Ministry of Economic Affairs
and Employment of Finland

Jari Lindström
Minister of Justice and Employment

Ms Marianne Thyssen
Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs,
Skills and Labour Mobility
European Commission
1049 Brussels
Belgium

Helsinki, 2 December, 2016

Dear Madam Commissioner,

Please find attached the Joint Nordic Declaration on the European Pillar of Social Rights.

As the Chair of the Nordic Ministers for Labour and Employment in the context of the Finnish Presidency of the Nordic Council of Ministers in 2016, I have the pleasure to send you this declaration on behalf of all Nordic Ministers of Labour and Employment.

The declaration was discussed at the meeting of the Nordic Council of Ministers for Labour and Employment in Helsinki on 29 November 2016.

The Nordic ministers for Labour and Employment urge the Commission to consider our views and take into account also the special features of the Nordic Labour Markets when preparing a proposal on European Pillar of Social Rights.

Let me finally take the opportunity to thank you for your visit in Helsinki on the 10th of November.

Yours faithfully

Jari Lindström
Minister of Justice and Employment

Enc. The Joint Nordic Declaration on the European Pillar of Social Rights.

Joint Nordic Declaration on the European Pillar of Social Rights
Adopted
Date: 29 November, 2016
Location: Helsinki
Nordic Council of Ministers for Labour (MR-A)

At the meeting of the Nordic Council of Ministers for Labour in Helsinki on 29 November 2016, we – the Nordic Ministers for Employment and Labour – discussed the proposal for a European Pillar of Social Rights and its relationship to the Nordic Labour Markets.

The communication on the European Pillar of Social Rights presents an ambitious initiative. The Nordic countries support the aim to examine the broader labour market and social tendencies deriving from demographic changes, new technologies and other factors. EU level discussions on these issues are topical. A wide consultation process including the social partners and civil society is also supported.

We have a common responsibility for and interest in working towards a more prosperous Europe. It is more important than ever to come together to discuss how targeted efforts for employment and social progress in our Member States can contribute to this and deliver on issues that matter for the future of our citizens and of the EU.

A European Pillar of Social Rights is relevant to all EU and EEA countries. Well-functioning labour markets and social protection systems are important to all EU and EEA countries. Good working conditions are fundamental to our citizens and necessary both in the EU and EEA countries also in order to ensure a level playing field for enterprises. For these reasons it is important to ensure that a Pillar is discussed and decided by all Member States, and that it remains open to all Member States on equal terms.

It is important to respect national competences and the principle of subsidiarity under the current EU Treaties when drawing up a Pillar. We do not support any changes to the competences between the EU and its Member States.

In our view, a Pillar should set a common vision and principles to contribute to a more prosperous EU. Existing tools and processes could be used in order to implement it, while also assessing employment and social impacts of various EU policies and actions.

The Nordic experience shows that it is possible to combine social progress with growth and job creation. A strong Europe should be built on the interplay between growth, competitiveness and solidarity, where growth and social progress are mutually reinforcing. The Nordic success factors in this process should be reflected in the upcoming Pillar of social rights.

The aim should be to support Member States in achieving inclusive societies and labour markets - with high participation in the labour market of both women and men and social protection for all. A gender perspective and gender equality objectives have to be integrated in the Pillar and its sections.

The Pillar should also respect the national labour market models and social models and their different policy mixes. Member States have different starting points and different strengths and challenges and there is no "one size fits all"-solution to create social progress. Despite similarities, substantial differences exist also between the labour market and social models of the Nordic countries.

The Pillar must respect the important role of social partners in the Nordic labour markets. The social partners' autonomy and their right to bargain collectively on wages and other terms of employment must be upheld. The key role and large responsibility of the social partners have contributed greatly to the positive employment and social outcomes of our countries.

Finally, while drawing up a Pillar of Social Rights it is important to keep focusing on Member States' efforts to ensure sound public finances, while respecting labour rights in accordance with EU legislation and other international obligations.

We urge the Commission to consider these points in the further work with preparing a proposal on a European Pillar of Social Rights.

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