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## PROMINENT MEP PROVIDES INSIGHT INTO THE ROME DECLARATION

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As the Rome declaration is finalised, Portuguese Partido Socialista MEP Maria João Rodrigues (S&D) provided insight yesterday (21 March) about what ideally it should contain, in anticipation of its unveiling.

On the occasion of the 60th anniversary of the Treaty of Rome, EU leaders will hold a summit in the Italian capital on 25 March in the hope of issuing a positive message for the Union, which is faced with multiple crises.

The drafting process of the Rome declaration, Rodrigues explained, was extremely secretive, and was involving sherpas representing the prime ministers and the presidents of the EU institutions. It is most likely that the declaration, expected to be two pages long, will be signed by the representatives of the member states, plus the representatives of the EU institutions.

What is at stake is that 60 years on, Rodrigues said, is that the European project could be described as an economic entity, or, conversely, it could be described as a fully-fledged political, economic, social, and cultural entity, working on a democratic basis.

The S&D lawmaker said this was the central issue, and that it was high time for the EU to identify itself according to the second description. Moreover, the international context has changed completely following the election of Donald Trump, and the multilateral order built after World War II could change to the extent of once again allowing nationalisms to clash.

Moscovici: 'Trump will bring more nationalism and protectionism'

Commissioner for Economic Affairs Pierre Moscovici agrees with the wait and see approach toward new US President Donald Trump mostly shared by the global elite in the in Davos. But he sees more nationalism and protectionism coming from the White House.

This is very worrying. The first task for the EU is to ensure full support of the multilateral system of order, when it comes to issues of peace, trade, democracy, sustainable development, she said.

Following the Trump administrations statements casting doubt over Americas role in NATO, she said that Europeans needed to make sure to have their own means, complementary to NATO, to ensure their defence. Lets see how far the declaration goes on this commitment to building a European defence capacity. This is still not clear, she said.

Nervous NATO allies seek reassurance from Trump's defence chief

European allies will tell the United States new defence secretary on Wednesday (15 February) that NATO is not the weak alliance US President Donald Trump has accused it of being, at one of the most anticipated NATO meetings in years.

According to Rodrigues, another issue was internal security, and it also remains to be seen, according to the text of the declaration, whether security would not be provided at the expense of fundamental human rights. The central test, she said, is the way the EU deals with the refugee crisis.

The only solution to enable the proper management of migration, she said, is to set up a real European asylum system and support the development of the European neighbourhood.

Merkel warns of return to nationalism unless EU protects borders

German Chancellor Angela Merkel yesterday (5 May) urged European leaders to protect EU borders or risk a return to nationalism as the continent battles its worst migration crisis since World War II.

Again, we don't know how far the declaration will go, Rodrigues added.

Another element to be watched, she said, is what kind of commitment the declaration will provide to EU citizens. A big test would be if the declaration connects with European citizens as such, and if the expression European citizens is contained in it at all. We still don't know, she added.

In addition, the issue of fundamental rights, including social rights appearing in the declaration, is important, and how far it goes in strengthening the social dimension of European integration, she said.

Economic and social cohesion has been a concern since the Rome Treaty, but now, in my view, it is being forgotten, Rodrigues said, speaking about inequalities among the regions and eurozone imbalances.

The eurozone is another source of divergence. We need to complete and re-balance the eurozone. The declaration speaks about providing prosperity for all, but without real means, this is not credible, she said, adding that this is another risk for the declaration.

Asked by EURACTIV.com why she thought the Rome declaration was so important, given the fact that the process of re-thinking the future of the EU is expected to last until December, Rodrigues said: The Rome declaration should show the direction in a good way – the level of ambition and the direction.

The MEP stated that in the five scenarios proposed by Jean-Claude Juncker, she wanted to see a scenario that is not there. In her view, scenario number 5, doing much more together, is a caricature and was put there intentionally, just for the sake of having it.

Juncker's real scenario is multi-speed Europe

Of all five scenarios proposed by Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker for the way forward after Brexit, the real scenario is Number 3: Those who want more do more, which is another way of

saying that the EU will be multi-speed, EURACTIV.com was told.

I would rather define a convincing scenario as doing much better together on the relevant issues, she said.

Opinion leaders identify seven pillars for better' EU action

CIVICO-Europa, an informal group set up by opinion leaders and later supported by politicians, presented today (20 March) a manifesto for the future of Europe, based on doing much better together, rather than the traditional way of doing more.

Asked about the ideas of multi-speed Europe, Rodrigues said she believe it was possible to achieve deepening in an inclusive way. The EU at different levels is unacceptable. It undermines the principle of equality of member states, she said.

We should not add new criteria, new benchmarks, and all countries should jointly discuss the rules, she stated.

The objective of economic and social cohesion should be open to EU countries fully sharing the European project, Rodrigues said, pointing to Bulgaria and Romania.

Asked about the Visegrád countries, who oppose the EUs relocation policy, the lawmaker stated: We see the difference with Visegrád, adding that it was wrong to put all Central and Eastern countries in the same bag. But she added that she remained convinced that a majority of Poles remained pro-European.

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