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"What kind of Social Europe after the crisis?"

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Tribune by Isabel Mota

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Speaking both on behalf of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's Board of Directors and in a personal capacity, I am delighted to be able to open this debate today.

This seminar, devoted to the future of the European social model, is particularly significant in that it marks the start of cooperation between the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation and the Notre Europe - Jacques Delors Institute following the signing of a Memorandum of Cooperation between the two institutions when Jacques Delors visited Lisbon in June of this year.

The partnership has already scheduled a number of initiatives for next year, both in Paris and in Lisbon, addressing issues that are of crucial importance for Europe's future, such as European democracy and the new exercise of citizenship, or the issue of the European economy's competitiveness. Our motivation for these debates is all the greater for knowing that these issues hold an important place in the discussion ahead of the upcoming European elections.

The viability of the European social model, the topic to which our seminar here today is devoted, is unquestionably one of the central issues which are going to determine our continent's future, and on which we can no longer afford to postpone a debate.

Europe and its social component have always been at the very heart of the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation's concerns. Indeed, I would remind you that we held a major international conference devoted precisely to social Europe as long ago as in 1997 - a conference which Jacques Delors, a good friend of the Foundation and of Portugal since way back, did us the honour of closing.

On that occasion Jacques Delors said: "When we talk about social policy, we can say that it lies at the very heart of the European countries' history. It is the thing that has shaped their societies and the way they organise their power structures of power and their public institutions. Hence it isn't any accident that we talk about a European social model and that some of us are doing our level best to defend it, albeit while tailoring it to totally new circumstances".

This statement, uttered almost twenty years ago, is still absolutely topical today, and in fact we may turn to it as the starting point for this seminar, especially at a time when the European Union's social dimension is resuming its central importance, a time when social and employment policies are high on the European agenda.

In the context of our present crisis, where levels of poverty and of social exclusion have risen drastically – and I am not referring only to the southern countries or to those currently benefiting from financial assistance from the Troïka – social justice has become an imperative which Europe's leaders cannot ignore.

Here are three social issues which Europe must tackle and for which it is urgent to come up with the best solutions in a European social framework.

- **Unemployment**, particularly among young people, is one of the primary causes of inequality, and thus of tension among communities. We have to come up with new ways of enhancing the human capital in which Europe has invested so much and which it cannot afford to waste.
- The **Ageing** of our populations is an enormous challenge that Europe is facing, and it demands that we rethink our retirement pension systems, our social security, our health care and even the problem of accessibility in our town and cities.
- **Migration**: Europe has always lived and grown thanks to the growing mobility and diversity of its communities, and the issue of integration models for immigrants to Europe is now back on the agenda. So it is important that we build a new consensus around the promotion of more inclusive policies in which everyone can take part.

Social innovation must continue to play a role of the utmost importance in the construction of the European social model. At a time when the European Union might be experiencing its most serious economic and social crisis yet, innovation must be seen as an essential component of change. What we need to do is to promote the kind of structural change in which a competitive economy, social inclusion and environmental sustainability can exist side by side in a multi-faceted manner.

Foundations benefiting from broad experience in the sphere of social innovation are picking up the challenge of shouldering new responsibilities in this field, particularly at a time when governments are starting to pull back from their traditional areas of intervention.

Intervention on the part of foundations – with their independence, their flexibility and their ability to take risks – can play an important role in this regard because they can test and disseminate innovative practices in the struggle against poverty and in the promotion of social inclusion.

In particular, in seeking to have an impact on society, foundations play an incentivising role in fostering the right conditions to test new solutions to social problems, and once those solutions have passed the test by achieving the required results, they can be adapted and replicated in different contexts.

Moreover, the proximity with field-based institutions and problems that is such a feature of the way they operate, also represents a comparative advantage for foundations in their effort to identify effective practices for innovation and creativity that can then be disseminated.

This is what the Calouste Gulbenkian Foundation does, focusing in particular on the spirit of enterprise and of social innovation, which are structural elements in everything that we do.

Nevertheless, innovation cannot focus only on responses. It is also important that we first rethink the model of development on the basis of which we plan these strategies. We can no longer expect governments to resolve these problems. Of course, governments are crucial players in the process, but other sectors – the private sector and the third sector – also have a very important role to play.

So we need to debate the European social model not in the context of the "welfare state" as such but also, or more especially, in its definition as a "welfare society" based on models of integrated governance and integrated responsibility.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The solution to the challenge that Europe is facing today depends to a large extent on a political response. But at the same time, it is crucial for that response to involve all sectors of society in a social dialogue as essential as it is useful.

The goal that has driven the organisation of this seminar is to get a group of figures representing the various different sectors of society to sit down together around a single table in order to contribute, in a climate of openness, harmony and mutual consultation, to the expansion of this debate on the social state to the level of the European institutions.

So I would like to thank all of you for accepting our invitation, especially European Commissioner Lázlo Andor, who will doubtless be talking to you this afternoon about the European Commission's most recent initiatives in this field, the importance of which is borne out by the Commission's communication in October highlighting the need to strengthen the social dimension of the Economic and Monetary Union.

I hope that our meeting today will help to shed light on solutions and points of convergence in connection with these issues, because that is the only way to renew the agenda of the commitment to Europe that binds us together.

Thank you.