

4 July 2015

European Anti-Poverty Network**Final Declaration***General Assembly**Bilbao, 4th of July 2015*

“The actions of the European Institutions together with the IMF are putting the lives of people of Greece at risk – we need to re-assert the role of the European Union as a democratic and social project.”

More than **150** delegates of the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN), representing 31 National Networks and 18 European Organisations met in Bilbao, at their annual General Assembly.

Delegates expressed their deep-felt solidarity with the people of Greece and those in other Troika countries who are suffering the consequences of dangerous austerity programmes, which have deepened poverty and devastated the lives of people across Europe. The meeting **called on the Heads of State and Government to prioritize** people’s well-being **over** purely financial interests, benefitting a minority, and called for the immediate release of funds to support essential services and incomes and boost employment in Greece and other countries suffering the consequences of these austerity policies. Delegates also felt that it was time to recognize the need for **a substantial debt restructuring if not debt relief, immediately.**

Moreover, EAPN delegates also called urgently and with mounting concern on the EU Heads of States and Governments as well as the European Commission to respond adequately and without delay to the humanitarian crisis that continues to unfold itself at the borders of the European Union and in particular in the Mediterranean where thousands of asylum seekers face death trying to make the journey to Europe. This is the time when the EU must show that it is serious about its founding principles of solidarity, respect of democracy and Human Rights. Delegates urged that the European Convention of Human Rights must be the central tool which guides actions to address this humanitarian crisis.

Delegates asked concretely that:

- There is tangible follow-up to the agreement by the Heads of State and Government in April to “mobilise all efforts to prevent more people from dying at sea and to address the root causes of migration;”
- Member States share equal responsibility for the settlement of asylum seekers, and provide additional funds to ensure that asylum seekers receive respectful treatment;
- The EU go further in tackling the economic as well as the political causes of involuntary migration, arising from growing inequalities across and between countries.

In this context, EAPN is deeply disappointed that the recent European Council was unable to agree on a working quota system. Nevertheless delegates welcomed the decision of the Council to receiving 40.000 refugees and asked for information what kind of resources will be made available for the real social inclusion of these people and the organisations supporting them. However, delegates expressed fundamental doubt that the decision to receive 40 000 asylum seekers had any realistic relationship to numbers of people risking their lives to reach the European shores.

Delegates asked the European Governments, European Commission and Parliament to help combat the growth of racism and xenophobia across Europe by promoting better understanding of the social, cultural and economic context of asylum seekers.

EAPN delegates felt heartened by the support and solidarity that the people on the ground in the Mediterranean are showing, for the asylum seekers and migrants, when and where they arrive in Europe. They are practicing a humanity that should be a guide for all of us. The people of Lampedusa, in particular, helping involuntary migrants oftentimes with great sacrifices for themselves, filled the lack of structural solutions from Europe. They deserve the recognition of nothing less than the Nobel Peace Prize.

Finally, Delegates stressed that:

- **Whereas an estimated 22,000 migrants have died in the Mediterranean between 2000 and 2014 on their fatal journey to Europe;**
- **Whereas more than 1 in 4, more than 121 million people are experiencing poverty every day in the European Union;**
- **Whereas the continuing application of austerity measures force more and more people into poverty:**

Delegates urged the European Heads of State and Government, the European Commission and the European Parliament to give priority to developing strong social policies to eradicate poverty and social exclusion and combat increasing inequalities.

In this context, delegates also called for a concerted programme to address poverty across the EU, developed and delivered with the participation of the people experiencing poverty and exclusion, and their NGOs must become a new priority, if the EU is to restore democratic legitimacy and develop solutions that can deliver on these rights and promises.

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