

The European Commission
Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights
Mr. Nicolas Schmit

Shared EU and Nordic priorities for the future of our labour markets

Dear Commissioner

Congratulations on your recent appointment as European Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights.

The Nordic Council of Ministers for Labour looks forward to starting a fruitful and constructive cooperation and dialogue with you. We agree with you on the need to develop an even stronger, more sustainable and socially inclusive Europe. In order to begin this dialogue we would like to invite you to participate in our next Ministerial Meeting on 2 April 2020 in Copenhagen.

Based on our Nordic Models and experiences, we would like to share with you some priorities that we, with the respect of the division of competences and the autonomy of the social partners, believe should be at the center of the Union's policies.

A future based on social responsibility and fair mobility

Across the EU and the Nordic countries, the past years of economic growth and improved employment outcomes have positively contributed to the overall well-being of women and men. At the same time, the good years give us the opportunity and responsibility to bring more people into employment, not least by equipping our workforce with the skills of tomorrow. In doing so, we would create a more socially inclusive Europe

Based on our Nordic experiences, we look forward to continued cooperation, sharing of experiences and good practice on the topic of labour market adjustments, as well as on the broader issue of "the future of work", including the platform economy. It is important to reflect on these issues in the years ahead as EU activities should respond to the current challenges in our labour markets.

Labour mobility, including the free movement of workers, is of central importance to businesses' access to qualified labour, preventing bottlenecks and allowing businesses to compete on a global scale.

However, in order to achieve a more socially responsible Europe and ensure the continued public support for labour mobility, it needs to be *fair*.

It is important to fight social dumping and abusive practices in the EU and ensure a level playing field in the Single Market.

A safe and healthy work environment across the EU

No one should go to work fearing for her/his health and safety. The EU's occupational safety and health rules should be ambitious, up-to-date and effectively implemented and enforced. The Nordic countries support the new Commission's efforts in the area of occupational safety and health, including the adoption of a new EU Strategic Framework on Health and Safety at Work. Addressing occupational safety and health challenges is important for many reasons such as changing working life, psychosocial risks, gender equality, preventing fatal accidents and protecting workers from diseases such as cancer caused by the use of dangerous substances. The work should be based on the latest research while involving the social partners.

A future European success based on strong social dialogue and national labour markets

The European Union is playing a crucial role in ensuring economic and social growth in Europe, including the Nordic countries. The EU needs to continue having jobs and growth at the center of EU policies post 2020.

The challenges that the Member States face are often similar, but not identical. That is why it is important that the specificities of each country are taken into account and respected.

In our view, the principle "big on big issues, small on small issues" has served the outgoing Commission well and should continue to be a guiding principle. In a Nordic spirit, an essential aspect of achieving this is to strengthen the social dialogue both nationally and at EU-level, including by encouraging higher union density and promoting the possibility for the social partners to find solutions to labour market challenges, many of which require nationally tailored measures.

Therefore, we very much welcome the assurances you gave *inter alia* at the hearing in the European Parliament of your respect for systems based on collective bargaining, i.e. that any future initiative on minimum wage will not interfere with labour market models where wages are regulated by collective agreements. For the Nordic countries, it is crucial that we can secure the functioning of our labour market model that relies on collective bargaining.

Equal economic independence of women and men

There is a close link between gender equality and economic growth. High levels of employment for both women and men are crucial for economic growth, and investments in gender equality contribute to the sustainability of society. This is an integral part of the Nordic model.

However, both in the Nordic countries and the EU women still take a larger responsibility for the unpaid work at home and the care of children and other dependents than men. Women also take longer career breaks than men and are more likely to choose part-time work to reconcile work and care responsibilities. Furthermore, the European labour markets are still occupationally gender segregated, and equal pay continues to be an issue.

In the view of the Nordic countries, it is imperative to strengthen the promotion of gender equality in the EU. Therefore, we warmly welcome the new Commis-

sion's plan to set forth an EU gender equality strategy and suggest that the Commissioner for Jobs and Social Rights contributes actively to the realization of this. The EU needs a powerful, comprehensive and sustainable Gender Equality Strategy. The strategy should have clear goals, be followed-up, and its implementation evaluated and reviewed within the Council.

To conclude, the Nordic Council of Ministers for Labour is looking into the future of the EU labour markets with great anticipation and ambition, while emphasizing the importance of implementing and applying existing measures, legislation and systems, as well as the recognition of effective and well-functioning labour market models such as the Nordic. We hope to have a chance to discuss these topics with you in a near future.

Yours sincerely

Sweden



Eva Nordmark
Minister for Employment

Finland



Tuula Haatainen
Minister of Employment

Norway



Anniken Hauglie
Minister of Labour and Social Affairs



Aino-Kaisa Pekonen
Minister of Social Affairs and Health

Iceland



Ásmundur Einar Daðason
Minister of Social Affairs and Equality

Denmark



Peter Hummelgaard
Minister for Employment