

Last year, major initiatives regarding the social dimension of the European Union have been launched, notably the proclamation of the European Pillar of Social Rights in Gothenburg in November. Thus, 2017 might mark a turning point in the development of the social dimension of European integration. These initiatives signal the emergence of a new paradigm, but the jury is still out about its real and lasting impact. Next to the imperative to translate the solemn declaration of Gothenburg into tangible measures, the debate on social Europe remains handicapped by confusion and contradictory views about the role the Union should play in social policy. Therefore, in the first part of this paper we briefly explain why a social dimension has become a necessity for the European Union, even though the Union has no vocation to become a Welfare State. In the following sections, we identify three areas in which concrete action by the Union is necessary: promoting upward convergence in social standards and performance; guaranteeing fair mobility; and making investment in human capital a leitmotif of European action.

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