouveaux objectifs ambitieux pour 2030 sur l'emploi, la formation professionnelle et la lutte contre la pauvreté.

Ces derniers doivent devenir les phares des nouveaux investissements opérés dans les plans nationaux pour la relance et la résilience et doivent être accompagnés par de nouveaux objectifs quantitatifs sur l'accès à des services d'intérêt généraux de qualités.

Mais au-delà du Pilier et des plans de relance, nous pensons qu'il est aussi temps de nous interroger sur la gouvernance économique européenne. Il s'agit de placer cette réflexion au cœur du débat sur le futur de l'Europe. C'est pour nous le sous-texte de tous les échanges que nous avons eu aujourd'hui.

Le critère de la simple croissance du produit intérieur brut ne peut plus seul nous guider. Les partenaires sociaux européens ont engagé un travail afin de tenir davantage compte des aspects environnementaux et sociaux de la croissance économique « *au-delà du PIB* ». SGI Europe souhaite poursuivre ces travaux avec le soutien des institutions européennes et des États membres et que ce sujet fasse partie de la discussion des chefs d'États et de gouvernements qui aura lieu demain.

Enfin, nous devons engager une révision de la gouvernance économique européenne afin de la faire mieux correspondre aux enjeux de notre époque. Nous appelons de nos vœux sa transformation afin de distinguer enfin la bonne dette pour l'éducation, la recherche et les infrastructures de la mauvaise qui finance les dépenses courantes.

La réponse aux crises doit toujours passer par les investissements productifs et il en va de la responsabilité des institutions européennes et des États Membres de créer une gouvernance économique fondée sur cette idée.

Je vous remercie.

SGI Europe President Pascal Bolo on Skills and innovation

Dear colleagues,

The COVID-19 crisis and lockdown measures have not spared our education and training systems as classes have been suspended and teaching activities partially moved online.

Against this background, I welcome the fact that we can keep the long-term perspective in mind. The Skills agenda for Europe is an excellent initiative at EU level. It needs to be fully implemented and properly connected to other initiatives such as the green deal, next generation EU and of course the action plan on the implementation of the Pillar of social rights.

Our pre-crisis priorities have not changed and were even potentiated by the COVID 19 crisis since they now represent the long-term and sustainable path towards recovery. In particular:

Green Deal - providing people with green skills and attitudes, proactive re-skilling and upskilling of the European workforce

Pooling our efforts towards employee training across Europe to prepare our workers for the green transition is an indispensable and powerful instrument to the materialisation of a sustainable and inclusive model of economic growth.

However, the existing articulations between education and training programmes and the labour market are still insufficient. This is largely reflected in the increasing skills shortages experienced by many of our members in essential utilities facing the transition such as transport, waste management, water energy or housing.

We call for the recovery effort to further materialise the activation of education and training systems for the objective of the green transition.

For this purpose, we welcomed the mention in the green deal of a future European competence framework to help develop and assess knowledge, skills and attitudes on climate change and sustainable development and hope to see further developments of this initiative.

Digital age - digital literacy of every individual, providing skill, promotion of transversal skills

The COVID-19 crisis has shown how important it is that all students have equal access to distance learning, through broadband connections and IT devices, and for every worker to have the necessary digital skills in the era of telework.

Together with the other EU Social Partners, we have adopted our Autonomous framework agreement on digitalisation and our dedicated chapter on *skills* is fully in line with the European key competence framework.

We assessed that Enterprises today need an *adaptive skill set* that includes and combines technical, sector-specific skills, as well as a range of transversal and soft skills and competences like problem-solving capacity, critical thinking, collaborative and communicative skills, co-creation and creativity.

The potential of the education sector to contribute to the digital transformation will highly depend on the ability of the people working in the sector to guide this journey.

Smart investment for the education sector in order to capitalise on COVID-19 experience - digital learning, online solutions, innovative education

To achieve our objectives, we will need effective investment that supports the development of equitable, and sustainable education systems. For this purpose, SGI Europe strongly believes that the implementation of the revised skills agenda should be connected to the future national recovery plans in the context of the new Recovery and Resilience Facility of next generation EU.

Public investment in education has stagnated, losing 0.2 points of GDP between 2002 and 2015. Lack of investment in this field has led to further inequalities in educational attainment, as poorer areas are not being provided with the same quality of education as richer areas.

Those three priorities clearly reflect SGI Europe's belief that Europe will re-emerge even stronger and more sustainable than before from the COVID 19 crisis if public policies at European and national level as well as social dialogue join forces for a systemic approach to skills and innovation, beyond the classic and "market oriented" demand/offer approach to skills developments.

Thank you for your attention.

SGI Europe General Secretary Valeria Ronzitti on Employment and Jobs

Dear colleagues,

The crisis implies that all supportive measures for employment should be maintained for as long as necessary as we are not yet past the emergency.

However, from passive support they should progressively switch to include more Active Labour Market Policy elements addressing structural needs such as labour shortages or skills mismatches, and aiming at new productivity gains.

The twin transition

The deep consequences of the COVID-19 crisis only served to accelerate the transformation connected to the greening and the digitalization of the economy and have renewed the necessity for anticipation of change to become an integral part of our identity.

We now need a much stronger focus on preparing for the twin transition. For this purpose, it was paramount to set ambitious goals at EU level and we therefore welcome the proposals in the Pillar Action plan for new ambitious EU targets on employment and on adult participation in learning. These will be essential to prepare the workforce to the transition.

We also insist on the need to underpin our effort to foster employment with an efficient skeleton of infrastructures. Gender equality is closely connected to the investment in childcare infrastructures to further empower women in the labour market. The modernisation of public administration is also still crucial to undertake in several MS to support our overall efforts, because you can't have successful reforms without an efficient infrastructure supporting their implementation.

But let me now use the opportunity of the Social Summit to also issue two specific calls to Member States.

As a social partner

Member States need to support social partners at the national level in creating an enabling framework for social dialogue. Social Partners are implementing the Pillar everyday as collective bargaining plays a key role in defining, monitoring, and enforcing a wide range of social policies, starting from the workplace.

Collective bargaining is the social partners' "raison d'être" and we count on the implementation of the action plan to reinforce that role.

As a provider of Services of General Interest

We call for a new paradigm: One which guarantees that productive investments in essential services are made into the levers of a recovery which leaves no one behind. Renewed investments in services of general interest will be key to reach sustainable productivity gains as well as an important source of new quality jobs.

SGIs must become the lighthouses of the new Recovery plans' and must be accompanied by new quantitative objectives and targets measuring the access to quality services.

We believe that in the long term to make this possible we need to engage the revision of the Stability and Growth pact in order to make it fit to the challenges of our time. We need to finally make a difference between the good debt for education, research and infrastructures from the bad one which finances current expenditure.

This is the moment or never for Europe to make this shift in paradigm: today and tomorrow can be the beginning of this new path to recovery.

Thank you for your attention.

SGI Europe PT President Luis Natal Marques on Welfare and Social Protection

Dear colleagues,

I welcome the opportunity to discuss welfare and social protection and in particular the lessons we are drawing from the crisis we are facing today.

The pillar of social rights identified the right principles to empower our social protection systems. For my members, providers and employers of services of general interest, the COVID crisis further recalled the importance of competent welfare states and resilient health care systems.

We believe that this understanding should be extended to empower all essential services of general interest which play the key role of enablers for citizens and companies, and are, for us, a prolongation of social protection systems.

The Action Plan for the EPSR and the European Semester

Very concretely, in the Pillar's chapter of Social protection and inclusion we have principles for the access to a wide array of key services from childcare to long-term care, housing and to the wider realm of essential services.

SGI Europe has been calling for years for EU institutions and National Member States to operate a change in paradigm, with recruitment and investment in these services no longer just seen as a cost but as productive long-term investments.

I strongly welcome for this purpose the very concrete steps taken in this direction by the Action plan for the EPSR.

It is crucial to focus on access to quality affordable housing, unmet needs for healthcare and the availability of childcare services.

However, we must also include new measures to ensure the quality of services like public transport, energy and education in the social scoreboard and elsewhere in the European Semester.

From the European level, we need mechanisms to be able to detect and correct our path when quality, accessibility and affordability of essential services are no longer seen as a priority for national policy making.

That is why we are also strongly looking toward the future launch of the High-Level Expert Group which will study the future of the welfare state, its financing and interconnections with the changing world of work or the first ever future EU report on access to essential services.

These initiatives stemming from the Action plan should serve to foster this new paradigm which we believe shall be a structural component of modern social protection systems.

The European Economic governance and the Recovery and resilience Plans

The National recovery and resilience plans already represent a unique opportunity to embrace such a new paradigm, especially when it comes to investing in services and social services of general interest.

These services represent the key interconnexion between the Pillar of Social Rights and our Green and social objectives.

But for this to be effective and to serve the purpose of inclusive welfare and social protection we need to unbind ourselves. We can no longer allow for productive social expenditure to be constrained.

This is a key debate closely connected to the empowerment of welfare and social protection systems. That is why we call for the revision of our fiscal governance agreements to enable

Member States to secure financing for long-term objectives in lifelong education, public health systems and all services of general interest.

We look forward to seizing the opportunity provided by this workshop to further discuss these elements.

Thank you for your attention.