# CEPLIS TELEGRAM

European Council of the Liberal Professions

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- SP4SE – Mid-Project Meeting in Dublin
- Reply of the European Commission to the European Court of Auditors' Special Report
- Mario Draghi's Report on the future of European competitiveness
- Von der Leyen Unveils the Commissioner-Candidate – what it Means for Liberal Professions

# SP4SE – Mid-Project Meeting in Dublin

On May 6th and 7th, CEPLIS actively participated in a steering meeting of the project Social Protection for a Social Europe (SP4SE) generously hosted by our Irish partners in Dublin. It was the occasion for all partners and associated partners to take stock of the progresses made and plan the next phases of our action. Represented by Policy Advisor Baptiste Deprez, CEPLIS is very eager to bring our experience in the working groups that it will supervise.

*The SP4SE Team*

**Launched in September 2023 under the leadership of ConfProfessioni, who had the initiative and acts as the project manager, the project is co-financed by the European Union.** Through a series of research and consultation, SP4SE aims to provide European legislators with a new framework for harmonising social protection systems for liberal professions, thus ensuring they are all protected in times of uncertainty. **SP4SE is also in line with the Commission's priorities fleshed out by Agenda 2030 and the European Pillar of Social Rights.**

Focusing on selected topics, the project aims to elaborate in partnership with civil society organisations, proposals on best practices to implement at the European level, as well as a model of social protection for liberal professionals.

This event was the opportunity for all participants to discuss the technical details of the implementation of the project. Fruitful debates enabled us all to grasp and engage with the topics. The project will continue its course, and CEPLIS will keep you updated as milestones are reached.

## Reply of the European Commission to the European Court of Auditors' Special Report

As you remember, CEPLIS informed you by general mail on July 8th, 2024, and through our Telegram N°11, the European Court of Auditors (ECA) issued in July 2024 a special report on the implementation of the Professional Qualifications Directive.


The European Commission, and more precisely, the current caretaker Executive, released its response to the Report's conclusions. As expected, it does not amount to more than a polite admission of some failures and hollow commitments to improve the situation.

In it, the Commission does recognise the importance of an effective system for recognising professional qualifications in cases where professions are regulated. Despite the current and lingering situation, it has announced that it is committed to enhancing the recognition of professional qualifications by simplifying and speeding up procedures, making them more affordable and accessible, and leveraging digital tools like the Internal Market Information System (IMI) and European Digital Credentials for Learning.

In the Commission's responses to the ECA's main observations, the EU caretaker Executive states it is crucial to limit compensation measures for educational disparities to case-by-case assessments and minimise prior checks for temporary services unless they affect public health or public safety. The Commission supports faster recognition through digital solutions and has initiated infringement proceedings against Member States that fail to meet deadlines. The Institution is allegedly considering improvements and expansion of digital processes such as the European Professional Card (EPC) and the feasibility of new common training frameworks (CTFs).

The European Commission agrees on the need for consistent application, including the potential to involve an independent body in proportionality tests and clarifying public health implications. It targets the implementation of this measure for 2025.  The Institution also shared other initiatives, such as simplifying and updating Annex V or exploring opportunities LLM chatbots offer.

While CEPLIS welcomes this response, it is crucial to remember that it has been shared by the current caretaker executive, which cannot guarantee that those commitments will be honoured and that the mentioned proposals will be implemented. As such, our professions must continue our actions towards policymakers. CEPLIS will obviously keep you updated on this subject. Do feel free to contact our Secretariat.

## Mario Draghi's Report on the future of European competitiveness

Former European Central Bank president Mario Draghi had been tasked by the European Commission to prepare a report laying out his vision for the future of European competitiveness. The Commission's request fits into the broader context of maintaining the EU's global leadership and competitiveness and achieving competitive and sustainable prosperity.


In particular, this includes the development of the new Clean Industrial Deal for competitive industries and high-quality jobs. The Political Policy Guidelines for the new Commission period 2024-2029, published by Commission President Ursula von der Leyen in July 2024, also anticipate Draghi's Report in parts. As we told you in Telegram 11, the issue of competitiveness and innovation will be central to the next Commission's agenda.

The Report identifies three main areas where action is needed to reignite growth:
- Closing the innovation gap with the US and China, particularly in advanced technologies, as innovation is not being effectively commercialised, and companies in Europe face restrictive regulations when attempting to scale.
- Developing a joint plan for decarbonisation and improving competitiveness in accordance with Europe's ambitious climate goals.

- Enhancing security and reducing dependency through, among other things, establishing a genuine EU foreign economic policy and strengthening industrial defence capabilities.

**For the former Italian Prime Minister and ECB President, European companies are facing significant skills gaps and labour shortages, hindering the EU's competitiveness and progress in key areas, like emerging technologies, green and digital transitions, and business development. Around 81% of companies view the lack of skilled workers as a major obstacle to long-term investment, second only to high energy costs. On average, 54% of European companies consider skills shortages one of their most pressing problems. This issue affects both large firms and SMEs and spans multiple industries.**

In addition to shortages, the European labour market also suffers from mismatches between skills available and those required. This misalignment is mainly the consequence of inadequate education and training, which can result in overqualification or underqualification. Moreover, the lack of digital and managerial skills, especially in SMEs, further contributes to this gap. According to the Report, this situation will likely worsen as future labour markets become more automated and demand higher-skilled workers, particularly in green and digital sectors.

Addressing these shortages requires action, particularly in managerial capabilities, which will be essential for the effective adoption of new technologies. Many SMEs lack modern management practices due to financial constraints and misperceptions about the importance of management skills. As such, the Report suggests proposals to promote managerial skills in SMEs by creating accreditation systems and training incentives as well as by facilitating the acquisition of managerial skills through vouchers to hire temporary managers.

The EU currently lacks a comprehensive and performing approach to adult learning, mainly due to the lack of coordination and the excessive dispersion of activities and investments among Member States. Mario Draghi thus suggests ensuring investment by private and public stakeholders in adult learning. For this to be successful, the balance of benefits and costs must be positive for both the employee and the employer. The latter is especially challenging for SMEs, whose training costs are often higher due to a lack of scale.

**Additionally, the EU needs to simplify its regulatory framework, especially for SMEs and mid-cap companies, to reduce their administrative burden and improve competitiveness on global markets. Proposals include the creation of a "Vice-President for Simplification" and the implementation of a single and clear methodology for assessing the cost of new legislation, which would help ensure proportionality in regulations affecting SMEs and mid-caps, thereby boosting innovation and competitiveness across the EU.**

The main challenge for the European Commission is now to convince Member States that the ambitious proposals laid out by Mario Draghi are the necessary remedies to the EU's sluggish economy and continuous economic decline. In particular, some proposals have already met fierce resistance from frugal countries such as Germany and The Netherlands and from Eurosceptics of the likes of Hungary.

## VDL unveils the new Commissioner-Candidates – What it Means for Liberal Professions

On Tuesday, 17th September, after weeks of fierce negotiations with Member States and tricky balancing, Ursula von der Leyen presented to the press her proposal for the new College of Commissioners against the backdrop of several geopolitical crises, serious economic concerns, and internal.

As she made clear before and during the press conference, **Von der Leyen wants more coordination and interdependency between the Commissioners.** To reflect that "you cannot put reality in boxes", she decided to remove the title of "Vice-President" and to grant the six Executive Vice-Presidents portfolios of their own. In an attempt to deflect the accusation of Presidentialism, VDL insisted on the independence and responsibility of each Commissioner.

The press conference was also the occasion for Von der Leyen to signal her priorities for the next mandate. **As expected, Climate Policy has been relegated to a secondary role to give way to the burning topics of security, competitiveness, and industrial strategy/innovation. Those topics span almost all portfolios and are thus likely to be the overarching priorities for the new mandate.**

**The new College will feature an Executive Vice-President who is also going to be Commissioner for Prosperity and Industrial Strategy, the Candidate for the position being Stéphane Séjourné.** Swiftly nominated as the new French pick after the shock resignation of former Internal Market Commissioner Thierry Breton, most reports agree that he would likely have a more constructive working relationship with Von Der Leyen than his predecessor, renowned in Brussels for never missing an occasion to openly undermine

the president’s authority. S**téphane Séjourné will, if confirmed, be responsible for the industry (including industrial policy), the Single Market, and economic security portfolios. Crucially, von der Leyen has been keen on emphasizing SME policies in detailing the responsibilities of the future Commissioner.**

Despite his relatively young age, the French pick is an experienced politician. Outgoing French Minister for European and Foreign Affairs and recently elected MP, he is also the former President of Renew Europe in the European Parliament. His academic and professional experience in European Affairs and his ideological and personal proximity to French President Emmanuel Macron and outgoing Prime Minister Gabriel Attal most definitely played to his advantage.

**In a surprising renaming, Ursula von der Leyen changed the title of Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs into Commissioner for Skills, Education, and Social Rights. For this post, she decided to appoint Romanian MEP Roxana Minzatu, who will likely, as the renaming suggests, direct her focus to the acute issue of skill shortages facing the European Union.**

**Former Romanian MP, and Secretary of State or Minister for European Funds, she has recently been elected to the European Parliament and currently sits within the S&Ds.**

While the new College of Commissioners remains to be approved by the European Parliament, her speech and nominations indicate that Ursula von der Leyen wishes the Commission to take new responsibilities on topics previously left to the Member States and to stretch the Treaty provisions as much as possible. As events unfold, CEPLIS will keep you updated.