



## **Statement on the Signing of the La Hulpe Declaration**

Today, on 16 April 2024, Social Platform welcomes the signing of the La Hulpe Declaration. In particular, we welcome the inter-institutional commitment by the European Parliament, European Commission & Council of the EU that re-affirms the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR) as the compass for EU policy making, re-commits the EU to meeting the headline Porto Targets and prioritises a 2025 revision of the Action Plan for the EPSR.

In signing the La Hulpe Declaration, it is Social Platform's belief that we can prioritise social progress and meet the Porto targets ahead of 2030 in the next mandate. Social Platform thanks the Belgian Presidency for engaging in structured civil dialogue over the past number of months, which should become the practice, not the exception.

The La Hulpe Declaration is critical to keeping the EPSR high on the agenda, however the finalised Declaration does not reflect the ambition that the people of Europe, Social Platform, and our members, see for the future of social Europe. Political compromises have diluted what should have been a compelling vision for a better society.

The outcome of social policy should, first and foremost, be social progress. The EU's commitment to improving the quality of life of everyone, of a society that prioritises lifting people out of poverty, combatting social exclusion and fighting discrimination should be paramount. The current framing of social policy around competitiveness, productivity and industrial policies is cause for concern.

The European social model is what sets us apart from other regions. Social policies are not 'nice to have' and should not be seen through the lens of competition or industrial policies. Social Platform is concerned that the growing emphasis on these economic arguments will erode our social rights, in the name of competition. We remind member states, European Institutions, as well as social partners, that social protection systems and social policies are frameworks that allow governments to meet their human and social rights obligations.

La Hulpe is a positive step forward from the Porto Social Summit, but Social Platform is disappointed that the Declaration does not go further to propose ambitious ideas for how we want to transform our society. Progress towards the Porto targets are stalling. While poverty hasn't reduced in the past three years energy poverty, financial distress, housing instability and severe material deprivation are all increasing. Ahead of the EU elections, and the start of a new mandate, we fear this has been a missed opportunity to demonstrate how we achieve social progress, rather than merely speaking of its importance.

The space for social policy is shrinking within EU policy making. Both the European Green Deal and the Economic Governance Review have enormous social implications, which



were broadly ignored by policymakers. Social policy cannot continue to be afterthought. The recent rhetoric around the European elections has been focused on promoting industrial policies and prioritising spending in defence over much needed social investments.

Delivering on the La Hulpe Declaration will require more ambitious social policies to ensure Europe meets the Porto targets. The forthcoming revision of the European Pillar of Social Rights isn't just about legislative initiatives, strategies or funding, but the opportunity to decide the type of society we want to work towards in Europe. A prosperous society based on the principles of respect, equality and non-discrimination, that work towards the eradication of poverty, ensuring access to education and skills, with thriving social, health and care services, a strong social economy and where people have access to quality employment and housing. These should be ambitions within their own right, not an upshot of competitiveness or industrial policy.

The fight for Social Europe does not end with La Hulpe, this is only the next step. It is critical that the La Hulpe declaration, and the commitment to the European Pillar of Social Rights is embedded in the forthcoming strategic agenda of the EU. Similarly, both the European Commission and European Parliament must re-affirm the Pillar, and a revised action plan with new proposals to guarantee social progress, as the compass for EU policy making.

In the weeks, months and years ahead Social Platform, and our members, will continue to fight for Social Europe, in particular ensuring the revision of the Action Plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights guarantees social progress and achieves the Porto targets. The Belgian Presidency, future Presidencies of the EU, the European Commission, European Parliament and social partners can rely on Social Platform as an ally in turning our ambition for Social Europe into a reality.