<div align="center">**Komal Tilekar**</div>

<div align="center">**Social Europe: A Pipedream?**</div>

A dream waiting to be a reality!

First and foremost, is 'Social Europe' synonymous with Social Policy and/or Welfare Policy, or might it mean something else? While approaching this topic the author had two understandings of the term 'Social Europe', one of them was about European society as a whole and the ensuing discussion on culture and identity and the challenges The European Union faces today to mold Europe into one society. Interestingly it was the other idea of a 'Socialist Europe 'that seemed more relevant to write about in light of current events.

In the context of rising populism and Euroscepticism, a credible social dimension is imperative to strengthen the political legitimacy of the European project. Citizens legitimately expect that European integration provides them with improvements in their living and working conditions; the European Union must rise to that challenge. The argument in favor of Social Europe goes beyond the mere "functional requirements" of the Monetary Union and the Single Market in the abstract. These two projects must serve the fundamental aspiration of the European project, that is, to promote both upward convergences between the Member States and cohesion within the States. Hence, the challenge is not just to define "a level playing field"; the challenge is to create the conditions for effective upward social convergence.

The European Pillar of Social Rights was adopted in 2017 at the Gothenburg Summit. The Pillar sets out 20 key principles which represent the beacon guiding us toward a strong social Europe that is fair, inclusive, and full of opportunity in the 21st century.

The idea of Social Europe revolves around this vision of a socially equitable and sustainable Europe based on international solidarity. The 20 key principles focus on topics of social importance such as education, skill training, gender equality, equal opportunity, active support for employment, fairer wages and working conditions, social protection, and inclusion. The European Commission has taken many steps and action plans to bring these principles to work such as the Council recommendation on access to social protection, EU strategic framework on health and safety at work 2021-2027, Action plan on integration and inclusion, Council Recommendation for Vocational Education and Training and many others.

These documents present in theory the goals of the European Union, but these are far from creating real changes in the economy and society towards achieving a 'Socialist Europe' The cost of living is currently the number one concern for people across the EU. With energy supplies becoming a priority due to the war in Ukraine, people focus on paying their bills. If the European Union is to

meet its climate ambitions, the right policies need to be in place to ensure that the transition is socially just and everyone is brought along. The major policies of the European Union have not reflected this vision thus far. The EU policy from the post-WW2 era is frequently based on the radically market-oriented logic of competition both within the EU and towards the rest of the world. One of the main challenges to Social Europe is the economic crisis that has affected many EU countries. High unemployment rates, especially among young people, have led to increased poverty and social exclusion. In addition, austerity measures implemented by some governments to address the crisis have reduced public spending on social programs and services, making it difficult to maintain a fair and equal social system.

Another challenge is the increasing social and economic inequality within and between EU countries. The economic and social disparities between the northern and southern European countries have widened in recent years, leading to a growing divide in living standards, job opportunities, and access to services. This has resulted in increased social tensions and political polarization, which have undermined the values of solidarity and cohesion that are at the core of Social Europe.

The rise of populism and nationalism in some EU countries is also a challenge to Social Europe. These movements often promote anti-immigrant and anti-European sentiments, which undermine the values of openness, diversity, and cooperation that are necessary for a unified and fair social system. The lack of a common European identity and a shared vision for the future of the EU makes it difficult to address these challenges and promote a strong and cohesive social Europe.

Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for a more resilient and coordinated European response to social challenges. The pandemic has exposed and exacerbated existing inequalities and vulnerabilities, particularly for marginalized and vulnerable groups. It has also demonstrated the importance of solidarity and cooperation in addressing common challenges and ensuring social protection for all citizens.

In conclusion, Social Europe still faces many challenges that need to be addressed to ensure a fair and equal social system for all citizens of the EU. These challenges require a coordinated and collaborative effort by all EU countries to promote solidarity, cooperation, and a shared vision for the future of the EU.

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