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Executive Summary of the 4th Meeting

“The most important thing is taking part”.

This - hackneyed or consolatory - quotation from Pierre de Coubertin has been given new legitimacy, as accurately reflecting a constant refrain of the delegates: the important thing is taking part in the European Meetings, being there to say what poverty is, being there to say that poverty is not a horrid inevitability, there is no guilt attached to it, and that people experiencing poverty can not just exercise their voice, but also analyse and take action.

Their testimony at this Meeting made it possible to address the image of poverty - that self-formed by those enduring it, and that formed by others.

Unanimity

The unanimous view was that the image of poverty is often stereotyped and even grossly distorted, and that the media tend to approach it from a sensation-seeking and seasonal angle.

There was near-unanimity that the current NAPs were quite inaccessible, and that people experiencing poverty must be involved in them from development, through to evaluation. A dialogue has been started up in some Member States, and only needs to develop further.

There was general agreement that good practises are to be found; that different kinds of key contacts and journalists can be allies in tackling poverty; that there are always some with ethical standards who can understand what poverty is; and that many key contacts and actors could benefit from training by “experiential experts”, as is starting to be done in Belgium.

Subjects not closed

Outstanding issues from previous Meetings – jobs, discrimination and racism, liberalization of services and support for anti-poverty mechanisms and networks – were clarified and updated, but still have not been fully explored.

Access to employment remains an acute problem; but it is no longer just the jobless who are poor, but also those in work: **14 million working poor in Europe.** It is a bewildering figure that casts serious doubt on the outpouring of slogans like “jobs and growth are a way to tackle poverty”. More growth and more jobs do not spell less poverty. Should this finding be borne out, the Commission has pledged to take action towards the governments.

The **trade unions are fully involved** in the fight against poverty, in collaboration with all social and political actors. The absolute necessity of establishing a minimum income was placed firmly centre stage, and emphatically supported by the European Commission.

Social exclusion is even worse for immigrants and minorities.

The fight against poverty cannot be divorced from that against discrimination and racism which, the Commission pointed out, is a matter of rights for legally resident migrants in Europe.

Liberalization of services was another concern: while the debate on the concept of services of general interest may be ongoing, and there is a European reference to universal services like electricity and water having to be affordable, the plain fact is that none of these services is liberalized. Europe can only remind governments of the need to fulfil their regulatory responsibilities for the supply of “universal goods”.

And what of social and health services?

There was universal agreement that social and health services should not fall within the European directive on services in the internal market.

Building more effective networks to combat against poverty, especially through better funding, is still called for.

Participation by people experiencing poverty?

The French and Dutch rejections of the constitutional Treaty are less a snub to Europe than its fail-

ure to communicate and inform, and a reminder of the importance of the local, “face to face”, level in a steadily-expanding Europe. This level of decision-making and participation is cardinaly important in the fight against poverty.

A voluntary community (circulatory) system spreading from the local to European level exists or is developing in the fight against poverty: networks enabling a two-way up-down flow are developing; they are as yet under-developed, but only need strengthening to consolidate a dialogue that is under way. Promoting participation also involves setting up structures and mechanisms to encourage the circulation of lifeblood throughout the (social) body.

Dialogue must be established with Europe, but also with key contacts and local politicians, who also project the image of poverty, and can portray it negatively through the figures, or positively by implementing concerted policies.

The local level, voluntary networks, ongoing dialogue between people experiencing poverty, their organisations and policy makers, factoring in expertise and experiences as the foundations of a new solidarity-based social Europe in which the fight against poverty is mainstreamed across all areas where there is exclusion: this is what was said and happened at the 4th Meeting. And all participants learnt something from one another, all have something to give, all can and want to contribute to building a more just society.

So where is the blockage?

Probably, somewhere in the middle:

- training social service practitioners and educators in how to co-operate.
- building awareness in front line administration.
- faltering mainstreaming, i.e., too little integration of actors who also influence the creation of poverty, like the criminal justice system, education (from basic to specialised), care provision, transport, urban planning and development ... to cite only the most obvious.
- dispelling the fear of sliding into poverty: manipulated by some superficial, sensation-seeking, profit-driven and not always free media, “Mr and Mrs Average” want to continue thinking themselves safe from poverty. But it is a delusion that does not stand up to the shock of the reality of poverty, which shows how fine a line there is between social inclusion and exclusion, leaving “Mr and Mrs Average” in no doubt that they could be tomorrow’s excluded.

The outstanding innovation of the 4th Meeting is to have opened up the dialogue between the “ambassadors” of people experiencing poverty and “invited guests”, the key contacts at official and decision-making levels. They are insistent that the dialogue must go on, that “better understanding comes from talking face to face” and that the European Lisbon Strategy must be taken forward.



Poverty is...

When everyone, your family and society turns their back on you.

A hard day's life.

Never being able to plan or make decisions.

Not actually living, just existing.

Losing your dignity.

Being excluded further from society every day.

Worst of all, having no rights, only obligations.

Introduction

In the first half of 2001, under Belgium's Presidency of the European Union, the Minister for Social Integration, Mr Vande Lanotte, floated the idea of a European Meeting of people experiencing poverty on the topic "We also participate in Europe". The planned Meeting was linked into the EU's Lisbon Strategy, decided in 2000, and focused on eliminating poverty in the European Community by 2010. The Strategy was consolidated at the 2002 Nice Summit by objectives which included **mobilising all relevant bodies, including people experiencing poverty.**

December 2001 therefore saw the first of these European Meeting of people experiencing poverty taking place in Brussels, as a two-day series of discussions between delegates from various EU countries on the general theme of participation against the background of issues like housing, employment, income and health.

At the end of the Meeting, the delegates asked for this process of exchange to be taken forward, and the Belgian Minister pledged to organise a 2nd Meeting.

In 2003, the Greek Presidency took up the initiative and backed the idea of recurring European Meetings. The delegations returned to Brussels to talk about participation and especially to identify obstacles and incentives to participation.

The importance of people experiencing poverty being involved in implementing the Lisbon Strategy became clear: good participatory practises improve the relevance of decisions and the implementation of processes. A 3rd Meeting was held under the Irish Presidency in 2004, targeted on good participatory practises. The process of dialogue was consolidated and the Meetings became part of the European agenda.

This year, the Luxembourg Presidency took over the initiative, hosting the 4th Meeting on the topic: ***Images and perceptions of poverty.***

Goals and objectives of the 4th Meeting

The context for these meetings is the European Union Inclusion Strategy, based on the Open Method

of Coordination with the National Action Plans on Inclusion (NAPs Inclusion) as a central component.

Images and perceptions of poverty, why this topic?

In the 2001 to 2003 European Meetings, the perception of poverty came up so frequently that it had to be addressed as such. The 4th Meeting therefore sets out to explore the theme image and perceptions of poverty, and the impact these perceptions have on the development and implementation of the European Inclusion Strategy with a view to enabling those who shape those views to contribute to the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

Objectives of the 4th Meeting:

- To develop a creative learning process and a forum for discussion where participants can share their experiences of participation, and so engage more with society.
- To enhance the participants' capacity to contribute to the work of NGOs combating poverty and social exclusion and to engage with representatives of public authorities and other actors.
- To promote the involvement of people experiencing poverty and exclusion, through the organisations in which they participate, in the development, implementation and evaluation, of the National Action Plans on Inclusion[1].
- To enhance the commitment of the EU institutions to the engagement of people experiencing poverty and exclusion through the organisations in which they participate, in policy making and policy implementation, at all levels.
- To take a step forward in the dialogue between people experiencing poverty and social exclusion and representatives of European institutions, policy makers, and other relevant actors, in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.

The Meeting is not a substitute for the work done by the many organisations and networks that work alongside people experiencing poverty; rather it is a recognition by the European Presidency of the importance of the voice of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, and an illustration of the importance of their engagement with struc-

tured networks that facilitate their involvement in the decision making processes that shape society.

To organize the 4th Meeting,

- the Luxembourg Presidency brought together an Organising Committee of representatives from the Luxembourg Ministry for Family and Integration, the governments of Belgium and Austria (which will hold the presidency of the European Union in the first half of 2006, and will host the 5th Meeting), the European Commission, EAPN, ATD Fourth World and FEANTSA.
- coordinators were appointed in each Member State to assist with planning the Meeting and ensure that delegates were properly prepared.

- EAPN was tasked with supporting the Organising Committee by developing the contents, methodologies and practical arrangements for the 4th Meeting.

The time and resources allocated to the national groundwork are something new in the organisation of the Meetings, and delivered telling results.

[1] Acronym: NAPs

Opening session

Mr Bruno GONCALVEZ, participant in the 3rd Meeting (Portugal)

I would like to start by recalling that the person who last year had the task that befalls me, closed her address with these words: *“each of us is an ambassador in our own country, and I am sure that all of us are proud of that role”*. All of us here today have a big responsibility. More than just representing our country, we are spokespersons for our own social condition, group and all those living on this continent who are experiencing poverty and social exclusion, and generally go unheard.

The testimonies of European citizens who are experiencing poverty show the scale of the task that has to be accomplished, not only by us but also by NGOs, policy-makers in each Member State and the European Commission. Truth to tell, it is a responsibility of all citizens bar none. Only by working together in this way will we deliver the goals laid down by the Lisbon Council in 2000 implemented by the European Social Inclusion Strategy to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by 2010.

The European Social Inclusion Strategy requires each of our states to draw up a National Action Plan for social inclusion as a means of implementing the Strategy. This year brings us almost halfway to the deadline for eradicating poverty. And the question is: what does the evaluation show? Will what has been done so far deliver the 2010 goals? **Is 69 million people experiencing poverty a shocking enough number to mobilise European society?** Or does it have to rise still further for the European Union to make the fight against poverty a real priority? This is not to sow doom and gloom; I just want us all to ask ourselves whether we are on the right track.

I am Portuguese, Gypsy and European.

I say this for a reason: I am a member of a community that is present in every country in the European Union, and which is affected by enlargement. With the entry of Bulgaria and Romania in 2007, there will be approximately 10 million Roma citizens in the European Union.

In reality, Roma have always had this European dimension, long before the Treaty of Rome and even long before the current borders were set. We have

been present in Portugal and Europe for 500 years; we have always been a migrant people, constantly searching out new horizons, and experiencing some of the worst poverty and social exclusion. Sadly, we are not the only ones to have been fighting for so many years for our rights and our citizenship, and to have those rights refused.

The European Union of 25 (soon to be 27) offers us opportunities for increased mobility and social inclusion through employment, housing, health, education and civic participation. But there is a lot more to be done.

I believe that only a social Europe that guarantees access to rights, respect for the fundamental principles of a decent life for all, regardless of their country, ethnicity, religion or gender can deliver full citizenship. That is what I expect of Europe - a Europe that really ensures equal rights, and the opportunity for all citizens to participate in all aspects of life, that their voice may reach local, national and European structures. This respect and communication are the only ways to achieve a real social Europe.

These Meetings are an opportunity for all those of us who are experiencing poverty and social exclusion. For two days, we are the voice of groups who have never believe or dared to believe that their voices would be heard in their country, still less reach Brussels.

We cannot proclaim ourselves to speak for all the poor and excluded. We do not have that legitimacy, but we were designated democratically in mass meetings in our countries. We have the opportunity to take part in this Meeting, perhaps for the only time in our life. But this also gives us the duty to do our utmost after the 4th Meeting to see that this process goes on. It is our duty to lobby, to urge on all political leaders at all levels the need for continuity in the participatory processes, to turn the rallying call of the previous Meetings into reality: we also participate in Europe!

I should like to highlight the relevance of this year's theme “the image of poverty”. It is very diffi-

cult to fight against poverty and promote involvement by all the actors when a large part of European society continues to have a negative image of poverty and the poor. It is very difficult to get people who are experiencing poverty to believe that their condition can change, when they are constantly made to feel guilty: it is their fault that they are poor, and they are to blame for their situation.

The fight against poverty is a daily job for all of us. To create the conditions conducive to fighting for the eradication of poverty, it is imperative to show another face of poverty, a face that shows that

another world is possible. For that, we must speak up first, understand one another, dispel the illusions in the prejudices and stereotypes that marginalize all those who for any reason have been faced with poverty and social exclusion.

I should like to leave you with a gypsy proverb:

“You may ride a horse facing backwards, but the horse will always go forwards”.

Europe will be built only if we all lend a hand.

Ms Marie-Josée JACOBS, Minister for Family and Integration, Luxembourg

A year ago, I had the honour of being invited to attend the opening session of the “3rd European Meeting of People Experiencing poverty”, organised by the Irish Presidency of the European Union.

In addressing the participants of the 3rd Meeting in May 2004, I informed them of my project to take over in 2005 by organising a 4th Meeting under the Luxembourg Presidency of the European Union.

I believe I can say that this 4th Meeting attests to the fact that this type of event is really beginning to be institutionalised as an essential component of the Community social inclusion process.

That the Luxembourg Presidency is able to contribute to that institutionalization is also thanks to the considerable support it has received.

This support has come from the Government of Belgium and the Government of Austria, and from the Employment and Social Affairs Directorate of the European Commission - all of whom I should like to thank for their commitment to the 4th Meeting. Praise is also due to the absolutely sterling job done by the entire EAPN network, not to mention the national delegations and their coordinators, for the 4th Meeting.

Like its predecessors, the 4th Meeting addresses one of the four common objectives that the European Union adopted in the fight against poverty. That objective calls for the mobilisation of all relevant bodies, and calls on the Member States to promote the self-expression of people suffering exclusion on their situation and the policies affecting them.

I have organised the 4th Meeting to show my commitment to this objective, a commitment based on a deep conviction, put into words by Professor O’ Cinnéide of the University of Maynooth in Ireland, who chaired the 3rd Meeting.

“Political strategists with the best intentions and with the best information cannot claim to develop policies, programmes or practices to fight poverty without having an idea of the meaning of poverty, as the only people who can talk about it are the people experiencing poverty themselves”.

Ms Quintin spoke in the same vein at the 3rd Meeting, when she said, *“The era when policies were concocted by a handful of civil servants who “knew” what was best is over. Today, what the concerned people say carries more weight in political decisions”.*

During the two-day Meeting, the members of the many national delegations will be given the floor to speak as ambassadors of the underprivileged citizens of the European Union, whose number continues to be of concern.

The theme that will be explored is the image of poverty and the impact this image has on inclusion policies.

What a broad topic!

I will begin my introductory remarks on the subject with two quotations from Paul Ricoeur, the great French philosopher, who passed away in late May.

The first quotation reveals Paul Ricoeur’s humanism, *“The shortest path from you to yourself is via someone else”.*

The second quotation summarises the topic of the 4th Meeting: *“Other people’s perceptions can set us free, but can also imprison us.”*

People experiencing poverty and social exclusion are often imprisoned by the image formed of them through others’ perceptions, the perceptions of those who do not know what poverty is.

In preparing for the 4th Meeting, EAPN compiled a document of delegates’ remarks on certain topics during the three previous Meetings. In that compilation, I find the following simple yet true sentence: *“The image of the poor is wrong.”*

Very often, too often, the poor are stereotyped. Let me illustrate these negative portrayals with an example with which I, as the Minister for guaranteed minimum income, am familiar.

Since 1986, Luxembourg has had the right to a minimum guaranteed income, commonly designated by its French acronym, RMG. It is a founding principle of democratic legitimacy that individuals exer-

cise their citizenship and participate in community life by asserting their rights. But, 19 years after it was created, the right to a guaranteed minimum income still has a social label attached to it. This kind of labelling is an attack on the identity of those who assert their right to a guaranteed minimum income; they are branded as “RMGers” (benefit scroungers).

This status stigmatises them and distorts the perception of the social realities. Relegating people who assert their right to the guaranteed minimum income to the status of “RMGers” is to pigeonhole them as a distinct category of people, even though they are a mixed group like any other.

Seeing the individual only as a “benefit scrounger” throws his identity and his self-image into question: one aspect of his situation, namely a problem of insufficient resources, determines who he is in every way!

To misquote Paul Ricoeur, “Other peoples’ perceptions trap the individual in the image of the “RMGer”.

Many of you suffer from being trapped in this way. They also know how difficult it is to break free of it: you are a unique individual, unlike any other, but others still consign you with to an image as an “RMGer”.

You can sing or knit, be an accomplished athlete or play the violin like Paganini, you are a mother, a father, a sister, a brother, a committed union member, a resolute feminist, a serious person or optimist, whatever ... , in the eyes of others you are always an “RMGer”, a benefit scrounger.

I shall always oppose the use of this term and the image it conveys, which is a belittling and depersonalising one.

There is a reason why the Meeting that brings us together today should be called a “*Meeting of people experiencing poverty*”!

Photographs of the participants are published on the first pages of the report of the 3rd Meeting. There was a reason for that, too! These photos do not portray abstract entities, but individuals: men and women, some older, some younger, human beings with different complexions and expressions, with particular distinctive signs that make them readily recognisable.

These photos convey a powerful message: if poverty means lacking income and gainful employment, lacking social strength, empowerment, partic-

ipation in social life and status, those who are vulnerable to these things cannot be summed up as “the poor”.

First and foremost, these men and women are “people”, and only then are they “people experiencing poverty and social exclusion”.

At a previous Meeting, one delegation demanded that, “*Excluded people must give an active image of themselves, of their ability to take initiatives to change their life, and to speak in associations*”.

This demand expresses the rejection of the negative image of poverty. But, the power of images and representations goes much further. Going hand-in-hand with explanations of poverty, they influence the policy approaches to poverty.

The researcher Peter Townsend, who has studied poverty issues very closely, gave this ambiguous judgement on the matter, “*Any explanation of poverty includes an implicit prescription of policy.*”

The 4th Meeting is right to address the images and perceptions of poverty, therefore!

In a report written in October 2002 for the European Commission, more specifically for the Directorate headed by Ms Quintin, researcher Serge Paugam put the following postulate, “*A country will be less likely to develop ambitious social policies if many of its citizens regard poverty as a problem of individual responsibility and, conversely, a country will more readily devote resources to the fight against poverty if its inhabitants regard this problem as the effect of systematic injustice which condemns its most deprived victims to one uniform destiny*”.

In this context, I am delighted to be able to quote the Chairman of the 4th Meeting, Professor Schaber, who has been studying the relationship between individuals and poverty since 1974.

In a study on persistent poverty done for the Commission in 1982, he observed that, “*half of the people questioned point to the individual as the cause of poverty, and the other half point to society*”.

How have these perceptions of poverty changed?

The 2002 Paugam Report gives an answer to this question.

The report shows that in all of the 14 Member States that were included, 17% of the people questioned put poverty down to fecklessness, whereas 31% attributed it to unfairness.

The differences in national perceptions are immense: so, 29% of Portuguese but only 8% of Swedes see fecklessness as the cause of poverty, and while 50% of East Germans put poverty down to unfairness, only 12% of Danes feel the same way.

The same report also found that, overall, the “fecklessness” share of the explanation is on the rise, whilst the “unfairness” share is falling sharply. This increasingly unfavourable perception of poverty by the general public gives me concern. It could be taken as an incentive for weakening social inclusion policies. Not by me! I hold the opposite view - that

in a European Union with 69 million people exposed to the risk of poverty, and 14 million in-work poor, we need to strengthen social inclusion policies.

We often talk about these policies in terms of the fight against poverty: combating wrongheaded images of poverty that can lead to the development of wrongheaded policies for people who live in poverty should be a part of that fight.

This 4th Meeting aims to identify the best ways to do that.

Mr Christian DUPONT, Minister for the Civil Service, Social Integration, Urban Policy and Equal Opportunities, Belgium

This 4th Meeting is a key event in the ongoing fight that has to be waged at European level to make poverty history. The vagaries of European integration are proof positive that there can be no sustainable advances towards European integration without establishing a real social Europe: a Europe that is in touch with social progress and the basic needs of its citizens - all its citizens, but especially the most vulnerable. This must be a central priority of the European project.

It must be expressed in each stage of the Union project, and in the Lisbon process, which must enable Europe to combine economic progress with environmental protection and social justice.

We are currently evaluating and adjusting that process. At this key time, Belgium is clear that the processes must be kept going so as to avoid a two-speed development in which poverty and social inclusion would be sidelined in negotiations focused almost exclusively on economic issues.

In the struggle for a social Europe, we cannot keep quiet about, hide or ignore poverty. We must talk about it to end it. We have to remember that it is not a horrid inevitability. We have to root out the

causes and celebrate the extraordinary courage of the people who, day in and day out, try to rebuild a normal life for themselves

The 4th Meeting gives an opportunity to step into that fight through a frank and constructive dialogue. With all due modesty, I can say that Belgium has some experience in this field. Our first general report on poverty was published in 1994. It would not be too much to describe it as a landmark event in Belgium. Produced in close cooperation with people experiencing poverty, it has set the tempo for the fight against poverty over the past ten years.

We know that much remains to be done. Ten years on, we are in the midst of evaluating and developing the process. Again, we are working closely with those who are in direct touch with or experiencing poverty. We aim to produce a new report at the end of 2005 that will set the political agenda for the next ten years. This, too, gives a special importance to the 4th Meeting.

Let us draw inspiration from this Meeting to turn the discussions into concrete actions back in our various jobs, associations and countries so that finally they help to wipe out poverty.

Ms Ursula HAUBNER, Federal Minister for Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection, Austria

The Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty has now become an institutionalised part of the European Strategy to combat poverty and social exclusion. This 4th Meeting is an important one on several counts:

- The 4th Meeting fulfils an important symbolic function in giving visibility to poverty and social exclusion issues at European level.
- It could help to put the key issues of the fight against poverty in concrete terms. It can also formulate important messages at the political level.
- The Meetings are becoming a forum for exchanges and information. Participants and their organisations are learning to get to know each other.
- The Meetings give physical expression to a central aspect of the European Strategy to combat poverty and exclusion through mobilisation of all the actors, including people experiencing poverty/exclusion.

The Meetings offer a valuable opportunity for multilateral exchanges and learning about one another. The European countries have chosen different strategies to combat poverty. Austria, for example, has gone down the road of reducing family poverty by the introduction of child allowances.

I can assure you that the Austrian Presidency of the first half of 2006 will continue the tradition of these Meetings, and that we shall be paying close attention to the outcomes of this year's Meeting.

The coming year will be marked by important events at European level

- by the end of June 2005, all countries will be reporting the results of their NAPs Inclusion which will be updated for 2005-2006.
- also in June 2005, all the Member States will be replying to a Commission questionnaire to evaluate the Open Method of Coordination. All the European networks and other actors should be involved in this evaluation.

One part of this evaluation relates to mobilisation of all the actors and their cooperation at the

national level, which includes people experiencing poverty/exclusion and the organisations that represent them. The participation of people experiencing poverty adds to the importance of the exchanges. The fight against poverty must be based on their experience.

Besides the process of social inclusion, two other processes address the fight against poverty

- the open method of coordination for sustainable, adequate pensions and
- the open method of coordination for health care and long-term care.

Both processes must be strengthened and made more efficient.

The Austrian Presidency's priorities for the first half of 2006 will include a discussion of new methods and objectives for social inclusion and social protection. This Meeting – in connection with new common targets - could make recommendations on how best to deliver the inclusion process.

My view is that policies to tackle poverty and social exclusion should follow the subsidiarity principle and operate at the most immediate level closest to people experiencing poverty/exclusion, this being the family. States have a responsibility to establish a legal framework to help families and provide them with a life free of poverty and insecurity.

The framework of a family policy includes measures like:

- Appropriate financial support to secure family life
- Establishing an enabling environment for work-family life balance
- Providing quality, affordable social and health services
- Securing high quality education for children
- Special support for families with special needs

Higher levels of wellbeing cannot be achieved if the immediate difficulties are not solved. The

inclusion of people experiencing poverty/exclusion must start at the lowest level. Local authorities are the first partners of people facing difficulties. At this level, inclusion often results from personal contacts. Problems may arise where the authorities lack the necessary empathy or stereotype people in a way that does not reflect the diverse realities of poverty and social exclusion.

Also, people experiencing poverty have difficulty accessing help for a variety of reasons.

These difficulties are often related to the image that a particular society has of poverty, often portrayed as shameful and a matter of personal fault.

Poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon, and this is a principle of the European Strategy to combat poverty. Personal reasons, like a poor educational level or health problems may be compounded by an inability to afford essential goods and services or job shortages.

Preconceptions cannot give a realistic picture, and may result in discrimination against people experiencing poverty and their self-exclusion. This is the reason why I see the topic of the 4th Meeting as so important.

The discussions will also consider how certain images and perceptions of poverty influence the construction of the NAPs Inclusion, and how to remedy that. Obviously, changes will not come overnight. But it is important to discuss this topic and take a first step in this direction at European level. It will also be of special interest to see what differences exist between Member States.

To make this Meeting more than a one-off event, all the participants will have to spread the results of the works in their organisations and areas, and take the discussion forward there. As the organizer of the next Meeting, Austria will do its best to move the dialogue forward in light of the results of this Meeting.

Before ending, I would like to raise an issue discussed last year, which is also on the agenda of the 2005 Meeting: the liberalization of services, especially health and social services.

As you know, the Commission had introduced a directive on services, known as the Bolkestein Directive, covering all services of general interest, including social and health services.

This failed to take account of the difference between social services and other services. The market is less important in regard to social services which, by definition, are focused on human beings and their needs.

Social services need a personal, ongoing and responsible relationship.

Social services compensate the negative effects of the market.

This is why I have consistently advocated having health and social services excluded from the Directive, and I hope that this is what will be the outcome of the debates on it.

I am happy to announce that the Austrian Presidency will organise a 5th Meeting in early May 2006 in Brussels. Austria is happy to follow the tradition, and to invite you all here and now to take part in next year's Meeting.

Ms Odile QUINTIN, European Commission, Director General, DG Employment, Social Affairs & Equal Opportunities.

To me, the 4th Meeting symbolises the Union's commitment to work against poverty.

First, because poverty is a violation of human dignity and fundamental rights: the Charter of Fundamental Rights recognises the right to "lead a life of dignity". All countries must strive to put that right into practice. It is one of the big challenges facing social protection systems. The Commission will be adding to the effort with a forthcoming initiative on guaranteed resources, including minimum income.

Second, because social cohesion contributes to growth, wellbeing and employment. This is the message that the Union adopted last March with the "Lisbon Strategy" review. The 25 Member States must take it on board when drawing up their "national reform plans" this autumn. The Summit of Heads of State and Government will be given an annual report on social cohesion, which shows the political importance that the Union attaches to these questions.

Since December 2001, the successive Presidencies of the Union have sought to reflect that commitment by hosting these meetings involving recognised anti-poverty NGOs. The European Commission has always supported these initiatives, which show the vital need to involve people experiencing poverty in policies to tackle exclusion.

European coordination of national policies on exclusion is based on involving and mobilising all the actors in those policies.

For policies to succeed, the voice of people experiencing poverty must be heard. Indeed, the French and Dutch referendums have just shown how citizens are clamouring for a greater say. There is still a job of work to do. Notwithstanding that some countries have increased participation by people experiencing exclusion and consultation of NGOs that represent them, there is still generally too little participation by people experiencing poverty.

The Member States in particular, tend not so much to draw up proper strategic "action plans" as to produce simple descriptive reports. An action plan

is not really effective if it does not reflect the pledges in the most detailed possible hard targets that allow transparent collective evaluation.

It is clear that economic slowdown and rising unemployment have radically changed the political context of the war on poverty. In some countries, the number of people at risk of poverty, especially among vulnerable groups, is rising. Mental health, alcohol and drug abuse issues continue to mark and undermine our societies.

Discriminations – multiple in some cases – are an obstacle to integration for many people, especially those in minority groups. In many cases, these discriminations are reflected in distorted perceptions and portrayals, not least in the media. The report presented today rightly inveighs against the obstacle created by these portrayals and images.

The essential thing, therefore, is to continue combining an overall approach that forms the framework of the European strategy with a targeted approach to the groups in greatest difficulty, in a way that reflects local contexts.

That also makes the case for linking the fight against exclusion to the fight against discriminations, which can be based on a comprehensive and effective European regulatory framework. It guarantees all individuals, wherever they live in Europe, the same protection against discrimination, regardless of gender, ethnic or racial origin, religion, age, capacities or sexual orientation.

In fact, the Commission has just unveiled its strategy to push back discrimination, including multiple discriminations, in the years to come. 2007, therefore, will be the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All. But action focused only on eliminating discriminations is not sufficient to roll back the obstacles faced by some minorities, in particular Roma. Affirmative action is needed to make significant improvements to their situation. To that end, the Commission will set up a working group of big thinkers to consider and recommend approaches for promoting improved social and occupational integration for these minorities.

The fight against poverty must also be part of the moves to modernize and reform our social protection systems.

This is because entrenched social exclusion is a big challenge to these systems, no less than demographic ageing, for example. So, these systems need to be reformed as part of a genuinely integrated strategy with “common objectives” for pension systems, the fight against exclusion and health systems. That is under way and will be completed in 2006.

To be successful, the reforms must pursue two parallel goals: to ensure the effectiveness and financial viability of social protection. The social services have a decisive role here. The discussions have pointed up the difficulty in many cases of distinguishing the missions of these services from their legal status, and widespread concern about legal insecurity. The Commission is working on a Communication

that will bring some clarification to the legal framework applicable to these services and their missions.

The previous three meetings made clear the importance of having sufficient financial and human resources to enable effective participation by people experiencing poverty. But allowing the time needed for that participation, and an attitude of confidence and respect, are just as necessary.

Hopefully, NGOs will draw incentive from this process, which demands that we all give thought to strategies for combating exclusion, set ourselves objectives and contribute to delivering them. “Organised civil society” can no longer content itself with just being the opposition; it must be a real actor in social policies.

Follow-up of discussions from the previous three Meetings

Some of the questions raised in the previous meetings remained unanswered, specifically on employment, discrimination and racism, liberalization of services and European and National support for the participation of people experiencing poverty. To achieve continuity between Meetings, these questions were reformulated and various speakers attempted if not to answer them, then at least to give insights into or bring them up to date.

Mr Jozef NIEMIEC,
Confederal Secretary, European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)

People very far from the labour market, including women who experience particular obstacles, need individualised training and support. How far is the European Employment Strategy addressing this need and how can it be ensured that the strategy gives access to real jobs?

The facts show that having a job is still one of the main ways to shield oneself from the risk of poverty and exclusion. But although people shut out of the labour market are more vulnerable to poverty, it is clear that simply having a job is no longer enough to stay out of poverty. The rising number of “in-work poor” is why we are fighting to improve access to jobs and also to maintain and improve the quality of jobs.

We therefore oppose a policy that would force people to take a job at any price, and demand quality jobs, i.e., a job in which the individual feels fulfilled and earns a decent wage that provides her/him with the resources she/he needs to lift her/himself and her/his family above the poverty line.

One important thing to emphasise here is that the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) does not see managing social exclusion as the answer. We are fighting for governments to pledge to make poverty history, and the best policy is prevention. That struggle is part of a broader campaign to secure respect for the human rights of all European citizens. From that viewpoint, social exclu-

sion too often prevents individuals from exercising their full civic and social rights. This Meeting therefore ties into the discussion on the future of the Union embodied in the draft constitutional treaty, on the future of the Lisbon Strategy and sustainable development.

The ETUC is fully engaged with these debates. We see the constitutional treaty as creating a legal framework by which to even up the balance in European policies. It makes social cohesion and solidarity into objectives, and introduces the idea of the social market economy. It gives added legal strength to the Charter of Fundamental Rights, and, let me also say, the right to a lead a life of dignity, emphasized by Ms. Quintin, representing the Commission. The recent rejection of this draft treaty in France and the Netherlands is a setback to our fight for social justice in Europe.

The ETUC concurs in the view that the various policies that play into delivery of the social cohesion objectives are not properly joined up. We find it regrettable that social inclusion and environmental protection no longer seem to be priorities of the Lisbon Strategy as revised at the 2005 Spring Summit. This flies in the face of analyses pointing to persistent clear trends towards growing poverty risks. The fact that a quarter of people living at risk of poverty do have a job clearly shows that more jobs and more growth do not necessarily mean less poverty.

Looking ahead to the June European Council, which will lay down integrated guidelines for growth and jobs, the ETUC is worried about the potential deflection that lies behind the slogan “making work pay”. The whole emphasis here is on benefit and tax reform, while the “decent and equitable wage” aspect is completely missing, and the call to “develop appropriate policies with a view to reducing the number of ‘working poor’ has been dropped.

But there are positive signs, too. The ETUC is pleased to note that the European Labour Ministers

have kept the basic approach of the European Employment Strategy by re-inserting the employment and labour market benchmarks and objectives, like participation in lifelong learning, “new start” measures for the unemployed, measures for the long-term unemployed, child care provision. By not allowing these precise objectives to be replaced by a mere expression of good intentions, they have avoided taking a first step down the road of creating jobs at any cost.

I would like to emphasize the role played by services of general interest, which could be described as “the social environment of work”, namely access to housing, health, and education. They are vital means for breaking down the barriers of exclusion. I agree with other speakers that we

Ms Cherry SHORT, Commission for Racial Equality, United Kingdom

Discrimination, including gender discrimination and racism, is one of the causal factors that lead to poverty and social exclusion. What role do the EU and the Member States need to play to address this reality and how could their work be strengthened?

I have slightly changed the topic title for my talk, because I am not expert enough to talk about the role currently played by the European Union or the governments of member states in dealing with gender discrimination and racism

My expertise lies more in understanding racial discrimination and what needs to be done to tackle it.

What I am going to stress today is that the EU and governments must recognise discrimination and racism as

- contributing factors which lie behind the poverty many experience,
- barriers preventing them from escaping poverty,
- additional dimensions to the experience of poverty, particularly for those in deprived and marginalized communities.

must emphasize the risk inherent in treating these services in the same way as purely commercial services, as the draft so-called “Bolkestein” Directive proposed. The ETUC believes it would undermine the performance of their public interest obligation to society. We trust that the Commission’s future Communication on social services will address these concerns in an appropriate way.

Finally, I feel it important to underscore the role of collaboration between all the actors who are engaged at all levels - European, national and local - , in this process of tackling poverty. Partnerships are essential to strengthening one another’s capabilities. There will be no let-up in the ETUC’s commitment to work against social exclusion and strengthen these partnerships in its spheres of activity.

Looked at through this prism, we can easily see that discrimination and racism have a far reaching impact on the lives of many people and communities living in the EU.

If there is one thing that governments in the European Union could do to have a significant impact, it would be to ensure:

- Effective laws in force against all relevant forms of discrimination
- Public discourse by government leaders and politicians which sets its face against the language of exclusion and celebrates the strength to be found in diversity
- The creation of independent, adequately funded bodies like my Commission with the responsibility of supporting individuals who face discrimination and carrying out its own investigations to require more general change.

Understanding discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, racism and other inequalities is vitally important if the causes of social exclusion and poverty are really to be tackled. General research shows that black, Asian and Chinese groups living in Britain as a whole are more likely to live below the poverty line, move in and out of poverty and are more likely to experience relative material poverty and deprivation compared to white populations.

But, in 2001, about 33% of Indian communities live below the poverty line. This rises to 40% among Black Caribbean families and 50% among Black Africans, whilst the proportion of people living below the poverty line was only 25% among the population as whole.

Other indices - like place of residence, occupation, level of educational attainment - are significant and must be included in the objective of eradicating poverty.

What should be done?

The answer is clear: the Member States and the European Union must decisively tackle racial discrimination.

I would suggest that:

- While the EU has already developed many legal tools to deal with discrimination, more must be done. It is vitally important that EU anti-discrimination law is implemented more rigorously in the Member States.
- The European Union must use structural funding to reach the poorest groups and most persistent pockets of poverty.
- Peer-review meetings and consultation must be developed to reproduce good practice and spread the experiences of groups facing discrimination and racism.
- The Member States must introduce monitoring and evaluation of how effective anti-discrimination policies are.
- Most Member States also need a mature debate on racism and discrimination against ethnic minorities
- The public discussion on the role of immigration and the history of ethnic minorities in Europe is part of such a debate.
- Above all, the Member States must mainstream anti-racism and equality into all policy areas from employment and housing, to education, and transport.

Despite the great potential present in ethnic minority communities, discrimination on the basis of a person's race, religion, skin colour, ethnicity, gender or a combination of any and all of these characteristics, continues to result in the material and social impoverishment for many people.

In conclusion, I would say that:

- Europe must pursue goals of sustained economic growth grounded in social cohesion.
- Key to fostering social cohesion is tackling poverty
- Key to tackling poverty is combating discrimination and racism
- Key to such action by governments are three things:
 - Effective and strong laws
 - Heeding powerful voices from below able to speak out about the experience of those facing racism and discrimination
 - Clear action plans that all can observe and verify.

Mr Raymond MAES,
European Commission, DG Employment

What will be done to counter the negative effects of the liberalization of services like water and electricity and the impact of competition in relation to the provision of social services?

What needs to be done at the European level to guarantee a minimum delivery for basic needs (water, electricity) and to ensure access to quality social services?

New discussions have been going on since 2003 on services of general interest. The Commission launched a Green Paper to determine what its role should be in regard to the provision of such services. The Green Paper asks what role the European Union should have in regard to the provision of services of general interest. Defining what kind of services are of general interest is a matter for the Member States, and local and regional authorities. But the European Union has a recognized supporting role to play. The outcomes of the Green Paper consultation were published in a White Paper, which addresses a series of issues that are directly related to those of the 3rd Meeting.

Liberalization of electricity

EU legislation is in place that provides for the opening-up of the electricity market. But in doing so, certain guarantees must be given to ensure that the electricity sector continues to provide these services of general interest. It is important here to mention the Charter of Fundamental Social Rights, which clearly states that the EU must respect access to certain services of general interest. The legislation refers to universal services. This is a key concept used by the Commission in this kind of legislation. The concept of universal service establishes the right for everyone to have access to services that are regarded as essential and an obligation for service providers to make affordable services of specified standards available to all.

The Electricity Directive provides that Member States must in particular ensure that there are sufficient safeguards to protect vulnerable consumers, including measures in their favour. Member States, and national regulators in particular, are responsible for implementing these principles. Strengthening the role of regulators is an issue in the Green Paper

consultation, along with increased user participation in the supervision of liberalised sectors.

Water is another service sector. The Directive shows that there is no agreement on having a European framework like that for electricity. But, the water supply market is open in some Member States. Some think there should also be a European level framework, while for others it is a highly sensitive sector that the European Union should stay out of. But the EU already has an involvement through the legislation on public procurement contracts, and the Treaty principles of non-discrimination and proportionality also apply. So, discussions are in hand in the water sector. But for the time being, the Member States are still responsible for deciding how the services should be provided.

The Treaty principles nevertheless apply. This fact emerged from the discussion on the Green Paper on social and health services. There is no framework directive here either. The clear fact is that there is no liberalization of the health care services sector similar to that of electricity. Also, the Treaty applies to any service of an economic nature. But that creates some legal uncertainty. Not just among users and providers, but Member States, too. The application of the Community rules to such services, especially the internal market and competition rules, needs to be clarified. The Commission has taken this on board and is preparing a Communication that will look at the situation in health care services. The Communication will be based on what came out of the Green Paper consultation. Community legislation has a clear and undeniable influence on the organisation and financing of health care services.

The question is, however, whether that influence has a negative impact on the service mission, and on the modernisation of health care services, amongst other things. Modernisation here is not about funding, but about adapting services to needs. We need to determine whether the Community legislative framework is suited to enabling that modernisation to take place.

In seeing whether it is suited to enabling these services to fulfil their role and for modernisation to take place, these services must obviously be treated differently to other services of general interest like

telecommunications or the transport sector. The specific characteristic of these services is that they are of more general interest than others, because they cater to the individual. They put citizens' social rights into practice. They are also part of the health protection system, which is not necessarily the case with other services. There is a high level of user participation and volunteer engagement. There is a special structure for the kind of organisations that provide these services. This is something that requires closer study.

The Commission is involving civil society and the Member States in preparing its Communication, because there is a joint responsibility where services

Ms Judit RÉZMÜVES,
Vice President of the Social Protection
Committee

What can be done at the European and national levels to prompt the Member States to support national networks and structures engaging people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, and to implement mechanisms by which to enable or increase their participation in decision-making processes that affect their lives?

There is poverty and exclusion in the European Union. These are challenges that must be taken up; but at the same time, changes occurred in Central Europe, especially at the turn of the 1980s-1990s. They showed up certain specific traits of poverty in the new countries, where it no longer affected just traditional groups like elderly people, orphans and widows. Growing numbers of people who are neither too young nor too old to work, but are nevertheless excluded from the labour market, are now also experiencing poverty. The social, economic and political changes of the 1990s wrought far-reaching changes to the lives of Hungarians. This is true of most of the EU's new Member States. These changes have sometimes proved positive, but have come with other more negative ones. The sweeping away of the single political party system has led to the introduction of democracy to these countries. But the shift towards a market economy has led to economic measures being taken. The labour market has

of general interest are concerned, and certainly even more so in the health care and social services sector, which are the responsibility of Member States and local and regional authorities.

Civil society and the Member States were consulted in drawing up the Commission's Communication. It is set to be published this year, and will pinpoint areas of potential difficulty in applying a legislative framework to these services. But it will also underline the essential role of social services in the European social model, which require special treatment.

changed. Social protection systems have been cut to the bone, with a negative impact on people.

Governments may have pledged to fight poverty, but the results have not been encouraging. Good will is not enough; a political dialogue needs to be set up between governments, social workers and the different actors concerned. NGOs have a key role here, not least in defending the European social model and social cohesion. In that regard, EAPN acts as the conscience of or a balancing force within the European Union. It is also a source of information. The network will enable insertion and inclusion for some groups experiencing poverty.

EAPN enhances lobbying capacity. But the resources need to be provided to enable people in the network who are experiencing poverty to have their say, and be informed in their language.

Resources at present are located at local level, but they are insufficient and their use is dictated by local policies. So the work has to be done at this level.

Civil society works in the same way as broader society: there are individual interests, specific expectations, and some people are better off than others. Sometimes, it is their ideas that prevail, not always helpfully. The interest of the greatest number is what usually counts; hence hearing also from grass root groups is important.

Situation in the Member States as presented by the national delegations [2]

Austria

400,000 jobseekers and just 25,000 job offers.

Paralleling Gross National Product, poverty has risen from 10% to 13.2% over the past three years. The net incomes of the unemployed are steadily falling. The cost of housing, food and health care are rising. The NAPs have not improved the situation.

What Austrians need is institutionalised representation of the unemployed that would sponsor local jobless initiatives. There is a growing interest among politicians for such institutionalisation, which must be followed-up very carefully.

The aim is seen as getting a law (including structural and financing provision) along “ombudsman” lines.

Belgium

Belgium is a prosperous country. The World Bank ranks it among the world’s 20 richest countries. But 13% of the population live in poverty on incomes below 60% of median income. That means 772 euros/month for a single person, and 1622 euros/month for a family of 4 people (2 adults, 2 children) The number of in-work poor is rising, due to the increase in temporary agency work, low-paid work and fixed-term contracts. The unemployed total (60,000) is rising. The social economy sector has been a Belgian Government priority for some years.

Social security is a major bulwark against poverty. Without social security, 38% of the population would be living in poverty. But the level of benefits is judged too low generally. Access to health care remains a problem. A growing number of people are falling into debt because of the cost of health care.

- Belgium has an acute housing shortage.
- Liberalization of the energy market has been in progress in Flanders (northern half of the country) since 2001
- There are many persistent inequalities in education.
- There is a growing population of undocumented

immigrants in Belgium, who are the main victims of many kinds of exploitation.

Belgium has an extensive voluntary sector in all spheres, including poverty. Participation by people experiencing poverty is seen as essential to tackling poverty. The federal Government and the different regional Governments have a cooperation agreement on involving all the actors, especially people experiencing poverty and their organizations.

Bulgaria

Bulgaria has a very high poverty rate and inequality levels, including income inequalities. The Government is making real efforts to reduce poverty, but they are having specific effects: the policies are based on the theory that wealth will trickle down to the poor. The result is that the improvement begins top-down, and the first effect is to improve middle class incomes.

Local and national policy-makers demonstrate concern for poverty, but explain the scale of it as an inevitable result of the deep economic crisis. Their only solution, therefore, is to step up economic growth. Despite significant GNP growth, poverty has not decreased in Bulgaria. A small number of municipalities stand as examples of successful actions. They make effective use of their resources to try and implement a set of social protection and support measures for their citizens.

The main hope for future improvements lies in the Structural Funds combined with the capacity of local communities to promote development.

Cyprus

The positive face of Cyprus’ economy does not reflect the reality for a certain percentage of the population. Entering the European Union may worsen the situation, especially through a predicted rise in unemployment. Almost a third of pensioners receive only the minimum pension, equal to half the minimum subsistence figure.

Single parents, especially unmarried mothers, face not only poverty but also exclusion as public

2. This information was prepared by the delegates in advance of the Meeting.

opinion still has a “moral” mentality that does not accept parenthood out of wedlock.

There is no mechanism for participation by people experiencing poverty.

For young people, coming from a poor family is a disadvantage in itself. Schooling is free, but these children have no access to extracurricular or pay-for activities

The creation of associations has increased awareness among people experiencing poverty of their rights and ability to exert strong pressure to get laws, policies and practises changed. The Cyprus Children’s Parliament, operating on a permanent basis since 2001, is a step towards participation.

Czech Republic

The Czech Republic has a general shortage of ordinary and social housing, a lack of employment opportunities for older people, and discrimination against the Roma community on the labour market. Solving social problems is not the government’s top priority. It is left to individuals to take makeshift measures, like homes supported by the Nad_je Foundation, mother and child hostels (single parent families), street papers.

Plans for the future exist like:

- Co-operation and exchange of knowledge and good practise between Czech groups and international associations
- Focusing on human rights
- Moving towards a people-centred social system

Finland

Social inequalities are growing. The Finnish delegation believes that there is more absolute poverty in the new Member States; but that relative poverty is growing as unemployment rises in “old” Europe. Creating new jobs will not be enough if social protection is undermined and earned wages do not provide a subsistence minimum.

The solution does not lie in introducing competition into social and health services, which could lead to deaths among people in need of social services. The ideology of continuing growth is reaching the end of the road. Incomes must be shared more equally than before to ensure people’s psychological welfare.

Enlarging Europe is not a value in itself unless it can keep its promises to the citizens. The mini-

imum demand is a sufficient guaranteed income to live a decent life. The European Union exists for its citizens, not for itself.

France

The situation is as follows:

- Insufficient state, local and regional government funding for anti-poverty organizations.
- Problems accessing job markets.
- Problems accessing housing.
- Under-25s ineligible for minimum income guarantee.
- Administrative regularisation of foreign nationals without the right paperwork.
- Steady rise in dependency behaviour.
- Non-recognition of educational qualifications.
- Insufficient human resources (social workers).
- Access to registered address for welfare purposes.

But there are also positive aspects like:

- Act 2002-2 introduced, giving people experiencing poverty access to a right to be heard, by introducing the “community life council”, charter of good practice, handbook.
- Collaboration established with social workers (dialogue, active listening, follow-up, support).

There are also hopeful prospects, like:

- Introduction of national legislation to tackle exclusion and promote social cohesion.
- Developing ways of accessing employment, housing, education, training, and health that respect individual dignity and autonomy.
- Introduction of participation and representation of people experiencing poverty in different cultural, sporting, and political bodies.
- A desire for change in the public perception of and attitude towards people experiencing poverty.

Germany

Political and industrial lobbies in Germany have for years been discussing the possibility of establishing a low pay sector where people would be forced to take jobs that would not guarantee them a minimum living wage. The poor are manipulated, while pressure is piled on people still in work. The new laws are no longer concerned to deliver participation in society and provide security for people in need.

The new laws aim to make entitlement to benefit contingent on accepting any kind of job. There are 5 million unemployed and 400,000 vacancies! The dialogue on social participation has ground to a halt, preventing the discussion on poverty and exclusion from moving forward!

The new German social policy therefore dismisses years of effort by organisations that are working to get the rights of people enduring poverty taken into account!

Greece

After several meetings within the Greek Network, it was decided to focus on mental health, which is a factor of exclusion. The preparations for the 4th Meeting were permeated by feelings of futility due to the negative experiences delegates had of meetings with policy-makers. They believed that politicians, even when claiming to heed the voice of the poor, do not take it into consideration in policy-making. Consequently, they are convinced that the same thing will be repeated at the 4th Meeting.

Hungary

10% of the population live in poverty, and the big problem is the increase in poverty. The delegation to the 4th Meeting comprises people with experience of unemployment, single parenthood, joblessness and discrimination (Roma community). In the preparatory meetings, the delegates talked about their experience of poverty in their daily lives. They described their relations and experience with the social service system and their personal relations with social service providers.

Messages that came out of the preparatory meetings:

- In the beginning, we were convinced that the problems were the same for everyone, but by the end, we realised that the different situations needed different solutions.
- Let's fight against exclusion!
- We are not the minority.
- We need help
- Our children also want to study and work.

Italy

Politics and participation often operate separately in Italy. Politics has to work for citizens,

respond to community demands and plan interventions on social issues. Participation is a personal right that allows individuals to influence political processes and express their views. Unfortunately, this is not happening. Italy is a country with no minimum income provision. Schemes have been piloted, but at local or regional level.

Politicians talk about social welfare, but in reality, many needs are not being met and there are growing social problems.

Participation by citizens in public life is still far from being achieved in Italy. Act No. 328 of 2000 to achieve an integrated system of social services is starting to work in some areas after 5 years, as is participation; but local social services are going through a troubled period as a result of the deep economic crisis, and so cannot provide essential services.

Politics and participation must be linked, and the needs of people experiencing poverty and exclusion must be addressed quickly. This depends on increasing people's awareness and responsibility as regards their rights/duties, and following a course in which people are not left behind.

"The poor cannot wait".

Latvia

People experiencing poverty and those in contact with them report difficulties mainly in rural regions:

- Wide differences in wellbeing between Riga and rural areas
- Unemployment in rural regions, and internal migration to Riga to find work
- Few family benefits
- For elderly people, the previously well-developed pension system is no longer working; it will take years to restore it because pension amounts are linked to earnings, among other things.
- Access to education is a problem.
- Migration to the European Union for low-paid jobs to send savings back to the family left behind.

One good initiative running for some years is the so-called "mother wage". For the first year after childbirth, the mother receives an allowance nearly equal to her last previous earnings, capped at approximately 557 euros. This was an achievement of the Rural Women's Association.

Another achievement is adapted jobs for people with a disability.

Projects:

- Training in crafts in rural regions
- Training for entrepreneurship in rural regions
- Training in e-commerce

Luxembourg

The Luxembourg delegation is from the Single Parent Families working group of the CFFM (Centre for women, families and single parent families) run by the Femmes en Détresse non-profit organization.

90% of lone parent families are female-headed, a fact concealed by the neutral name single parent family. In most families, the woman is the one faced with insecurity because of the unequal distribution of family and work responsibilities, and household tasks.

For a mother to stop work or work shorter hours may be a joint decision, but in the event of divorce, the woman will be most at risk!

Financial poverty after divorce: lawyer's fees, maintenance/child support.

Where health and poverty are concerned, direct payment by insurance for outpatient consultations should be introduced at least for those in need (a growing number of people in Luxembourg neglect health care because they cannot afford it). But social workers can issue vouchers for a doctor's visit!

Children brought up in a disadvantaged home will have worse health as adults.

There is also poverty among widows.

The Ministry for Family and Femmes en Détresse have concluded a cooperation agreement to organize the "Winter Campaign" to help homeless adults applying to the Centre who cannot find a hostel place

Femmes en Détresse has set up two childcare providers:

- S.K.K.D (Service Krank Kanner Doheem) providing home sitter services for sick children
- Kannerhaus providing childcare during doctors' visits, shopping, training courses, school holidays and in emergencies.

There are planned projects at national level, in particular with the Ministry for Equal Opportunities, and cooperation with similar networks at international level.

Netherlands

The Netherlands delegation comprised a work-incapacitated unemployed person, a full-time homemaker, a person with a disability, a family carer, and a homemaker with a baby, who couldn't attend this meeting because her baby is ill. Like others, these people are marginalized from community life by lack of resources.

The most frequent problems stem from stereotyping:

- A seemingly healthy woman
- Parasites
- Stupid

The worst thing is not to be seen as a full citizen, which is devaluing.

The positive thing for two delegation members was sitting on their local council's Users Committee - user participation! They give their opinion on how social affairs are run. Walk-in services for people on minimum income adds to the feeling of self-worth.

The delegation is hoping that the EAPN-Netherlands network, with policy-makers, will be able to run front-line expert training projects as well as local action plans

Norway

Approximately 9% of the population live on the poverty line (European definition). Between 1999 and 2003, poverty increased by 36%; By the benchmark of 50% of median income (OECD standard), poverty increased by 25% from 2001-2003. Norwegians need a minimum income calculated on the standard household budget (National Institute for Consumer Research); Anyone living below the poverty line is entitled to guaranteed financial support.

Where participation is concerned, there is a gap between the government's stated wishes and reality; Norway's Pensions, Labour and Social Security Offices are being merged into a single big organisation and the Welfare Alliance (NGO) will work harder to implement user participation into it.

The Alliance's priorities are to:

- abolish poverty,
- increase user participation,

- improve quality of life and conditions for membership groups, and
- improve financial and working conditions for the member organizations.

Participation is one – if not the most important – means for reorganising the welfare system. In other words, if participation fails, anti-poverty policies will fail too.

Poland

The Polish delegation comprises people who have experienced poverty and social exclusion. Some have a long history of street living or alcohol abuse; others have experienced difficult childhoods, unemployment and homelessness.

These people are now in temporary accommodation or housing, in training, involved with publishing street papers, an agricultural cooperative, a second hand clothing shop, etc.

The experience of all the Polish participants shows that environmental constraints and personal weaknesses can be transcended. They show that exclusion can be overcome, and that integration into work and society is possible. They are living examples of the good practises that enabled them to “stand on their own two feet”.

Portugal

EAPN Portugal

- develops activities based on decentralization, and building regional networks that make up the national network. The regionalized set-up was thought the best way to reach the local level and mobilize associations.
- aims to give continuity to dialogue through the way it is set up.
- will invest as much as possible in national, regional and local media work as a means of giving a voice to the participants in the 4th Meeting by assuming their role as representatives of a broader public.

It would be interesting to spread the findings of the research on the public perception and image of poverty to a wider audience.

EAPN Portugal aims to maximize participation in its activities by other stakeholders: justice, employment, health, education and training, immigration, development co-operation, etc. If possible, EAPN Portugal will invite national/regional politi-

cians involved in the NAPs Inclusion to ensure continuity of the Inclusion Strategy at national level.

Spain

Social exclusion does not have a single face, or a single cause. One of the visible symptoms of exclusion is the lack or absence of participation in areas touching society and people’s lives.

The views of people experiencing poverty are disregarded by the rest of society. This is partly due to people in poverty’s self-image, and partly to others’ image of them.

“We are more than what they see”. People experiencing poverty are more than outward appearances show.

Trying sincerely to know someone requires attention, respect and care, and to achieve this is never 100% sure. People experiencing poverty need to be given the opportunity to be known as they really are, beyond their image or stereotype, and they have to give that opportunity to the others. It also means making sure that the opinions of people experiencing poverty is heeded on things that are important or of concern to them. Finally, there has to be guaranteed respect for their equal rights and opportunities.

Sweden

The Swedish delegates have different life courses – company owner, self-employed, manager, with a job, a family, etc....What in Sweden is called “a Svensson life” (= an ordinary life). For a variety of reasons – financial collapse, illness - they are now living below the poverty line. All three have different contact with social services, health services, and employment agencies. All are unemployed.

The “A decent life” scheme is a partnership between a national NGO, VERDANDI, and different social services in Örebro. It is a European Social Fund project. The idea of the project is for the participants to start a co-operative together at the end of the project period in December. It is a project for the long-term unemployed and work-incapacitated, who are regarded as too far out of touch with the labour market.

VERDANDI was created in 1896 as a protest movement against social injustice and the prevalent attitude that the individual is solely responsible for alcohol abuse rather than being the victim of inhu-

man conditions, insecurity and other circumstances.

Since the beginning, Verdandi – as an independent organisation in the labour movement – has aimed to improve working conditions and pay by promoting housing, education, the 8 hour day and universal suffrage.

Presentation by Eurochild

Eurochild AISBL^[3] is a network of children and young people's organizations. Its work is underpinned by the principles of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Eurochild promotes the welfare and rights of children and young people at the European and national levels. Figures show that in the European Union, 19% of children aged between 0 and 15 are at risk of poverty in the former Member States, and 20% in the 10 new Member States. Not only does poverty affect the development of the child in terms of health, education, psycho-social well-being, participation in cul-

ture, sport, recreation activities, but it also undermines its future prospects and lifetime chances.

Child poverty is not just about vulnerable groups of children and young people. It is a "horizontal" issue and needs to be mainstreamed in the NAPs process. Children and young people should be recognised as actors in the NAPs process and their participation facilitated.

The NAPs should be predicated on indicators of child poverty informed by what children and young people themselves say is important to them.

Eurochild therefore calls on policy makers and other stakeholders to strengthen their efforts to involve socially excluded children and young people.

3. International non-profit organization.

Andre, a young 16-year-old Cypriot tells her story:

I am a 16 year old student. My family broke up when my parents separated 10 years ago. They are not legally divorced, but I do not know where my father is or what he does. My mother is sick and unable to work. We live on benefit that is too low to really cover our needs.

Since the age of ten, I have worked during the summer holidays to earn my own spending money, but I cannot really have what I want or do what other kids my age do. I do not own a computer, and I often feel disadvantaged compared to my fellow students, and that I have less chance of a good education. I mostly stay home because I cannot afford to go out with my friends.

I have never felt discriminated against in school – and I feel lucky for this – but many children do experience discrimination and exclusion in school.

Our basic problem is that grown-ups do not listen to us, do not let us speak and are not interested in hearing our views. Our problems

are none of their interest, and most times they think that by solving "family problems", they solve ours too. This is not true. We want to be listened to on issues like equal opportunities in education, recreation, socialization and real inclusion in society as equal members.

Discrimination is when others criticize what you think or how you dress, dismiss you for being less capable, enjoying "different" things. This makes us feel excluded and diminishes our self-respect since we know that we are not accepted.

We are not respected in school. Education is just "lessons and examinations". Imagination, free thought and understanding play no part. We want an educational system in which adults do not rely on power, but in which there is mutual respect, understanding and learning.

Finally, when you call for "family support measures", remember that families include children as well as adults.

We want financial support

We want jobs for our parents

We want recreation and activities for all

We want educational opportunities regardless of our financial capacity.

WORKSHOPS^[4]

There were five workshops comprising

- **Delegates** from 22 Member States and Norway and Bulgaria. 89% of them people experiencing poverty bringing experiences from their lives (single parent family, jobless, homeless, disabled, registered unemployed, ill, migrants, minorities, etc.).
- **“Invited guests”** representing various European and national official agencies involved with poverty and social exclusion.

The workshops were set up to promote discussions on the images and perceptions of poverty

- held by different groups of key contacts (social services practitioners, government officials, researchers, politicians,...),
- portrayed in the media, and
- in the National Action Plans for Social Inclusion (NAPsIncl).

Each workshop produced a summary and questions or recommendations in a report back to the plenary session, followed by a debate.

The invited guests’⁵ contributions to the plenary meeting will be found at the end of this “Workshops” section.

4. The words in italics are those spoken at the meeting

5. Invited guests: senior European and national civil servants, European and national politicians, representatives of European institutions and committees, members of the press.

Workshop 1

Belgium, Cyprus, Greece, Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, United Kingdom.

Invited guests: representatives of the Austrian Ministry of Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection, the Luxembourg Ministry for Family and Integration, the European Union’s Social Protection Committee, the United Kingdom’s Pension Service, the University of Antwerp, the Belgian Social Integration and Anti-Poverty Service, the United Kingdom’s Commission for Racial Equality, the European Federation of National Organizations Working with the Homeless (FEANTSA).

Perception

- *Being poor means being stigmatized*
- *Women’s poverty is largely ignored because women hide their poverty.*
- *For centuries, poverty has had a negative image that is still being cultivated because poverty must*

create fear. The image portrayed is harmful to people who are poor.

- *We have a meeting chair who has been talking about poverty for over 50 years; that shows it is time to act.*

Key contacts

- *Single parent families are shunned in Greece.*
- *Asylum seekers are seen as money-grubbing scroungers, when they want to take part in the country’s economy.*
- *Welfare centre employees always turn poverty into a money thing.*

Social services practitioners must be in contact with people experiencing poverty. The problem is that some have no proper training and treat people as things. They have to understand what is happening. A lobby was formed in Poland to do that, to help teach people how to see things differently. The thing is not to throw money at people, but to change people’s attitudes.

Social services practitioners must be qualified and people experiencing poverty must be involved in

training them. Belgium has an “experiential experts” programme for training people who have experienced poverty to mediate between officialdom and people experiencing poverty. After four years’ training, they are able to put their experience to professional use.

Media

- *The press is very big on reality shows, spectacle, heart-tugging bad news.*
- *Poverty does not boost the ratings.*
- *The media pay people experiencing poverty to take part in confessional shows.*
- *The media are interested in the homeless in winter.*
- *The media do not try to understand what pushed people into poverty. They report on individuals who might not behave as they should.*

Strategies have to be developed, e.g., to draw attention to the European meetings, in order to get media coverage.

How to improve the image?

Some suggested getting positive descriptions of the lives of people experiencing poverty onto television and into the newspapers. People experiencing poverty should not be tagged as uneducated, for instance. The aim is to get the outside world to take a non-judgemental attitude.

Others urged having nothing to do with sensationalism by refusing to take part in reality show-type programmes.

The media must be encouraged to describe the conditions that lead to social exclusion, which will involve journalists being “trained”. Then, they could move away from sensationalism and stigmatizing groups like minorities.

Strategies and methods that can contribute to a positive image could include NGOs organising their own media events, like a press conference or public demonstration.

Another possibility is to link up with journalists, make them into allies, by producing a special report, as has been done in Belgium, for instance.

Another example from Poland: NGOs put forward people who are claiming a place in society through sport.

The important thing is to play up the positive!

People experiencing poverty are proactive. They struggle and get worn down by disrespect, they struggle to live and do their best. So, the press could follow a family for a month or two and show how they cope.

Some groups produce their own newspaper to give a positive spin to the image.

NAPs

- *The general public have not been involved in developing the NAPs.*
- *Most people have never heard of the NAPs.*
- *There is nothing about people experiencing poverty in the documents. It is not an easy thing to work with.*
- *Each country sets out its priorities in the NAPs, but they differ from one country to another.*
- *The texts include important things, but they are often presented in an inaccessible way.*

The main problems raised in relation to the NAPs are: no consultation or participation by civil society in framing them. The NAPs at present are unknown and inaccessible to a broad public.

CONTRIBUTION TO PLENARY SESSION

The experiences and observations shared point to the same thing: that despite an improved economic situation, the gap between rich and poor is widening in many countries. The delegates from the countries represented in the workshop stressed that sound economic growth does not mean more social inclusion and less unemployment. They repeatedly pointed out the particular difficulties faced by children, young people and families, as well as the elderly. Poverty is persistent and multi-generational. So, children who have lived in poverty have very great difficulty escaping it, and there is a big risk of poverty being “handed down” from one generation to the next. They also note that ethnic and racial discrimination are unfortunately prevalent in our societies, labelling some social groups with negative stereotypes that exclude them or add to their exclusion.

But, the vicious circle can be broken. The delegations shared a number of good practises like: public training grants, having the courage to address parliament and the press, help for budding entrepreneurs through official recognition of social co-opera-

tives and community-based enterprises, and strengthening job creation for people experiencing poverty through the setting-up of co-operatives

As the discussions progressed, various problems related to the perception of poverty in society were identified.

1. The delegates discussed contacts with social services practitioners⁶; the sad conclusion was that people experiencing poverty are too rarely accorded their full human dignity, and feel trapped in a “bureaucratic machine”, being treated as objects rather than subjects. Social services practitioners can learn a lot from people experiencing poverty, but their training needs to include front-line training courses.
2. Poverty is not a “sexy” topic for the media. The media tend not to put out reliable information about poverty; they explain neither its causes nor what can be done about them. Audience ratings/circulation figures drive the quest for “sensation”, so that poverty gets covered only in the “in brief” column or “other news” segment, or at specific times, like in winter or on 17 October⁷.

But, the delegates stressed that the media are not all the same, and there are journalists who try to put over a fair image. These are the ones who deserve to be given interviews and trust. People experiencing poverty can and must put over an image not as victims but as actors within self-help groups, co-operatives, sports players, etc. They can also create their own media image by publishing and distributing their own newspapers.

On the National Action Plans, the delegations found them very useful things to work with, but little understood in European societies. In many countries, governments lacked the political will to consult. The delegations therefore called on governments:

- for more consultation and participation by civil society in developing the NAPs. This would increase their visibility and help clarify their priorities.
- for more effort from governments to make the NAPs more accessible and more comprehensible to civil society.

6. To be understood in a broad sense as social workers, grass-roots workers, public servants, civil servants, etc.

7. UN International day for the eradication of Poverty

Workshop 2

France, Sweden, Norway, Finland, United Kingdom, Belgium, Malta, Estonia, Ireland, Spain.

Invited guests: Federal Ministry of Social Security (Austria), FEANTSA.

Perception

- *Poverty is not having the resources to play a full part in society*
- *You are experiencing poverty by not having access to fundamental rights.*
- *Being poor does not mean you should not be a citizen.*
- *It's not just that people experiencing poverty hide it, some people don't want to see it.*

Key contacts

- *In Sweden, social poverty is becoming much harder to bear than economic poverty, because our country is rooted in a welfare system and we have a Minister for Social Affairs who no longer talks about people experiencing poverty because it is not thought right to single out a group as being poor. So we cannot talk about these people. We don't like to say that there are people who live in poverty.*
- *When I asked for help from the social welfare system, I was told that I came over too positively; my house was too clean. I didn't look poor enough. I have my pride and self-respect. They said that if my house had been dirty and I looked scruffy, they would have given me money, but I was not a deserving case. You almost have to pretend to be something else to get help.*
- *Some people think that if you are experiencing poverty, you cannot make your own choices.*
- *If you're on benefit, you aren't regarded as poor. But people on benefit are experiencing poverty and are not included in the statistics.*
- *Researchers never quote us in their research findings. We never get a copy of the result.*
- *Politicians don't see us as citizens, we should shut up and go away.*

Researchers convey a poor image of poverty, especially in their published research findings. They talk about people they have not met or tried to understand. Research must be based on a participa-

tory methodology that gets away from the top-down approach. As many people as possible should be involved in research so as not always to be dealing with the same ones.

Agency officials find it important to have face-to-face meetings with people experiencing poverty.

Decision makers never stay in the meetings they are invited to. They say their piece and go. Talking at people is not enough, they have to talk to people.

Media

- *You should not be afraid of speaking your mind, or saying that the situation is horrific.*
- *The media talk about poverty from October to June because they think people might die in winter, but in summer, they couldn't care less.*
- *They've talked about poverty for two months. But 2 years ago, they never mentioned it; it was just ignored, brushed aside. They didn't think the public would be interested.*
- *They show two sick people. There are a lot of pictures and few words. Looking at them makes you want to cry.*
- *They have to stop showing homeless people with a bottle of booze and a dog. They never show pictures of people that have lifted themselves out of it.*

The media are more interested in celebrities.

The media image of poverty is stereotyped, shocking, negative and seasonal (winter). The media like shock-horror stories, and never ask how it can be changed, "how do we tackle poverty?" Poverty is frightening, which is why its image is always cautionary.

How to change the media?

Some organisations have press consultants to give a positive spin. Some journalists are allies, people who can be trusted to put across the examples given to them. It is important to work with journalists who know NGOs. The essential is to show people's daily lives and positive images.

Another idea is to publish one's own newspaper, as some NGOs do. Here, again, there are problems with getting personal accounts. The fear of speaking out is found not just among people experiencing poverty, but officials, too (agency officials,

social services practitioners). Telling one's story can lead to difficulties. Speaking to the media can help or hinder.

Learning to use journalists' vocabulary, use their tools, use mass communication techniques are all essential means for putting over a different image of poverty that does not smack of whingeing. Training in this would be helpful.

Another essential is to produce marketing documents that contain a social ideology.

But not all newspapers are amenable to reporting on poverty.

Street papers seem to have gone out of fashion, people have got used to them and many have stopped buying them. Street paper sellers are seen as beggars. But some are still thriving: in Denmark and Sweden, they still seem to be playing a positive role, especially as regards integration.

There is a wide range of communication tools, like artistic expression, for example, extracts from operas where the principal characters are poor, and the whole story revolves around them. There is also the Internet, especially through chat groups.

The existing code of practice for publishing images on situations in developing countries should also apply to people experiencing poverty in Europe.

Social marketing could be developed, as companies do. The important thing is getting heard, so why not stage a "Poverty Pride" or get the European Meetings as high-profile as the Olympic Games?

CONTRIBUTION TO PLENARY SESSION

Poverty and social exclusion are found in every country. Because they are grossly distorted, the people enduring them face perception, self-esteem and self-confidence issues. Stereotypes are perpetuated by the media and society itself.

Image

Governments and the media are now unwilling to admit that social exclusion and poverty still exist in their country. In Sweden, for example, with its highly developed social security system, people wrongly tend to claim that there is no poverty. They do not see poverty as something complex. They attribute it to a lack of resources or the poor's own

fault. But poverty and social exclusion are much more than that. They are about inequalities in rights and access to rights - we are entitled to what is our due.

That there is growing talk of poverty and social exclusion is a good thing, especially when done by people who know what of they speak, which raises the profile of the problem. Sometimes, it can have a negative impact. The problem is one of labelling: the poor are seen as vulnerable, but do not necessarily see themselves that way.

Immigrants are said to be vulnerable, for example, but if asked, will often reply that they are better off in the host country than in their country of origin. Their self-perception is not as being poor or vulnerable.

Social services practitioners can either help or hinder us. Social services practitioners see people experiencing poverty as clients, a benefit recipient, not as someone with knowledge about the situation they are living through, and shareable experience on it. A relationship of dependency on the social services practitioner may also grow up, which influences how people experiencing poverty are perceived.

More resources are needed, but the quality of social work must also be improved, with more participation by people experiencing poverty/exclusion. The thing is to work with people experiencing poverty to help them escape their situation.

Researchers have only one image of social exclusion and poverty. They should use participatory methods where people experiencing poverty can have a voice and take part in the research work.

We may be experiencing poverty, but we still have something to contribute. We have the inner strength to respond, and it is that strength that must be leveraged.

Media

The media often take a fixed approach to poverty through shock-horror, challenging images simply to grab readership/audiences rather than educate society about poverty. The media play up deaths from hypothermia in winter, but brush poverty under the carpet come summer. The media put across an unrealistic image. We need to change this kind of portrayal.

That means gaining a better understanding of

how the media work so as to be able to use communication tools, in particular by forging good relationships with journalists, so they learn to respect personal stories instead of exploiting them to boost sales/audience figures.

The good side of how poverty is portrayed by the media is to challenge public opinion and call its attention to the problems of poverty and social exclusion in our societies.

The media and new communication technologies must be used to put our messages across.

Workshop 3

France, Germany, Latvia, Luxembourg.

Invited guests: representatives of the Federal Social Security Service (Belgium), the Social Protection Committee, the Social Security Inspectorate (Luxembourg), the Alter Agency.

Perception

- *You aren't born as a homeless person.*
- *People experiencing poverty are portrayed as brutish and uncouth.*
- *There is a huge difference between new and old Europe.*

Key contacts

- *Social services practitioners are more clinical than personally involved in what they do.*
- *In Latvia, social services practitioners are badly paid and need help themselves, which is why few people willingly go to them.*
- *Many of those we deal with have difficulty communicating.*

Most social services treat people experiencing poverty as things rather than people.

A scheme from the United Kingdom was cited as a way of improving their perception: promoting inclusive language - not "I/me" (the social services practitioner) vis-à-vis "him/her" or "them" (the "client") but rather "we/us". "We" are working together to find a solution.

Media

- *In Latvia, a women's magazine published reports and interviews with people and families experien-*

cing poverty. Readers could then vote for the one they thought was worst-off. The winner received a cash prize. The problem was that these reports were also popular among people experiencing poverty, even though, they conveyed an even more negative image of them.

- *Poor people are a sideshow.*
- *Newspapers talk about figures, not people.*
- *You have to remember that the media are a business and journalists are limited in what they can do. They have to sell.*

Access to the media is unfair: people experiencing poverty are portrayed in a staged, negative, sensationalist way. The newspapers published by self-help groups are the best channels for information on poverty.

How to improve the image?

People experiencing poverty and self-help groups should have media training. A good relationship with journalists would also help improve the image. More open letters should be written on poverty. People experiencing poverty and self-help groups setting up their own newspaper is an avenue to be explored.

NAPs

- *People experiencing poverty must be able to take part in developing the NAPs. That ought to be possible at regional level already, because the reality of poverty differs from region to region.*
- *Latvia's NAPs is a good programme, but contains no practical measures. There is now a monitoring committee that associations are invited to attend, but it is not independent, so the NGOs pulled out.*
- *The very way the NAPs are written puts over a particular image of poverty.*

People experiencing poverty generally have little or no say input into the NAPs. The first NAPs were written by bureaucrats and politicians. In some States, people experiencing poverty are now being asked for their views on the NAPs, but it is not enough.

The question is: How to ensure that the "voice" of the poor is heard in the NAPs after they have been consulted? One possible answer cited was the Belgian example of people experiencing poverty being involved in writing a general report on pover-

ty, and then monitoring action on it. This method could be used for the NAPs

How do people experiencing poverty get involved in the process of writing the new NAPs? It must be through a two-way dialogue: from Europe to the people, from the people to Europe. EAPN must step up efforts to promote participation by people experiencing poverty. They must not be involved just in the process, but also with the product and its outcomes.

CONTRIBUTION TO PLENARY SESSION

After a presentation on two instances of how poverty is reported in the French and Latvian press, the group concluded that the press was too uninvolved. After considering the relations of people experiencing poverty and NGOs with the press, the participants tried to identify problems with other key contacts: politicians, social services practitioners, etc. Awareness of the NAPs was also looked at to find possible ways of reclaiming ownership of them.

Things to do to promote participation and get it onto the Social Agenda:

1. Increase participation and involvement by people experiencing poverty in NAPs implementation at local and regional level
2. Secure funding to support and increase participation.
3. Draw up an EAPN action plan with recommendations
 - for participants.
 - for each government.
4. Get on board with decision makers and politicians to forge the link with people experiencing poverty.
5. Get the Member States to support the cause of people experiencing poverty
6. Have a real dialogue with governments
7. Supplement lobbying with cultural, sporting, written analysis and other groups
8. Use the entry of and issues in the new Member States to give a general "boost".
9. Increase cooperation with journalists

The participants want to be informed about future work, and not just within EAPN. They would like to receive a work plan and recommendations from EAPN and the European institutions. National

governments have a duty to involve the different strata of society in policy-making processes.

National governments have an obligation to listen to people experiencing poverty, and they must take their opinions and views on board.

We must improve our lobbying, not just at European but also at national level. There are wide gaps in the image and perception of poverty between the new Member States of the EU and the old Members States. Social security systems are a recent thing in the new States. The problems are the same, but the scales are not. The EU's new Member States should apply themselves to catching up with the old ones.

As to the media, it is very important to cooperate with them to spread a more positive image of poverty, so that they stop using shock-horror images when covering poverty and social exclusion.

NGOs do a vital job, because they are in direct touch with people experiencing poverty.

Workshop 4

Austria, Bulgaria, Cyprus, France, Ireland, Italy, Malta, Netherlands, Norway.

Invited guests: representatives from of the Luxembourg Ministry and a French magazine

Perception

- *Unemployment is experienced as something shameful.*
- *Poverty is not seen as the product of unsuitable policies.*
- *They say that the poor get more milk than they deserve. But definitely less than they need.*
- *Poverty is seen as behind the job culture that terrorises people.*

Key contacts

- *Some say there is no such thing as poverty.*
- *Job centres find work for the easiest cases, the most "employable" people, and ignore the rest.*
- *They think that if you're on the dole, you're an illiterate waster. So you get offered only the most basic training.*

- *There is a relationship of dependency between the social services practitioner and the person asking for help.*
- *Poverty is criminalized: the money that isn't given to social policies goes into the prisons.*

Key contacts deal with figures, not people. Some agency officials work on performance incentive systems, e.g., the number of unemployed they "place". So, they work with the easiest cases. Also, training provision misses the target, namely leading on to a job. Again, the trainers themselves have no job security; so how can they feel motivated? There is also a victim-blaming culture.

Media

- *If you say you live in a hostel, you are tagged as a problem drinker. If you are unemployed, you are shiftless. Other media manage to listen to us, but not many.*
- *They report on the homeless in winter. Any other time, the media never come to see what life is like in a hostel.*
- *The media take a three minute soundbite from a one hour interview, just the bit where you said something shocking.*
- *Newspapers tend to play up the negative side of things. Bad news sells better than good. Immigrants are "sold" as taking others' jobs.*

The media publish what they think the public wants to read or hear. The daily lives of people experiencing poverty never rate a mention. The media want the "big splash".

You have to remember that the media are a business and so they publish what will sell. Also, some newspapers are government-owned, so the information they publish is controlled. But there is also the opposite, i.e., media that shape policies.

How to change the image?

A platform on housing in Belgium, for example, invited Ministers to spend a night in the home of a person experiencing poverty. This may have attracted big media coverage, controlled by the platform to ensure it was not given a negative spin, but a Minister spending one night with a person experiencing poverty does not solve the problems overnight.

When NGOs can put together stories to “sell” to the media - for example setting up an event showcasing the creativity of people experiencing poverty – they readily attract coverage.

But journalists can be partners.

NAPs

- *We don't know much about the NAPs. We get no information. The people most affected are the least informed.*
- *We were closely involved to start with, but increasingly less now because they don't much like listening to those most affected.*
- *The NAPs were a ministerial exercise.*
- *We were invited once, that's all.*
- *The NAP is a technical exercise for the European Union.*
- *The measures described are ones that have already been taken.*

The NAPs should be discussed and put into effect locally in order to involve people experiencing poverty.

For the NAPs to be meaningful, the public must have a say in their development and follow-up.

Participation by people experiencing poverty must be guaranteed.

CONTRIBUTION TO PLENARY SESSION

Key contacts

On issues of pressing concern - employment and work - the participants emphasized the lack of jobs and the difficulty of getting disadvantaged people into the labour market, as well as the growth of casual hire-and-fire.

The group also discussed and took issue with the public sector withdrawal from service provision, which is being increasingly handed-over to the private sector, especially privatisation of public employment agencies. Employment agency staff need training to better address the needs of job-seekers. Neither vocational training, nor vocational education, are sure-fire means of entry into the job market.

Personal services were also discussed. They should be seen as rights to be observed.

In many countries, services have become concessions granted to people.

Disadvantaged people live in a state of dependency on the different services.

Discrimination and criminalisation were also discussed.

Media

What image do we give to the media and what image do they give of us?

As things are, bad news always makes the headlines. It seems that is what the public wants. Newspapers print what readers want without going into the real causes.

Newspapers are sensation-hungry.

They are businesses, with interests to protect – whatever political line they toe - they always have to work for the owners' interests and profit.

The media are often influenced by the country's policy.

It is unfortunate that they show the civilised outward appearance of society, concealing and even ignoring the reality of things.

But, positive spin-offs have been found when there is extensive media coverage.

There are new possibilities: technology offers different instantaneous, effective means of information; the Internet brings information a mouse-click away.

In conclusion, the media operate more or less the same way across Europe. They give a distorted picture of people experiencing poverty, and take notice of them only at certain times, in winter or in the run-up to elections.

NAPs

The general public is under-informed about the action plans for social inclusion.

People experiencing poverty have little or no involvement in drawing up the action plans for social inclusion. But they are the ones directly affected, and so should be more involved in the process of drawing up the action plans.

Employment: specific measures for jobseekers are first set by reference to objectives shaped by market forces; only afterwards are attempts made to define appropriate tools. Training is the other way round. Tools are provided, but no objective, namely: (re)employment. The effectiveness of training meas-

ures is undermined by this, as the aim (a decent, well-paid job) is at best receding into the distance, and at worst simply non-existent.

In some countries, governments focus on categories of the poor that they favour over others. The NAPs should be detailed-out at regional and local level in order to increase participation by people experiencing poverty/exclusion, and contacts with them should be strengthened. Poverty is spreading despite rising GDP, so people experiencing poverty must be allowed active input to the social inclusion plans.

Workshop 5

Austria, Germany, Norway, Spain, France, Belgium, Luxembourg, Italy, Hungary, Denmark, Czech Republic, Ireland.

Invited guests: representatives of the Ministry for Social Security (Austria), the Social Integration Service of the Federal Ministry for Social Integration (Belgium), the European Commission, the Social Protection Committee

Perception

- *We have negative images of ourselves, because others have that image of us.*
- *Poverty stunts self-fulfilment.*
- *Being far away from one's own country is a form of poverty.*
- *The worst ever thing for me was when I had to make my child put some chocolate back on the supermarket shelf because I couldn't afford to buy it.*
- *You feel humiliated, imprisoned.*
- *Taking part in a meeting like this one shows us that poverty is not an inevitability*
- *Poverty has to stop being a reason for discrimination.*

Key contacts

- *I don't think our rulers know what it's like looking for somewhere to live.*
- *Bureaucrats and politicians have no idea what poverty is.*
- *New legislation aims to make the poor poorer and the rich richer.*
- *Social services practitioners don't understand the misery people go through.*

- *Social services practitioners say that poor people cannot have hobbies. They have neither the time nor the means for leisure activities.*
- *Social service office walls are plastered with posters that reflect a negative image back to us. You can't put up brighter posters, because when you are poor, you have no right to dream.*
- *The general public thinks that the poor are all the same. But we are different people with different lifestyles.*

One general remark: social policies try to address the consequences, not the causes, of poverty.

How to improve the image?

Belgium's social integration agency is running a scheme consisting in hiring two "experiential experts"⁸. The idea comes from an association, which set up a scheme to train people who had experienced poverty to become mediators in contacts with public services. The project will result in 16 "experiential experts" being employed in federal government agencies on contracts of employment. The experience of people who are experiencing poverty is a valuable input to policy implementation.

It was remarked that key contacts were not all good or all bad, and that some officials did a good job. But, there was a fear and disquiet about some who were afraid of what they did not know.

The job of enhancing the image has to be started at local level, to dispel fears in the community. Another good practise is to hold discussion meetings in public buildings that house politicians, like Parliament, to get direct access to them. Being seen gets results. Getting public opinion to understand what poverty is would also help change perceptions. The public can help leverage policy change. Awareness-building could start by taking local communities to task. People who work in institutions have the ability to listen; it is up to people experiencing poverty to talk to them. They can help the efforts made. In Italy, teachers have been given training to understand the needs of children from poor families. They became school mediators, and the children's situations improved, showing that people can be educated about social issues.

Politicians also have a role to play by bringing situations of poverty home to the electorate.

"Wherever you are, you have to speak up and make demands, from neighbours to politicians. We

have to listen to one another to understand one another”.

8. Ervaringskundige, people who have experienced poverty.

Media

- *People experiencing exclusion are portrayed as the cause of social problems.*
- *Migrant workers are very often portrayed as unskilled benefit cheats, and also as criminals in the making who only disrupt society.*
- *The media spend about a minute on poverty and hours on the production of wealth.*
- *Some papers say that the poor are idle scroungers.*
- *My picture was published in a local paper with a report about me going to the Meeting. Afterwards, people asked me things, took an interest in me, even the politicians.*
- *All journalists want is to get us to say what they want to hear.*

How to change the image?

Occasional contact with the press, especially to invite journalists to events organised by associations, can help put across a positive message. This kind of approach can also lead on to talks with the local authorities or other key contacts as a result of information published in the press. This dialogue has to be kept up afterwards.

Getting one's picture and an interview in a local paper makes it possible to reach the local community and show that people experiencing poverty are trying to escape it.

Becoming aware that the poor exist, and are trying to lift themselves out of poverty, means that people can no longer shut their eyes to the situation.

“It is important to communicate with the media, but also to tell them what we really want”.

NAPs

- Before the NAPs, there was nothing in Greece for the poor.

A proposal was made to set up forums for participation in NAPs development and evaluation.

CONTRIBUTION TO PLENARY SESSION

There are many differences in Europe. Poverty is not just about money, but also quality of life. Every human being has the right to decide how to live their life. No-one can tell someone else how to live their life.

This is why people experiencing poverty must be heard. A dialogue with policy makers must be established. They must understand what experiencing poverty and social exclusion means.

On the media - we must learn to make better use of them, bearing in mind that what journalists want is a “good story”, and that story is ours to tell.

We are long on ideas but short on putting them into practice, not least because we feel insignificant. Organizations are taking shape in different countries to try and change things: they are not being heeded, and sometimes getting a bad press from governments.

Contribution by the invited guests to the plenary meeting

Direct listening is crucially important. The main impression is the host of experiences and factors that have worked to consign people to poverty. These experiences are a productive input that informs how the “invited guests” see social exclusion and poverty.

The group had noted three key things.

1. the experience of poverty is something often denied and highly stigmatised.
2. people experiencing poverty often suffer low quality services, which merely compounds the poverty experience. Something must be done to put that right.
3. The NAPs are not well enough known or understood: they do not relate directly to people's experiences.

It was repeatedly pointed out that there was a lot of stigma attached to poverty, which only made the problem worse. We are aware that poverty bars access to the media for some people, stops them taking part in a political dialogue. Access must be made available to political circles.

On services - those of us who work for government well know that there is very often a wide gap between people who are experiencing poverty and the politicians who are meant to be tackling poverty.

There are ways to close that gap:

- It is very important to bring people experiencing poverty closer to government, and train them in self-advocacy so they can share their experiences.
- Conversely, governments have to say what they are doing for people experiencing poverty.

On the NAPs – we fully understand why people do not feel connected with them. Some plans may be too Euro-centric. The way in which plans are communicated to the Council and Commission does not

enable a real process to be developed within the Member States. We nevertheless believe the NAPs to be an important tool for people experiencing poverty, and for their self-advocacy organisations.

The NAPs are a way of effectively tackling poverty at the local level. There is obviously much to be done to engage people experiencing poverty more with the NAPs. More must be done, therefore, to increase participation in writing the NAPs and formulating anti-poverty strategies.

Recommendations and questions

Each workshop put forward recommendations and questions to the plenary, which were commented on or replied to by a panel comprising:

- Mr Jérôme VIGNON, Director, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs And Equal Opportunities, European Commission
- Mr Tom MULHERIN, Chair, Social Protection Committee
- Ms Brigitte WEINANDY, Social Protection Committee
- Mr Johan VANDENBUSSCHE, representing the Belgian Ministry for Social Integration
- Ms Edeltraud GLETTLER, Director, European and International Affairs, Federal Ministry for Social Security , Generations and Consumer Protection, and Social Protection Committee, Austria
- Mr Ludo HOREMANS, Vice President of EAPN

Recommendations

On ...

... participation and NAPs

- National governments must draw up indicators for participation and use them to demonstrate their commitment to listening to people experiencing exclusion and poverty, who must be involved in working out those indicators. EAPN would follow-up and audit the process.
- The social inclusion process lacks visibility in Europe, so it is important that governments should consult more widely with civil society on developing strategies to tackle poverty and social exclusion.
- Promote the right to self-expression and the right to vote among people experiencing poverty.
- Get decision makers and politicians on board to forge the link with people experiencing poverty.
- Other governments should look at the Belgian scheme for training “experiential experts” to interface with government departments and agencies with a view to reproducing it.
- Step up participation and involvement by people experiencing poverty at the local and regional levels by implementing the NAPs
- Governments must do more to make the social inclusion plans more accessible and more comprehensible to the general public.

... national and local involvement

- National Meetings modelled on the European Meetings must be staged in all EU countries to set a real national conversation going.
- Step up regional and local involvement in tackling poverty and social exclusion

... financial resources

- Associations must have direct access to the European Funds, not via governments
- Funding to support and develop participation by people experiencing poverty in policies to tackle social inclusion

... journalists

- Establish good relations with journalists who are knowledgeable about the situation and problems of people experiencing poverty, and use these journalists as a channel of communication with public opinion

... training

- Education and training for young people should be part and parcel of job creation.

... the follow-up on the European Meetings

- Keep the 3rd Meeting’s recommendations in mind.
- Use the issues and entry of the new Member States to boost the whole process.
- Work in specific themed workshops.
- Draw up an EAPN action plan with recommendations
 - for the participants.
 - for each government.
 - Think about action groups as well as lobbying: cultural and sporting activities, written analyses.

Questions

About ...

... jobs and training

- What systemic solution can be offered to enable the social economy to develop and more jobs

created in NGOs and community-based enterprises?

- What can you do to ensure vocational training for all unemployed and people with a disability?
- What can you do to make it easier for lone parents to get decent jobs and bring in measures to make it easier to employ them (flexible working hours, childcare provision, etc)?

... participation

- What will you do to make the Lisbon strategy goals binding?
- How will you promote the right to self-expression?
- Associations want to be partners with the State, not just to give impetus or compete with one another. How are you promoting associations that work close to people in poverty?

... social security

- What will you do to improve equality for all in social security systems and universal access to health care?
- How do you propose giving parents the wherewithal to give their children a decent start in life?

... the perception of poverty

- Have you ever experienced poverty? Do you personally know anyone who has? How do you perceive poverty?

... the follow-up to the Meetings

- What action are you considering taking on our suggestions?

Comments and responses

Mr Jérôme VIGNON

The Commission is responsible for putting forward to national governments strategic choices for tackling poverty and exclusion.

It has received a clarion call from this meeting.

The Commission's future policy initiation will give greater recognition to the fact that exclusion is already found in the way that policies, including social policies, are framed, the feeling of superiority they do or do not express towards those they are intended to help. Exclusion is shaped even by the images conveyed in public discourse, and reflected in

administrative attitudes. The Commission will endeavour to factor all this in when formulating the European strategy to tackle exclusion.

Some workshops queried what the Commission could do. It means to move forward with action and press home the fact that the European and national strategy to tackle exclusion is in for the long haul. It has been going for 5 years, and will certainly continue up to 2010 and probably beyond. Strenuous efforts are needed to see that social inclusion, an inclusive society, remains part of the European economic strategy itself. We shall be using various opportunities to do that:

- the "social monitoring" conference on the future of the social inclusion plans will be held on 13 and 14 June 2005.
- the traditional Round Table will be held in Glasgow in October, and the Commission will use it to relaunch the strategy.
- the Commission will be discussing implementation of the NAPs 2003-2005 with the Social Protection Committee in a few months' time.

The Commission will be proposing new common objectives for the period 2006 to 2008, and participation by people experiencing poverty/exclusion will be a feature of their implementation. The media must be encouraged to report instances of successful implementation of the social inclusion strategy. The European Union's role in the perception of poverty is to promote a realistic image of poverty. The European Union's approach to achieving social inclusion, based on the same rights, treatment and dignity for people experiencing poverty as for those who are not, should help to counter the inclination towards a superiority complex.

Thought must be given to what can best be done (actions and strategies) to fight poverty and social exclusion in order to prompt ministers – and not just those for Social Affairs - to recognise that what is fair for the poor is good for all society. Implementing policies for the poor is an investment in justice, and a foundation for the future.

This is written into the European agenda and will not be dropped; making 2010 the European Year of Combating Exclusion and Poverty shows as much.

Mr Tom MULHERIN,
Chair, Social Protection Committee

Discussions on social policies at European and even national level can often be quite abstract. It is essential that these policies in their design and implementation take full account of the real problems and issues and this requires continuous contact and communication with the people affected. Politicians, including Ministers, rely heavily on that communication. So, also do those who develop policy options for consideration by Ministers. NGOs in the field of social inclusion provide important channels of communication and work hard to get the most important issues included on the political agenda at local, national and EU levels.

This meeting is a valuable opportunity to hear directly from people affected by the problems that Member States' economic and social policies seek to address.

The members of the European Social Protection Committee are senior officials who represent their Ministers and it reports to the European Council. The Social Protection Committee is fully supported by and has a very fruitful co-operation with the European Commission – under the Open Method of Coordination - in a number of areas, including social inclusion, which are primarily the responsibility of each Member State.

Real action at national level is required to ensure that the policies reach all the way to the people affected. Local participation is essential to maximise success.

Some of you have been critical of the NAPs Inclusion: from your perspective, they have not succeeded. In my view, the NAPs get better with each successive process and while progress may be slow, it is nonetheless significant. In developing a multi-faceted approach to social exclusion, their contribution has been substantial. They are of course written in somewhat inaccessible language with which policy specialists are comfortable rather than those people affected by poverty. To be successful, the national authorities need to do much more both to

involve people in the development of inclusion policies and to explain the resulting proposals to them.

One of the more important benefits of the NAPs Inclusion is the extent to which it promotes essential cross-government strategies on the many aspects of the problems being addressed.

Joined up thinking may take longer to build but the potential benefits are worthwhile.

Ms Brigitte WEINANDY,
Ministry for Family and Integration (Luxembourg),
member of the Social Protection Committee

Have I ever experienced poverty?

As luck and good fortune would have it, I have never been poor. As a child, I knew that there would always be someone there to provide me with the food and toys I wanted. I always had material security, and I have never personally known poverty.

But, before taking up my post in the Ministry, I spent a long time working in the field with people experiencing poverty, people coming out of prison.

Moving from that to the more remote sphere of central government, I noticed one thing – that yes, the way you see things and listen changes. You listen to and hear someone better when you can look them in the eyes, and the fact of having seen the person in front of you can result in different decisions.

When you lose that opportunity in your daily work to “look people in the eyes”, it also changes the image. It is true to say that working on policy issues, you can lose sight of the individuals behind them.

In that connection, I should like to mention what I think is a particularly good Luxembourg practise: any planned decision to cancel the “minimum guaranteed income” benefit of a claimant at fault cannot be taken before the claimant has had a personal interview with the senior official who will be taking the decision.

Many participants in this meeting said that *poverty often has a grossly distorted image*. This is true, and I think that policy-makers are also to blame for spreading that image. They tend to focus on the cost of tackling poverty and social exclusion, but

underplay what people in poverty contribute, such as when engaged on community work projects. Taking account of this contribution could also help change the image.

Some policy-makers are not too keen to acknowledge that the European Union has 14 million working poor. It may not be a palatable figure, but it has to be said, because it too can help change the public image of people experiencing poverty: they are not “shiftless benefit scroungers” but workers, too.

When it comes to vulnerable groups who depend on social services, policy evaluation needs to ask itself:

- What policies are helping to “brand” people experiencing poverty with the negative image of “benefit wasters”, and which ones could help people experiencing poverty shake off that image?

Activation policies, for example, are a positive way of helping people experiencing poverty free themselves of the negative image of “idlers”.

One final point is the importance of participation. All policy makers must be aware that participation cannot take place unless structures are provided to enable it.

To sum it all up, someone said that poverty has had a negative image down the centuries because it has to create fear. Yes, poverty must have a negative image, because it is a scandal in our societies that must be openly condemned, just as the fight against poverty must be recognised as a real policy priority.

In the workshop I attended, one young woman said she did all she could to hide her poverty. This remark encapsulates all the shame that is still attached to being poor, when it is poverty that is shameful, not the person living in it!

Mr Johan VANDENBUSSCHE,
representing the Belgian Ministry of Social
Integration

How is poverty perceived in the *media*, and how does that affect policy?

The media portrays powerful images of poverty and social exclusion. But the wealthier a society is, the more it focuses on wealth and turns away from part of the population – the excluded – saying “it’s your own fault”. Contact between these two groups breaks down, and what results is a two-tier society, which must not happen.

The thing to stress is that the media can make situations worse or better. There is no denying that the media have an impact. The media can turn an event into a big story.

But the image portrayed has to be positive, one of opportunities.

What does a Minister react to?

Two main things:

- The presentation of good practises. Never be shamed about what you are doing.
- The presentation of experiences and personal testimonies. There are a growing number of publications that tell how people end up in poverty, how they lose their position in life. It is important for there to be a face, a person behind the figures. Politics is not impervious to such accounts.

Clearly, more must be done, and it must be put into practice through participation. The closer one is to people experiencing poverty/exclusion, the more likelihood there is of framing a policy that helps and works. A consultative body is in preparation in Belgium: it will put organisations in ongoing contact, which should at least improve information and involve them directly.

The expertise present at the 4th meeting is also particularly important, because personal life histories are also a way of transmitting information. Two-way communication is what is needed: from politicians to the public, and from the public to politicians.

The European Meetings make it possible to have a series of contacts, which must last into the future.

Ten years ago, in Belgium, we wrote a General Report on Poverty. Ten years on, it has to be said that not much has changed, despite the measures taken.

But we have to broaden the discussion to include new information and this is why there will be a new debate in Belgium.

Communication has to be kept up day by day.

So, the Meetings owe their success to national preparations, but also the feedback on the meetings in those countries.

Ms Edeltraud GLETTLER,

Director, European and International Affairs, Federal Ministry for Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection; Member of the Social Protection Committee, Austria

This Meeting has touched me on an emotional level more than any other conference and convinced me of the importance of these exchanges of experiences at European level. Not as a matter of theoretical knowledge, but as a tangible fact, I see that poverty is a violation of human dignity. Poverty does not just have many causes, but also many faces. It is important to change the perception of poverty among as many people as possible through direct, personal contacts. Anonymous faces and analyses are not what should predominate, but rather real dialogue with people experiencing poverty. And this goes for everyone – not just politicians, civil servants and journalists.

I am grateful to you for having had the opportunity of listening to what you said yesterday in the workshops, and I thank you – this experience will influence my future work.

When preparing this Meeting, we found that there were very few written works or studies on the topic “Images and perceptions of poverty”. One of these studies pointed out that the image of poverty comes not from people experiencing poverty themselves, but more from those that deal with it. And as Minister Jacobs said, the poor loom largest in the run-up to Christmas.

But some studies have been done on people with special needs, and here, I should like to say that people with disabilities get more media coverage now than a few years ago.

The European Year of People with Disabilities 2003 was important in this respect. Austrian television stations, for instance, broadcast many pro-

grammes in cooperation with the Federal Ministry for Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection, which helped boost the public image of people with disabilities. The Year of Equal Opportunities announced by the Commission for 2007 could perhaps do likewise for people experiencing poverty.

Thanks in part to this Meeting, a new objective could be included in the common objectives for combating poverty and social exclusion, reflecting the topic of this Meeting: “Images and perceptions of poverty”. The Member States could call for an exchange of good practises on it, for example.

“Images and perceptions of poverty” could be a topic on training schemes for future journalists, civil servants and others. Employment and training opportunities in NGOs could be increased.

I was impressed by the Belgian “experiential experts” scheme, i.e., training people experiencing poverty for work in public services, ultimately to act as mediators between people in poverty and government. Austria finds this an interesting idea, and I will suggest implementing it.

Austria will carry on the tradition of European Meetings of people experiencing poverty next year, and will organise the 5th Meeting in association with the Commission and EAPN. We hope it will be an interesting and successful event. We shall start right now thinking around ways of improving communication between people experiencing poverty, public agencies and politics.

I offer you my best wishes, and thank you again for the opportunity to take part in this important and impressive Meeting.

Mr Ludo HOREMANS

Vice President of EAPN

The 4th European Meeting is one of the most important Meetings that EAPN would like to leverage within the Network. All the delegations present at this meeting are in contact with a national network. It is on this level that work now has to go forward between the 4th and 5th Meetings.

Follow-up on the 4th Meeting

EAPN will not be waiting on the 5th Meeting to tackle the issues raised. They will be addressed within the Network, but also in relation to the national preparations. The first ever budget was allocated for this in 2004. EAPN hopes that the Austrian Presidency will keep this budget so that national meetings can be held meanwhile in the different countries, and not just between people experiencing poverty. It is important to take the dialogue at national level forward, especially if it has lost momentum. The dialogue must therefore be taken forward with partners, including outside the strictly social sphere.

Media

A lot has been said about images and the media. The evidence from the workshop reports is that there are different types of people in the media. We have the printed press and television, which are businesses to be run but alongside and within that, there are also journalists with high ethical standards who try to portray a true image. We can find allies among these journalists. So we need to identify where at national level we can forge alliances to improve media penetration.

Importance of the local level

With the new Member States, there are clearly new realities. EAPN needs to respond in its general assemblies and different task forces that are monitoring the NAPs. EAPN wants to move on, to look to the future, because we know that we have to deal with a new European Union.

The public in some founding countries of the EU said NO to the constitutional Treaty at the time of enlargement. Not because they have had enough of the European Union, but simply because they are saying, "We have not been sufficiently involved. We want to be kept better informed, and as long as we are not, we will not fall into line."

These NOs showed how particularly important the local level in Europe is. So far, too little account has been taken of the local level, even in the NAPs, which focus on governments but not the local level, which is exactly where poverty has to be addressed. If people experiencing poverty see an improvement in their situation, it will be because of improvements at the local level.

We have had a serious wake-up call. Authorities and associations alike absolutely have to realize that the local level has to be involved. This makes the Network particularly important in putting participation into practice.

Development of the Meetings

Participation has certainly been a point of discussion at the Meetings, but so have other things like housing, jobs and training, health, and so on, which are big issues. It has also been pointed out that for people experiencing poverty every day is a fight for survival. What these people do goes unrecognised. While pledges must be given on respect and dignity, they must also be given on incomes. EAPN believes that makes a minimum income important.

The Meetings have come up with good workable ideas on the forms and process of participation. Now that the 5th Meeting has been announced, we need to take stock of this, to see what has and has not been done, to try and draw up a scoreboard in order to better prepare the next Meeting, and to take the necessary steps for the future so as to have a Europe which is not just a Europe of economic growth but a Europe where the social dimension is important.

We need a new commitment from the politicians and the Commission, from the President of the Commission. It needs to be said that the Nice objectives for the Social Inclusion Strategy are central to the integrated Lisbon Strategy.

But let us not forget that the decisions in Europe are taken by our national Ministers, and it is at this level that we must act first. This is the job before us.

Discussion with the floor

- **We do not want a negative image, we do not want to stay in poverty. We have pride, we are human beings.** We live in poverty but there is no shame in that. We struggle, we think positively. We want to escape poverty. Why should we always hide ourselves? We should not even have to ask for our rights – rights are what we should have.
- **"The poor cannot wait"**. Some people are not being given their fundamental rights. In the deci-

sion making processes, politicians have to keep in mind that the poor cannot wait.

- These two days have seen a lot said about helping people. I find that astounding. There is this constant refrain about wanting to help. **What we want is support, to have the opportunities to lift ourselves out of it.** Granted, people in need, who need direct help, should be helped. But to be led by the hand, helped all the time, will not help us to feel better about ourselves, or stronger.
- It's very often hard to speak out. People in prison, **if you don't give them resources, they won't be able to do anything** when they get out of prison. The same goes for people living with HIV; if you don't let them integrate into society, if they don't have resources, they can't take preventive measures. If people experiencing poverty stay in this situation, they can't easily escape it. Poverty, AIDS, prison make prisoners of us all. I don't think we should be pigeonholing people. They are all people without resources, and without the means, they will not be able to exit their situation.
- How can migrant workers be included and socially integrated into society? **It is high time that the European Union recognised the contribution migrant workers make to society and the economies of the different countries.** What is the European Union proposing to enable migrant workers to integrate into society?
- **For us as immigrants, Europe is remote and I don't think we are treated properly.** It is flagrant discrimination. What can the European Union do for us who want equal opportunities, dignity and respect?
- Gypsy children born in the European Union have no permission to stay. It is **a denial of human rights**, and when they reach 18, they can be shipped off back to their country of origin where they don't speak the language properly. These children's right to citizenship must be recognized.
- I cannot believe I am hearing that the NAPs have led to progress. **The gross national product has increased in different countries, but poverty has also risen.** What progress have the NAPs produced? In Austria, as well, people do not under-

stand why in a Constitutional Treaty that talks about human dignity, nowhere else in the text is there any mention of the resources that are necessary to enable people to live in dignity.

- In Greece, **some established social rights are being called into question.** How can you take the fight against poverty forward at the same time as calling social rights into question?

Response by Mr Jérôme Vignon,

Director, Directorate General for Employment Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, European Commission

We will be taking everything that we have heard into account in our policy action, in the various policy-making forums where we are present, through the Open Method of Coordination. We shall take on board the variously expressed concern about rights – especially migrants' rights. All migrants and their families - even those who are not nationals of the European Union – who are legally resident are entitled to social protection and freedom from discrimination. If help is needed to see that this right is universally understood, we will use the Social Fund to train those who enter into contact with migrants and their families, welfare system officials, but also members of the police force and justice system.

Finally, it has been said that the NAPs have not necessarily produced progress. I would like to say that the role of the European process is to evidence the commitments that the Member States make through the plans. In the years to come - 2006 to 2010 and beyond - the Social Protection Committee, supported by the Commission, will take the measure of whether growth is working for the fight against poverty. If it is found not to be, our job is to say so, and urge the Heads of States and Governments to change those policies.

Closing session

Ms Brigitte WEINANDY apologised for the absence of Ms Marie-Josée JACOBS, Minister for Family and Integration, Luxembourg, and read her address.

At the close of the 3rd Meeting, the participants asked for a follow-up to be given to certain debates on key issues at the preceding Meetings. I am delighted that the 4th Meeting has afforded you the opportunity to return to those issues.

While the debate may not have brought answers to all the questions, the concerns, the discontent even, that some of these issues can elicit were brought out all the more clearly. The bulk of the work was on the keynote topic of the 4th Meeting, namely "Images and perceptions of poverty".

Taking stock of this issue in so short a time is a real challenge. Looking at the reports from the different workshops, it seems to me that the challenge has been taken up with a will.

The options proposed for improving the way poverty is seen within the European Inclusion Strategy are deserving of closer study.

At a previous Meeting, one of the delegates said, "*People experiencing poverty have something to offer policy-makers!*" The outcomes of the 4th Meeting again show how right that delegate was. So it is vitally important that policy-makers be able to take note of the results of these two days' work.

I pledge to report on this Meeting to my Council colleagues.

As the final "Employment and Social Affairs" Council under the Luxembourg Presidency has already been held - on 2 June - I have asked the United Kingdom, which will be holding the Presidency at the next "Employment and Social Affairs" Council, to convey my message at that time, and it has agreed to do so. The results of the 4th Meeting's discussions will therefore get heard at the highest level.

Let me very briefly come back at this point to what my colleague Ms Haubner said yesterday: the Luxembourg Presidency welcomes Austria's pledge to follow up this meeting by organizing the 5th Meeting in 2006 under Austria's Presidency of the Council of the European Union.

In these discussions, no-one spoke for you. You spoke for yourselves! In so doing, and in the way that you have done so, you have once again given the lie to the stereotypical image of the hapless poor person, reduced to silence by the poverty they are enduring. In my opening session address, I said that the common objectives for tackling poverty adopted by the European Union in December 2000 called for the self-expression of people experiencing poverty to be promoted. This Meeting has certainly done that!

Those same objectives also called for the promotion of participation by people experiencing poverty.

Participation was the keynote topic of the 3rd Meeting. I would like to say that I see the image of poverty and participation as linked issues.

The importance of participation has general recognition:

- the March 2004 European Council invited the Member States to build "Partnerships for reform" with civil society in particular,
- In March of this year, the European Council asked the Member States to establish "national reform programmes" to be widely consulted on with all the stakeholders,
- the Social Agenda 2005-2010 provides for all the stakeholders to be involved in an annual evaluation forum,
- the cohesion policy strategic guidelines say that effective policy delivery depends on a quality, wide-ranging partnership with civil society,
- one of the guiding principles proposed for sustainable development policies calls for all associations and interested parties to be offered opportunities for participation.

People experiencing poverty and their self-help associations certainly count as interested parties!

2007 will be the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All. The European Commission will be proposing a debate during that year on ways of

strengthening participation in society by under-represented groups.

People experiencing poverty are one such group.

I believe that the first way to increase the participation of people experiencing poverty is to recognise them as being ready and apt to participate.

I would like at this point to give you two quotations whose profound truth spoke directly to me.

The first quotation comes from a participant in a previous “Meeting”. Who said: *“The poor tend to be seen as shiftless, when they actually spend most of their time and energy surviving”*. The second comes from Father Joseph, founder of the ATD Fourth World Movement: *“The poor know in their heart of hearts that their daily struggle is in reality the struggle of all humanity against poverty and exclusion.*

They know that their struggle is not theirs alone, but the real challenge to all humankind”.

Yes, tackling poverty is a challenge to us all, because while the poor alone may endure it, they do not bear sole responsibility for creating it. Poverty is also the reflection of many injustices in society, and the product of many policy choices. This way of seeing poverty, **which is now dismissed** by many individuals and policy makers, holds people experiencing poverty innocent of the charge **that they are responsible for their own poverty**.

But if you do not turn away, but look more closely, you see clearly that these charges are unfounded, the stock stereotypes are dispelled, and the knee-jerk denial of participation for people experiencing poverty dwindles.

Here, policy-makers could play a central part in dispelling negative stereotypes.

I also think that we need to look very closely at policies that target people experiencing poverty to pick out and scrap those that lock them into the image of benefit claimants. People experiencing poverty have issues with income levels, housing, education, employment, health, social protection, information, transport, security and justice, leisure and culture.

So, the aim of tackling poverty should be mainstreamed across all these policies, and all government ministers - not just social affairs - should be involved in implementing it.

The “European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty” could also benefit from the involvement of various government departments, as well as various European Commission directorates.

Ms Maria MARINAKOU, President of EAPN

It is always a challenging task to draw concluding remarks from such a productive Meeting where a very powerful participatory dialogue has been developed. Many big issues have been addressed that make up the everyday lives of people living in poverty and experiencing different forms of social exclusion, because poverty is multidimensional, as reflected here by 160 participants from 22 European countries.

We have taken a critical and analytical look at the role of the media, its power in creating stereotypes and superficial explanations of the causes of poverty. We have considered discriminatory practices, and the impact that perceptions of poverty have on social policies and the attitudes of social services practitioners.

Although research findings indicate that the more developed welfare states with solidarity-based social protection schemes are more likely to have perceptions that acknowledge the structural causes of poverty rather than looking at poverty as individual pathology – a matter of personal responsibility – the participants have brought evidence that negative perceptions of people in poverty prevail in all countries.

One strong message coming from the debates is that individualistic perceptions of poverty often result in stigmatisation, victimisation and disempowerment, which trap people experiencing poverty in a vicious circle. Contrary to the perceptions of “victims”, many participants’ testimony from their personal and family lives, from their neighbourhoods and communities, show that people in poverty have a powerful capacity for survival, which enables them to find solutions, and transfer their experiences to collective actions.

That does not mean individual solutions can replace policies, anything but. EAPN has always argued that policies must be informed by the real experiences of people in poverty, that their voices should be listened to and their expertise taken into

account in policy making, and their political, economic and social rights guaranteed.

This is the essence of participation and the foundation of the 4th Meeting: people experiencing poverty and social exclusion are ‘experts of experience’.

The discussions have acknowledged the power of the media to shape the image of people experiencing poverty, and to some extent, impact on policy making.

The media have often portrayed discriminatory images and so legitimised social divisions, especially in relation to race, ethnicity, migration, gender, disability, culture, lone parenthood, addiction, etc.

But, while the media’s sensationalist and dramatic approach - presenting individual cases in undignified, manipulative and superficial ways – are practices that are clearly understood and need to be strongly criticized, there is also a clear acknowledgement of the need to build alliances with ethical journalists and construct communication strategies at all levels, especially the local level, where the media can be more easily approached and influenced. Some good practices in this direction have been identified by Belgium and Poland. Many participants stated that new technologies, like the Internet, should be accessible to them so as to give visibility to poverty issues.

In the discussions on policies and policy making, focussing on the NAPs Inclusion, it became clear that after two rounds of National Action Plans for the 15 and one for the 10 new Member States, there is still a long way to go before we can say that real mobilisation of all actors, consultation, participation and inclusion of people experiencing poverty have really been achieved. The participants clearly affirmed that the “political realism” able to tackle poverty and social exclusion is missing from the NAPs Inclusion.

Although, in Lisbon in 2000, a new impetus had been given to the fight against poverty and social exclusion with a pledge to “make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by 2010”, many of us

have wondered what has been achieved so far? And how do governments plan to achieve this objective by 2010?

Cutbacks, privatizations of public goods and services such as electricity, water and health services, high levels of unemployment, changes to social protection and pension schemes, the lack of training and life long learning create great uncertainty about the future. Many participants stressed that it was time for more concrete actions that take our debates into account, and this is a clear message for the 5th Meeting. EAPN has been called to promote these suggestions at all policy making levels.

As things currently stand in the European Union, there is much confusion about the direction to take. The social dimension of Europe stands at a crossroads. In the context of current debates about the future of the Lisbon strategy, employment and services of general interest, the Union is giving only one image to its citizens: that of being in pursuit of

competitiveness, growth and job creation at all costs. The debate on the European budget and the Structural Funds shows that national priorities are diminishing solidarity and social cohesion, and the Union is facing a crisis of identity.

The referenda in two of the founding members of the Union show that Europe's citizens feel alienated from the decision making processes and the European project as a whole.

But let us be clear: in these challenging times for the future of the European Union, there are many strong forces that are fighting for Social Europe, for social cohesion and environmental policies, for more participation in decision making, for solidarity and social justice. EAPN is one of them and builds strong alliances to strengthen that voice. Let us unite our forces in that direction. Each one of us has a role to play.

Another Europe is possible, another world is possible.

Closing Notes by the Chairperson of the 4th Meeting

Professor Gaston SCHABER, President, CEPS/INSTEAD

Let me conclude with a remark that I hope is not too personal, but a tribute to your initiative. I have been involved for over fifty years in working with - not for - people experiencing poverty and social exclusion, often over the generations.

For more than 30 of those years, I have been involved in national and international research teams, working not only to scientific standards but also to see that the findings do not go ignored by policy-makers: we have worked with widely representative samples, through personal interviews with poor and well-to-do people, we have covered complex fields which may well have left gaps in the relation between poverty and wealth, between the disempowered and the powerful,

Through these two spheres of involvement, we have been in direct, discrete contact with organisations that have their own work programmes, and people experiencing poverty. The 4th Meeting changed this: you have given convincing proof that structured collaboration between people who are experiencing poverty and people who are not but are working alongside them can be both relevant and productive. This Meeting has made it clear that such collaboration is not only possible, but essential. Do not take this as just a trite platitude: **I am already looking with certain delegations at how to take forward the work started here.**

Let me look back at what has gone on: the first part of our Meeting looked at big issues that came out of the previous Meetings: jobs, discrimination and racism, the liberalization of services and its impacts on people experiencing poverty, the need for mechanisms and structures to facilitate participation.

These two days have made it clear that these issues and concerns are as pressing as ever, and they have even been a background presence, both in the workshops and the plenary, to the specific topic of the 4th Meeting - "Images and perceptions of poverty".

To put it more clearly still, poverty and vulnerability to poverty have not fallen in recent decades but spread to wider sections of the population, to workers, to people whose backgrounds, educational and training levels, and past careers might hitherto have been thought bulwarks against insecurity and poverty. Let me briefly look back over the past sixty years.

After the 2nd world war, and **30 unbroken years of growth and expansion of wealth**, the European Community called the first European seminar on combating poverty in 1974, which led on to a series of European programmes to combat poverty under varied names, going from the term "the poor" to "less favoured" then "excluded"). Although increasingly less stigmatising, these expressions are still indicative of an insecurity that is spreading across all walks of life.

The next 30 years – a period of far-reaching changes globally, nationally and in the interactions between them – bring us to a situation in Europe – and elsewhere – of continuing growth where 5 to 10% of the population enjoy higher living standards, but the distribution of those benefits is stagnating or even receding, and where the middle classes, despite their gains, are extremely vulnerable to poverty.

This has happened despite three series of programmes to combat poverty, and notwithstanding that they have been positioned and fine-tuned within broader socially-oriented approaches to economic development, and notwithstanding the development at all levels of descriptions, measures and indicators, relatively sophisticated procedures that are now applied as standard in monitoring, the evaluation of policy goals and their results, as well the identification of good practises. (More specifically, the Luxembourg Presidency will be holding a conference on the topic "Taking forward the social inclusion process" based on a scientific report written by Tony Atkinson, Bea Cantillon, Eric Marlier and Brian Nolan which sets out to help focus the inclusion

process more sharply on the implementation of its aims, the presentation of targeted results, and evaluating them against the objectives set by the Member States of the European Union).

Let me emphasize this: notwithstanding all these absolutely essential efforts and initiatives, we must face the fact that, leaving aside the differences between Member States, neither our national programmes nor the European programmes to combat poverty have worked ... And the reasons lie not in the extent to which the different Member States are or are not applying good practises ...

Without disparaging what has been achieved so far, we must move up to another level of thought, research and analysis – which is as yet politically incorrect and underdeveloped: an analysis of power, and the value of these approaches in light of the global power system. And at the same time, we must look at the local level of the relation of people experiencing poverty with their local power. And on a similar – but not yet accepted - level, we must analyse the failings in governance of countries, nations and the Member States as regards power systems, i.e., what we currently call economic and financial globalisation and their implicit rules.

I shall stop there, because I do not wish to put you in an embarrassing position as regards the institutions that are supporting your initiatives. I shall continue to plough my own furrow without inflicting collateral damage on you... but I would like you to note that I am not as heretical as I might seem by saying to you that defeatism can be met by empowerment – and that is an aim of the 4th Meeting. I do not have the time to comment on these objectives, but they are the wellspring of your undertaking: and I should like here to congratulate the successive Presidencies of the European Union - Belgium in 2001, Greece in 2003, Ireland in 2003, Luxembourg in 2005 and Austria next year - for their support.

Through the modest but real involvement of the Centre⁹ with which I work on “Global Network Development”, we know that empowerment of people experiencing poverty is on the agenda of a global partner, whatever that may mean in terms of outcomes. In Deepa Narayan’s 2002 book “Empowerment and poverty reduction”, we can read:

Empowerment is the expansion of assets and capabilities of poor people to participate in, negotiate with, influence, control and hold accountable institutions that affect their lives.

Since poverty is multidimensional, poor people need a range of assets and capabilities at the individual level (such as health, education, and housing) and at the collective level (such as the ability to organize and mobilize to take collective action to solve their problems).

Empowering poor men and women requires the removal of formal and informal institutional barriers that prevent them from taking action to improve their wellbeing -

Individually, or collectively - and limit their choices. The key formal institutions include the state, markets, civil society, and international agencies; informal institutions include norms of social exclusion, exploitative relations, and corruption.

I would argue that this approach is not far removed from that which lay behind our first study on persistent poverty, done in 1978-1980 in 7 regions of 5 of the most industrialised countries of the then European Community ...

It is also very close to your own approach.

Let me conclude by wishing you the success you so richly deserve, and all of us, the grit and energy we need.

9. Set up at the instigation of the World Bank.

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