

# Network news



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Editorial

## European Elections: make your voice heard!

**T**he conclusions of the recent European Spring Council included the following commitment: *"Strategies that make a decisive impact on social exclusion and the eradication of poverty must be reinforced"*. This sounds like good news for the 68 million people, who daily face poverty and social exclusion in the EU of 25 countries. However, in the rest of the same conclusions, there is no recommendation that would turn these nice words into reality and, on the contrary, there is an approach which subordinates employment and social protection policies to economic growth which - EAPN argues - is not necessarily a reflection of a healthy society nor does it always benefit all.

The European Elections offer an opportunity to debate what kind of European Union we want. EAPN, in its Election Manifesto, has put forward concrete proposals for actions which would reinforce the EU Inclusion Strategy and the cooperation between Member States to fight poverty and exclusion. This election campaign must be an opportunity to hear from the candidates and from the political parties what they think about the EAPN proposals and what actions they propose to turn the nice words quoted above into tangible realities.

The European Election campaign must also offer a vision of enlargement based on real commitments rather than nice words on the 1<sup>st</sup> of May. This vision must look to building a society that can guarantee social justice and access to fundamental rights to all inhabitants of this enlarged European Union.

Use your vote. Make your voice heard to get the European Union you want.

Fintan Farrell  
Director of EAPN

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## EAPN's campaign

EAPN has not stood on the sidelines just watching the hustings; the network has launched its own big campaign to get its positions in the spotlight. For instance:

- EAPN's European elections manifesto - widely circulated and available in 10 languages on the website [www.eapn.org](http://www.eapn.org).
- A postcard with the slogan "68 million people face poverty today... Is this the European Union we want?" - thousands of copies sent out across Europe in many languages.
- Contacts have been struck up with the European political groups to promote EAPN's positions based on the manifesto sent to them.
- The special issue of *Network News* that you are reading aims not just to tell you what EAPN thinks, but also to comparison-test the manifesto pledges of the main political groups in the European Parliament. You can find that on pages 6 and 7!

## Poverty is not inevitable!

68 million people face poverty today in the enlarged Union.

In view of the European elections, EAPN draws up the portrait of a Europe of real solidarity.

**P**overty is not inevitable. It is under these terms that EAPN has launched a campaign for the European elections of June 2004, reminding that tens of millions people face poverty and social exclusion in the new Europe of 25. Thanks to a manifesto and a postal card available in many languages, EAPN aims to stress that developing policies based on social solidarity in the field of social protection, employment and access to rights, goods and services, can change figures, and can change lives! The European Parliament elections 2004 provide a valuable opportunity for having a democratic debate about what kind of European Union we want. A European Union close to its people must not only be about economics and technical regulations but must be based on social values and democratic participation.

### An important moment in European history

The elections of June 2004 come at an important moment in European history, just after the most important enlargement that the European Union has ever faced and during the process of negotiating a Constitutional Treaty.

These elections also come at a time when the influence of the European Parliament in decision making has strengthened vis-à-vis the other two major European Union Institutions: the European Commission and the Council of the European Union. The outcome of the elections will have a strong bearing on the establishment of the next European Commission and in particular the choice of President of the Commission.

In the period of tenure of the present Parliament important steps were taken regarding the fight against poverty and social exclusion, including the adoption of an EU strategy for Social Inclusion, based on National Action Plans for Inclusion. Yet

despite this progress, the way towards the eradication of poverty and social exclusion in Europe is still long...

The Members of the European Parliament, as the representatives of all the people, must ensure that they also represent and defend the interests of all citizens and residents in the EU. To achieve this it is clear that social solidarity and the fight against poverty and social exclusion must be moved higher up the agenda of the EU.

### Key questions for the election campaign

This election campaign and the public debates it generates offer an important opportunity to reduce the alienation from the EU project that is felt by many citizens and residents in the EU and to address issues which can help bring the EU closer to its people. This campaign also provides an important challenge to those putting themselves forward for election but perhaps even more importantly to those responsible for generating the public debate around these elections, in particular the media.

Developing policies based on social solidarity can change figures, and can change lives!

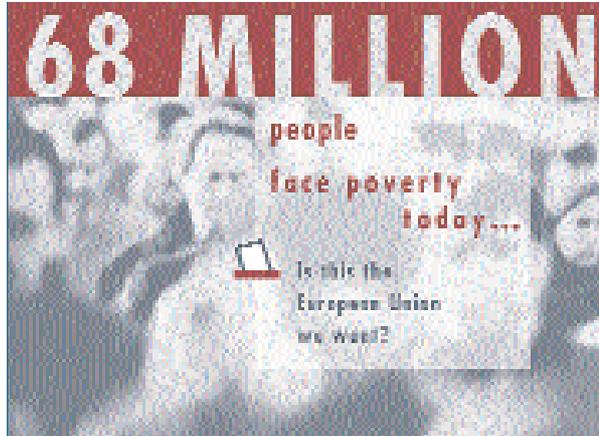
In its manifesto, EAPN wishes to see the following issues addressed during the campaign:

1. **57 million people in the EU of 15 Member States and 11 millions more in the new Member States face poverty and social exclusion.**

What are the structural causes of this reality in a European Union situated in one of the wealthiest areas of the globe? How can the EU achieve a balance between its social, environmental and economic objectives so that we can create institutions and actions that are at the service of the people and the planet?

2. **Economic growth is not a guarantee against poverty and exclusion.**

Economic growth is often described as the key objective for the European Union. Yet economic growth is not necessarily a reflection of a healthy society nor does it always benefit all. It does not guarantee more or better jobs or a fair distribution of income. Moreover, investment in



people is often subordinated to objectives of competitiveness and profit making.

3. **In many EU Member States the access to and quality of services available are linked to one's income level, rather than to the implementation of fundamental rights.**

With such a trend what does it mean to speak about defending a European Social Model? What are the effects of privatising 'public' goods and services? Have large sections of the population become complacent about their risk of becoming poor or of losing access to essential goods and services or have they lost faith in the ability of politicians and Governments to address this reality?

**Six demands in view of the elections**

If the debate about a Social Europe is to happen in the context of the European Parliament elections then the Political Parties and Groupings must take the following demands into account:

1. **To safeguard the progress made on social issues in the Convention on the future of Europe and in the Inter Governmental Conference**, including incorporating the mainstreaming of the fight against social exclusion, the Charter of Fundamental Rights and the recognition of civil dialogue in the future EU Constitutional Treaty.
2. To promote **a European Union based on access for all to fundamental rights** within a sustainable development model and a social market economy aimed at social solidarity, that guarantees a balance between social, environmental, employment and economic objectives and which seeks to have this balance reflected in its institutional arrangements, in the policy priorities agreed in the annual Spring Summit and in the Structural Funds framework.
3. To promote **a strengthened European Union Social Inclusion Strategy** aimed at making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and social exclusion by 2010 through:
  - the agreement of a headline EU wide target for the reduction of poverty and social exclusion and appropriate sub targets,

- strengthened National Action Plans on Inclusion based on EU guidelines and recommendations,
  - a renewed Social Exclusion Action Programme that takes account of the enlargement of the EU.
  - the establishment of a European Observatory on Poverty and Social Exclusion with the involvement of all relevant actors,
  - the development of greater synergy between the Inclusion and employment strategies, and
  - ensuring the future Structural Funds programmes are driven by the inclusion strategy and are accessible to non governmental organizations involved in the fight against poverty and exclusion.
4. To ensure that the approach to tackling poverty and social exclusion addresses the **multi dimensional nature of poverty and social exclusion** - poverty is not just a monetary issue but also includes issues such as access to decent housing, quality health care, access to child or elder care, lifelong learning opportunities, or culture opportunities...- and is responsive to what people experiencing poverty and exclusion express about their reality.
  5. To ensure that **social protection systems**, including individualized minimum income schemes, are adequate for all to have a sufficient income to live life with dignity and to work towards agreeing minimum EU standards for social protection and for the combating of poverty and social exclusion.
  6. To ensure the European Union adequately addresses the issue of **discrimination** which is one causal factor of exclusion. This is true on the basis of gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, age and disability. New European Directives are required to promote equality and to combat discrimination on these grounds alongside funding programmes to promote innovation and transnational cooperation on these issues.

**FIVE CHALLENGES**

The 2004-2009 period will be a decisive time for the EU to meet the following key challenges:

1. Building a 'Social Europe': the European Parliament has a role to play to ensure that EU policies have positive social effects, in particular regarding a fair reform of social protection systems and sustainable development.
2. Enhancing the Lisbon Strategy: On the occasion of the mid-term review of this Strategy in Spring 2005, MEPs must hold governments accountable for their action to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by 2010.
3. Promoting further anti-discrimination legislation to progress strong gender equality policies, and rights-based policies regarding issues of migration and integration.
4. Ensuring that the future Structural Funds programmes 2007-2012 are driven by the EU Social Inclusion Strategy, and are accessible to NGOs.
5. Ensuring citizens have a say: MEPs can do a lot to ensure that civil society can have its voice heard in European policy-making.

Source: Act4Europe 'toolkit' at <http://act4europe.horus.be/module/FileLib/EPelectionsPartI-III.pdf>



Photo: EC

## Musical chairs

As it enters the June 2004 elections, the European Parliament has 626 MEPs. The Treaty of Nice upped this to 732 when the European Union is enlarged to the 12 countries with which it has been negotiating (the ten new Member States, plus Romania and Bulgaria). The fact that Romania and Bulgaria do not figure amongst the first wave of accession states means there are 50 seats (33 for Romania, 17 for Bulgaria) to be divided amongst the 25 Member States.

So, for the 2004-2009 term of office, the 732 seats will be allocated as follows:

- Germany: 99
- France, Italy, United Kingdom: 78 (instead of 87 as previously)
- Spain, Poland: 54 (instead of 64 for Spain)
- Netherlands: 27 (instead of 31)
- Belgium, Greece, Portugal, Hungary, Czech Republic: 24 (instead of 25 for Belgium, Greece and Portugal)
- Sweden: 19 (instead of 22)
- Austria: 18 (instead of 21)
- Denmark, Finland, Slovakia: 14 (instead of 16 for the first two countries)
- Ireland, Lithuania: 13 (instead of 15 for Ireland)
- Latvia: 9
- Slovenia: 7
- Cyprus, Estonia, Luxembourg: 6
- Malta: 5

It can be expected that the accessions of Romania and Bulgaria will mean that the 2009-2014 Parliament will broadly return to the allocations agreed at Nice.

# What does the European Parliament do?

The European Parliament was set up to be the voice of the Union's people, but its functioning - as a European Institution - is probably the least known. Here, we take a quick look at its role and how it works.

**T**he European elections coming up between 10 and 13 June 2004 (depending on the country) will take place in all 25 Member States following the enlargement on 1 May this year. That means 732 MPs being voted in according to an allocation of seats laid down in the Nice Treaty, varying from 5 for Malta to 99 for Germany (see box p.4).

MEPs are elected every five years by universal suffrage, under a proportional representation system either on a regional basis, for example in Italy and the United Kingdom; on an interregional basis in France; nationally such as Denmark, Spain, Luxembourg; or using a mixed system such as Germany.

### How it all started....

The first-ever European Parliament was elected in June 1979. To begin with, it was a purely consultative body, but with each new Treaty, it acquired added powers which now enable it to play a fairly significant political role alongside the other two sides of the "institutional triangle" - the Commission and the Council.

The 1992 Maastricht Treaty and 1997 Amsterdam Treaty turned it into a real legislative assembly, exercising powers akin to those of national parliaments. For example, it now passes most of the European legislation jointly with the Council of Ministers under what is known as the "co-decision" procedure (see below).

### How does it work?

The European Parliament is the only Community institution that meets and debates in public. MEPs spend one week each month at a **plenary (i.e., full) session** in Strasbourg, and additional two-day sittings are regularly held in Brussels. Two

weeks in every month are set aside for parliamentary committee meetings in Brussels. The remaining week is taken up with meetings of the political groups.

MEPs do not sit in the parliamentary chamber in national delegations, but with other members of the **political group** to which they are allied. There are seven of these in the current European Parliament, plus some non-attached MEPs. Before the plenary session voting, the political groups consider parliamentary committee reports from their own political standpoints and often table amendments. They also play an important part in setting the agendas for plenary sessions and choosing the topical issues to be placed on them.

The 17 (soon to be 20) **parliamentary committees** (see box p.5) do the preparatory work for Parliament's plenary sessions. They draw up and adopt reports on legislative proposals and own-initiative reports. They also prepare opinions for other parliamentary committees. These are standing committees, but Parliament can also set up temporary committees and committees of inquiry.

The European Parliament is the only Community institution that meets and debates in public

### Its three powers

Like any parliament, the European Parliament exercises three fundamental powers:

#### 1. Legislative power

The normal legislative procedure is co-decision. This puts the Council and European Parliament on an equal footing, and together they adopt legislation proposed by the Commission. This means legislation cannot be passed without the European Parliament's final agreement. Co-decision applies in matters relating to the free movement of workers, the environment, employment, education, culture, social exclusion and health, etc. Co-decision legislation may undergo one, two or three reading stages in the European Parliament.

The Amsterdam Treaty not only reinforced the European Parliament's co-decision powers, but also gave it the power to initiate policy. The EP often adopts reports that are intended to steer the Union's policy in a particular direction, and call on the European Commission to take initiatives.

Parliament's legislative work mostly follows the course below:

- The Commission submits a legislative proposal to the European Parliament. This is referred to the parliamentary committee responsible to draw up a report on it, and may be referred to one or more other committees for an opinion;
- MEPs - and the committees asked for opinions - may table amendments to the draft report; it is then adopted, possibly with changes, by the committee responsible;
- The political groups examine the report from their own political standpoint;
- The report is finally discussed in the plenary session. It is still open to amendment. Parliament's vote expresses its final position.

### **2. Budgetary power**

The European Parliament and the Council are the two arms of the budgetary authority. In other words, they share the power of the purse in the same way as legislative power. The preliminary work for Parliament's decisions is done by its Committee on Budgets in cooperation with the other parliamentary committees.

Each December, the European Parliament sets the budget for the year to come. It has the final say on most heads of expenditure, like spending on the less prosperous regions, measures to reduce unemployment, etc. For agricultural expenditure, Parliament can propose amendments, but the power of yes or no lies with Council.

Parliament can also reject a budget which it considers does not meet the Union's needs. If so, the budgetary procedure goes back to square one.

### **3. Supervisory power**

The European Parliament exercises democratic oversight of all Community activities. Originally a power of scrutiny only over Commission activities, the power has been extended to the Council and the bodies responsible for the common foreign and security policy. To facilitate its supervision, Parliament can set up (temporary) committees of inquiry. It has done so on various occasions, such as in the case of mad cow disease, where its inquiry resulted in the setting up of a European Veterinary Agency. The European Parliament also secured the creation of the European Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF) to tackle budgetary fraud.

The European Parliament also plays a central role in appointing the Commission. It ratifies the appointment of the Commission President, examines nominee Commissioners and decides whether or not to give a vote of confidence in the Commission. Parliament also has power to censure the Commission: a "motion of censure" passed by two-thirds of the votes cast and an absolute majority of MEPs would force the Commission to resign. To date, however, no censure motion has been passed, although the power to do so acts as a powerful deterrent.

Parliament exercises day-to-day oversight over the Commission's management by examining a large number of reports that the Commission submits to it on the implementation of policies, legislation and the budget. Also, a parliamentary committee, political group or a given number of MEPs can put oral or written questions to the Council and Commission (there are over 5000 of these each year).

The Council Presidency (the member state that is currently chairing the Council) presents its programme and half-yearly report to the European Parliament, and informs it of the preparation for and outcome of European Councils and the progress of major pieces of legislation. The Council is also represented at parliamentary committee meetings, sometimes at ministerial level.

### **A growing political role**

Along with the extension of co-decision, Parliament has also acquired enhanced political clout through its regular passing of resolutions relating to the European Union's foreign policy and human rights in the world. For example, it rejected a series of financial protocols with third countries, forcing them to release political prisoners or sign up to international pledges for the safeguarding of human rights.

Finally, any new application to join the European Union and most international agreements require the assent, i.e. the approval, of the European Parliament.

*Source: [www.europarl.eu.int](http://www.europarl.eu.int)*

## **THE PARLIAMENTARY COMMITTEES**

There are currently 17 parliamentary committees responsible for preparing the work of Parliament's plenary sessions. This is likely to rise to 20 for the period 2004-2009. At present, they are:

1. Foreign Affairs, Human Rights, Common Security and Defence Policy
2. Budgets
3. Budgetary Control
4. Citizen Freedoms and Rights, Justice and Home Affairs
5. Economic and Monetary Affairs
6. Legal Affairs and the Internal Market
7. Industry, External Trade, Research and Energy
8. Employment and Social Affairs
9. Environment, Public Health and Consumer Policy
10. Agriculture and Rural Development
11. Fisheries
12. Regional Policy, Transport and Tourism
13. Culture, Youth, Education, the Media and Sport
14. Development and Cooperation
15. Constitutional Affairs
16. Women's Rights and Equal Opportunities
17. Petitions

The Employment and Social Affairs Committee is responsible for matters relating to employment policy, social policy (in particular, social exclusion, housing policy, European Social Fund), all forms of discrimination, and monitoring of the implementation of current expenditure for which it has responsibility.

## Seven political groups

### EPP - European People's Party

Seats (1999-2004): 231

Website: [www.epp-ed.org](http://www.epp-ed.org)

The EPP is a fairly mixed bag, grouping together the Christian-Democratic parties along with parties such as the British Conservatives and Forza Italia.

### PES - Party of European Socialists

Seats (1999-2004): 173

Website: [www.pes.org](http://www.pes.org)

Groups together the socialist and social democratic parties.

### ELDR - European Liberal, Democrat and Reform Party

Seats (1999-2004): 52

Website: [www.eldr.org](http://www.eldr.org)

Links together the liberal and reform parties. Members include Pat Cox, current President of the European Parliament.

### GUE/NGL - European United Left/Nordic Green Left

Seats (1999-2004): 48

Website: [www.europarl.eu.int/gue](http://www.europarl.eu.int/gue)

A grouping of communist parties and Scandinavian environmentalists.

### Greens/ALE - Greens/European Free Alliance

Seats (1999-2004): 44

Website: [www.greens-efa.org](http://www.greens-efa.org)

A grouping of environmentalist and regionalist parties.

### UEN - Union for Europe of the Nations

Seats (1999-2004): 23

Website: [www.europarl.eu.int/uen](http://www.europarl.eu.int/uen)

A group of sovereigntist parties.

### EDD - Europe of Democracies and Diversities

Seats (1999-2004): 18

Website: [www.eddgroup.com](http://www.eddgroup.com)

Groups together parties opposed to any future European integration and centralization.

For a comprehensive country-by-country contact list of parties standing for elections, also mentioning the European political group which they are affiliated to, see the 'Act4Europe' toolkit:

<http://act4europe.horus.be/module/FileLib/EPElectionsPartIV-Partycontacts.pdf>

## What priorities for economic and social policy?

To give you an inkling of the economic and social policy priorities of four of the main political groups represented in the European

Parliament, here is a brief comparison-test based on their political manifestos.

	Poverty/social exclusion	Economic policy/taxation	Employment
 <b>EPP</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Reference to social progress and solidarity</li> <li>■ Promoting equal opportunities</li> <li>■ Conception of humankind influenced by Christianity and the Enlightenment</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ EU more than just a common economic area; first and foremost a political community of citizens and nations</li> <li>■ Social market economy based on personal freedom and social responsibility</li> <li>■ Emphasis on economic growth based on competitiveness, free enterprise and a stable currency</li> <li>■ Reduce trade barriers and open up markets</li> <li>■ Support research in new technologies</li> <li>■ Develop a knowledge-based economy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Unemployment</li> <li>■ Emphasis on "bureaucracy"</li> <li>■ Emphasis on people</li> </ul>
<b>PES</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Active social inclusion and integration policy, especially for immigrants</li> <li>■ Promote solidarity between rich and poor regions</li> <li>■ World development policy</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Social market economy</li> <li>■ Social justice comes before free competition (no social 'dumping')</li> <li>■ Economic growth working for citizens</li> <li>■ Reform the Stability, Growth and Employment Pact</li> <li>■ Invest in research and technology</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Create jobs</li> <li>■ Reinforce (Internal Market)</li> <li>■ Support employment</li> <li>■ Direct</li> </ul>
<b>ELDR</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Keep all citizens out of poverty and exclusion</li> <li>■ Education as a means of eliminating poverty</li> <li>■ Combat lone mother poverty</li> <li>■ Focus assistance on the poorest areas and regions</li> <li>■ Help developing countries</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Reform the European economy to create an environment favourable to enterprises</li> <li>■ A real, more competitive single market with lower prices</li> <li>■ Market deregulation</li> <li>■ Tax competition can be healthy provided there is no "big government"</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ More</li> <li>■ Promote</li> <li>■ Enhance</li> <li>■ Active</li> </ul>
<b>Greens</b> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Emphasis on social inclusion and efficient public services for all</li> <li>■ Remove physical barriers and barriers to employment for people with disabilities</li> <li>■ Ensure that EU Funds are used to guarantee social inclusion</li> <li>■ Increase development co-operation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Put economic and trade rules to work for social and environmental objectives</li> <li>■ Halt tax dumping</li> <li>■ Introduce a Tobin-style capital flows tax</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Ensure</li> <li>■ Promote</li> <li>■ Promote</li> </ul>

Note: given that not all political groups have shown an interest in the adoption of a European manifesto, this comparison-test is based on documents of varying length, contents and adoption

Employment	Social protection	Citizens' rights/ non-discrimination
<p>Employment is "unjust", its consistent reduction is the worst social policy"</p> <p>Emphasis on free enterprise to create jobs, not on "bureaucratic" state intervention</p> <p>Emphasis on education and mobility for young people</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Efficient national social security systems</li> <li>■ Safeguard pension and health systems in the long-term</li> <li>■ Need to reform and consolidate social security</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Concept of a European Union working for people</li> <li>■ Emphasis on freedom, peace and security</li> <li>■ Promote gender equality</li> </ul>
<p>More new high-quality jobs</p> <p>Improve modern education and lifelong learning</p> <p>Equal access for all by 2012)</p> <p>Meet the Lisbon strategy social objectives for employment (70% employment rate)</p> <p>Direct EU Funds towards job creation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Preserve, strengthen and modernise the European Social Model (adequate levels of social protection)</li> <li>■ Tackle challenges arising from an ageing population.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Make the EU institutions more transparent and accountable to citizens</li> <li>■ Involve citizens in decision-making</li> <li>■ Promote more gender equality, particularly at work</li> <li>■ Ensure that migrants can exercise all their civic and social rights</li> <li>■ Combat all forms of discrimination</li> <li>■ Combat racism and xenophobia at all levels</li> </ul>
<p>More and better jobs</p> <p>Improve education</p> <p>Improve labour market flexibility and mobility</p> <p>Improve employment policy for immigrants</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ EU's role limited to freedom of movement for workers</li> <li>■ Establish safe and sustainable pension systems</li> <li>■ Pursue "active ageing" policies</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Guaranteed fundamental rights for all, including asylum-seekers, immigrants and minorities</li> <li>■ Prevent all forms of discrimination</li> <li>■ Open up and democratize the EU Institutions</li> </ul>
<p>Improve job security and decent minimum wages</p> <p>Improve work time-sharing</p> <p>Improve women's employment</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Strengthen social protection systems</li> <li>■ Fair pensions for pensioners</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>■ Guaranteed rights for all, especially women and minorities</li> <li>■ Make the EU 1 more democratic and transparent, especially for civil society and NGOs</li> <li>■ Mainstream gender equality across all policies</li> <li>■ Any resident living legally in the EU for five years must be able to become an EU citizen</li> <li>■ Give long-settled undocumented migrants the opportunity to become legitimate</li> </ul>

procedure from one political group to another.

## A MORE GENDER-BALANCED PARLIAMENT?

With 195 women MEPs out of 626 (31.2%), the European Parliament is nowhere near gender parity, but more "feminized" than most national parliaments: only those of Denmark and Finland (37%), Sweden (45%) and the Netherlands (33%) do better, while France (9%), Greece and Italy (10%) are trailing the field.

Women's representation in the European Parliament by Member State in the period 1999-2004 in creasing order of representation was: France (45%), Finland (44%), Sweden (41%), Belgium (40%), Austria (38%), Denmark (37.5%), Germany (37%), Ireland, Luxembourg and Spain (33%), Netherlands (29%), Portugal (28%), United Kingdom (24%), Greece (16%), Italy (11.5%).

For the new Member States, the percentage share of women in observer delegations is: Slovakia (38%), Latvia (33%), Cyprus and Poland (17%), Czech Republic (12.5%), Hungary (12.5%), Lithuania (8%). The other three countries (Estonia, Malta and Slovenia) had no women observers.

There is still a long road to travel towards parity, and the European election results will tell us how far down it the European Parliament has gone...

## **“We need a Social Progress and Employment Pact”**

### **Towards a European party of the far left?**

Eleven communist and left-wing socialist groupings met in Berlin on 11 January 2004 to call for the foundation of a “Party of the European Left” with the aim of “*challenging the grip of profit and the stranglehold of capitalist power*”.

Some of the MEPs in these parties were already linked up in the Confederal Group of the European United Left / Nordic Green Left, but their parties were not organized into a European party. The Nice Treaty gave legal recognition to the existence of such parties, and the Council lays down the rules for classifying and funding them (in 2003, annual total funding for the European parties was set at 8.4 billion euros, and assistance was conditional on having received at least 3% of the votes in a quarter of EU Member States).

We talked to Ms Ilda Figueiredo, member of the Portuguese communist party, MEP and leading candidate for the European elections in Portugal.

### **EAPN: Unlike other parliamentary groups, the Confederal Group of the European United Left / Nordic Green Left hasn't published a manifesto. Why is that?**

**Ilda Figueiredo:** *Because our group is not a party as such. But some of the parties that make up the group (\*) have agreed on a common platform for the European elections, and this is in line with the positions I have argued for during my term as an MEP.*

### **How do you think the electoral campaign is going in Portugal?**

*It's a tough one: the media are basically run by business groups and aren't paying enough attention to the European elections. In an economic downturn with a sharp rise in unemployment, public opinion can be drawn to Euroscepticism and not feel much interest in these elections. I am actively campaigning to show how important they are.*

### **How do you think voting in the European elections can help bring down poverty and social exclusion?**

*We think the first thing needed is to fight for a reform of EU economic and monetary policies. We suggest that the free-market Stability and Growth Pact be replaced by a Social Progress and Employment Pact. The Lisbon Strategy implementation wants revising to make combating exclusion the priority.*

*It's also vital to boost public capital expenditure and develop quality public services that are accessible to all in areas as different as education, life-long learning, health, housing, and culture. And we need guaranteed access to good jobs with employ-*

*ment rights. Putting people first also includes real gender equality, and sustainable integration for people with disabilities and immigrants. We also aim to fight to get more money put into social policies.*

### **How do you stop enlargement creating a two-speed social policy?**

*Again, only by resourcing it properly. The financial perspectives proposed by the Commission are not enough; the wealthiest countries need to accept an agreement that enables better social cohesion to be developed, not just in the new countries, but also in countries like Portugal that are hard hit by poverty and unemployment.*

### **How do you see civil society's role in framing and implementing social policies?**

*There is a good deal of participation by civil society at the moment, but still not enough. The Commission, Council, European Parliament and Member State governments must engage more with the fight against exclusion, not just through practical measures and effective budgets, but also by involving the NGOs concerned throughout the process.*

*Interview: Claire Champeix*

(\*) French Communist Party, Party of Democratic Socialism (Germany), Synaspismos (Greece), Party of the Italian Communists, Communist Refoundation Party (Italy), Luxembourg Communist Party, Portuguese Communist Party, United Left (Spain).



*Ilda Figueiredo, leading candidate of the Portuguese Communist Party*

## ***“An opportunity to make poverty visible...”***

Portugal has one of the highest poverty rates in the EU. How do we seize the opportunity offered by the European elections to tackle this issue? Interview with Sergio Aires, of EAPN Portugal.

### **EAPN: Do people living in poverty in Portugal know anything about these elections?**

**Sergio Aires:** *Most people in poverty know there is an election process but they have other “priorities”. According to a survey published on 21 March in the newspaper ‘Público’, 200,000 people in Portugal suffer from hunger and around 2 million people live in poverty (20% of the population). Taking also into account the increased unemployment rate - from 4% to 7% in 2003 (around 500,000 people), it is quite understandable that, in these conditions, people living in poverty do not consider these elections as their first concern.*

### **What have EAPN Portugal and other actors done to raise awareness on the elections?**

*In the framework of the European campaign led by EAPN Europe, EAPN Portugal, together with other NGOs, has launched an information campaign aimed at putting poverty and social exclusion on the political agenda and making this phenomenon visible in the media, with some success.*

*EAPN Portugal has sent the EAPN manifesto to all political parties and current MEPs. At the end of April, a seminar organised by the National Parliament, together with an NGO contact group - of which EAPN Portugal is an active member - took place and helped to raise this subject at the political level. Without such a strong participation and public awareness, the Lisbon strategy and the National Action Plan on Inclusion risk being just a list of good intentions.*

### **What about the election campaign itself?**

*Two months before the elections, the political manifestos were not well known yet. Some parties had already presented their candidates and mentioned the importance of the Lisbon Strategy, but accessing manifestos is always better in order to get more*

*political commitments. In fact, the election campaign did not start early.*

### **Has the campaign raised national or European concerns?**

*The European elections are not perceived as the most “exciting” ones. The abstention level is usually rather high. However, this time, the European elections are seen as an opportunity to measure the Portuguese Government’s popularity - this means a focus on national issues. On the other hand, there are European issues that have gained importance during this period of tenure of the European Parliament, such as war, the European Stability Pact, international alliances, terrorism.*

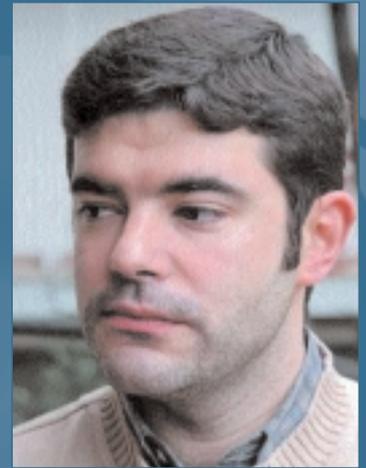
*If we look at the list of candidates, it is quite clear that Portuguese political parties attach a great importance to these elections. This is a very good opportunity to raise the issue of poverty and social exclusion and we are ready to “make the most” of this situation.*

### **And it is also an opportunity to promote the European Social Model...**

*It is, indeed. The European Social Model is at risk and people start to understand that European policies can have a strong impact on the future of this model. For the first time, they understand that some decisions are taken more in Brussels than in Lisbon. The “wave” of privatisation of public services is a very good example of that. This “wave” being a European “wave”, it becomes obvious to many people that the moment to stop or reduce this trend is the European elections, where the different parties present their views on privatisation.*

*Another matter of concern is the future of the Lisbon Strategy. The idea that the Member States may not achieve the Lisbon objectives, leading to abandon them one day - as it was already mentioned at the Spring Council - is one of our major fears...*

*Interview: F. Farrell*



*Sergio Aires, EAPN Portugal, Secretary of EAPN-Europe Executive Committee*



Ivo Šlosarčík, Director for Research at the 'Europeum' Institute for European Policy, Prague

## **“Domestic issues are at the centre of the campaign”**

For the first time, the European Parliament elections will take place in the ten new EU Member States. Interview with Ivo Šlosarčík, Director for Research at the 'Europeum' Institute for European Policy, Prague (\*).

### **EAPN: Has the campaign for the European Parliament elections in the Czech Republic received great attention?**

**Ivo Šlosarčík:** *The election campaign has not received particularly great attention, as compared to the campaign for the lower - more powerful - Chamber of the Czech Parliament. Its intensity can be compared to that of the election campaign for the Senate, which is the upper - less powerful - Chamber of the national Parliament. Given that there is a limited number of parliamentary seats at European level (24 MEPs for the whole Czech Republic), as compared to the number of seats in the Czech Parliament (200+81), public attention depends on the profile of the candidates involved in this campaign.*

*In spite of low intensity of the campaign at the end of April 2004, we expect the campaign to intensify during May.*

### **Has the campaign reflected European or national priorities?**

*Domestic issues are at the centre of the campaign. The European Parliament Elections are primarily a reflection of and another opportunity for domestic inter-party competition and as a 'test' for the coherence and continuation of the current Czech coalition government.*

### **To what extent has civil society engaged in the campaign?**

*Civil society engagement is relatively low. Channels of communication to the public in the context of the European Parliament campaign are similar to those in 'standard' elections. The 'Ano pro Evropu' party ("Yes for Europe" in English), which tends to involve civil society elements in a more visible way, has rather low chances to get seats at the European Parliament.*

### **What are the expectations of the new European Parliament?**

*As an institution, the European Parliament should continue to serve as the second major pillar of the EU legislative making process (together with the Council). It should also continue to monitor the activity of the European Commission and to put attention to the strengthening of modern forms of governance in the EU.*

*As regards Czech MEPs, I expect them to find a balance between representing the interests of the Czech Republic and general interests of the European integration. In that way, the EU will continue to be seen as a tangible reality for people in the Czech Republic.*

*Interview: P. Brandellero*

*(\*) The Europeum Institute for European Policy is a non-profit, non-partisan and independent think-tank. It focuses on issues of European integration and on the transformation of the political, economic and legal context in the Czech Republic arising thereof. It is seated in Prague. Website: [www.europeum.org](http://www.europeum.org)*

### **Low participation rates in new Member States?**

According to a Eurobarometer survey (2003.4) on the public opinion in the acceding and candidate countries, published in February 2004, predicted participation rates in the EU elections are extremely low in these countries. The most likely to participate are citizens from Cyprus (44%) and Malta (43%). The least likely are in Estonia (14%) and Lithuania (18%).

This survey also reveals that citizens in the acceding countries expect the European Parliament campaign to mainly focus on the following issues: unemployment (68%), country-specific issues (56%), agriculture (51%), and rights as an EU citizen (48%). The issues which draw little attention include the activities of the European Parliament (20%), as well as the institutional reform of the European Union (18%).

Looking at individual country data, the survey emphasises that the question of employment is mentioned in first place among 9 of the 13 new Member States and candidate countries, and by more than 50% of citizens in ten countries.

See:  
[http://europa.eu.int/comm/public\\_opinion/cceb\\_en.htm](http://europa.eu.int/comm/public_opinion/cceb_en.htm)

## Social protection system under threat

In the Netherlands, there have been many cut-backs in the social security system and the local fight against poverty.

**A**s often in these cases, the position of the claimants is under heavy threat. Pushing people into a paid job is seen as the ultimate solution, while unemployment rates are rising, which means there is a lack of paid work! The framework of the social security system has been changed again, and is currently the Law on Work and Assistance (*Wet, Werk en Bijstand*). This is a clear change in policy. Jobs especially created for the long-term unemployed who have little chance of re-entering the mainstream labour market will be stopped by the 1st of January 2006. This will be a disaster for a lot of people. The fear of losing one's job is - again - very present.

As EAPN Netherlands we try to play our part in the 'National Action Plan on Inclusion' process. Unfortunately we have experienced that transparency leaves much to desire, as well as the involvement of all relevant actors. This important policy process is too often used as a promoting tool for own governmental policy and too little to conduct a policy aimed at the future.

The Third Round Table on Poverty, in October 2004 in Rotterdam, in which preparations we are naturally involved can provide us at least with an opportunity to enter the discussions, also at European level.

In the framework of democratic involvement the government is putting a lot of efforts into the upcoming elections of the European Parliament. We have also made our contribution by calling upon our members to let their voice be heard - to vote! This is a heavy task in the light of the cut-backs in income, care, housing, healthcare and education.

*Alida Smeekes - Jo Bothmer - EAPN Netherlands Foundation*



## Dutch Presidency: what's on the menu?

### Starter

In the past 15 years, the Dutch Presidencies have delivered two important Treaties: Maastricht and Amsterdam. Especially the last one can be seen as an enrichment for the EU. As EAPN Netherlands, we hope that the next Presidency will bring the fight against poverty and social exclusion a huge step forward. Groningen must be a measure-point, because the EAPN will be able to take there a clear stand at its General Assembly. EAPN also will have the opportunity during this General Assembly to address Mr de Geus, Minister for Social Affairs and Employment, who will be present there, to his responsibility as Council President concerning this issue.

### Main course

The Dutch agenda for the Presidency - in great lines - will cover three big themes: 1) lasting economic growth, 2) further extension of the area of freedom, safety and justice, 3) an active, involved and alert external policy. And moreover:

- promoting social inclusion in an enlarged European Union;
- stimulating economic growth and employment;
- meeting the Lisbon targets: focusing on combining an adequate level of social protection with

increased work incentive policies;

- carry forward the new community strategy on health and safety at work;
- consolidate and simplify the *acquis*;
- promote the implementation of legislation in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) and facilitate the exchange of good practices;
- hold an informal political debate in relation to the issue of 'making work pay';
- evaluate the process of policy coordination in the field of social inclusion and pensions;
- focus on the promotion of equality;
- start work on proposals for a Directive to combat discrimination and revising the Directives in the area of equal treatment between men and women.

### Dessert

Should the Netherlands eventually lead the European Constitution through the Council, passing all cliffs?

With this menu a rough wine will be served with the full body of cut-backs at all levels - with the exception of the salaries of top managers.

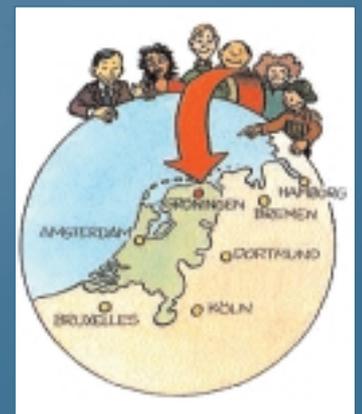
*A.S. - J.B.*

## PROFILE OF EAPN NETHERLANDS

Right from the start, the Dutch Network has consisted exclusively of self-help organisations. Convinced that people themselves know best what they need to improve their situation, we let people speak for themselves. As EAPN Netherlands, we lobby, negotiate and translate the results of these discussions from and to our members.

Our "Reaction on the NAP Inclusion 2003-2005" - in which we included an abridged version of the Action Plan - has been sent to more than 1000 local self-help organisations, client-councils and activists, asking them to influence the local and social agenda. We are working on a monitoring system, for which we are trying to raise the necessary finances.

As EAPN, we have a seat in the National Habitat Platform by which the input of the socially excluded and financially poor, inside an important advisory body of the government, is ensured. Next to the usual and intensive activities around national social policy, we are working very hard on the preparation of what has to become a very successful EAPN General Assembly in 2004 in the beautiful city of Groningen.



# The "Dutch model": an illusion bites the dust?

The Netherlands has long seemed the "teacher's pet" of the European class, especially when it comes to employment.

Miracle or mirage? The figures tell it all...

It is only a few years since EU governments were praising the Netherlands' economic and employment policy as a model path to high growth (averaging 3.6% a year between 1995 and 2000). But what mainly earned the Netherlands its "championship" title was its record on keeping unemployment down: 2.6% in April 2002!

But as the last Joint Employment Report now reveals, the Dutch unemployment "miracle" hides a full-time equivalent employment rate (58.1% in 2002) well below the total rate (75.8% for the 20-64 age bracket). Also, the female employment rate (full-time equivalent) is only 42% (74.7% for men), putting it at the bottom of the EU league table along with Greece, Italy and Spain. In both cases, the Netherlands has the dubious honour of claiming the widest gaps in the Europe of Fifteen.

## Part-time: a quick fix?

Since 1982-1983, the Netherlands has been tackling unemployment by cutting working time. Reductions in working time came through negotiated agreements with state intervention, like the 1996 legislation. The low working hours are therefore made up of negotiated short time (36 hours a week in some industries) and extensive use of part-time, especially by hiring young people for public sector jobs and through incentives to businesses to expand part-time opportunities.

The effort to reintegrate people into the labour market is important but the reality is that part-time has been mainly taken up by women, which - in some cases - has made their already uncertain economic and social situation worse.

## What about the poverty rate?

The Joint Report on social inclusion 2003 shows that, while the overall year-on-year poverty rate has held steady at below the European average (11% in 2001 against 15% for the EU-15), young people are hardest hit: 16% of under-16s live in poor households and 49% of single childless adults under 30 (the second highest rate after Denmark - 61% - versus 32% for the EU-15) live below the poverty line.

The figures for the working-age population present a contrasting picture. On the one hand, the poverty rate among workers was 8% in 2001 (1% above the European average) and 23% among the unemployed (18% males, 24% females) compared to 38% for the EU-15. But where the distribution of groups within the population living in poverty is concerned, the Netherlands again wears a badge of shame: 46% of people living in poverty (aged 16 and over) actually have a job, against 26% for the European Union as a whole.

Single parent families are little better off: 45% of them live below the poverty line - the second the highest rate after the United Kingdom (50%); the EU average being 35%.

## An economy on the slide

From 2001, the Dutch economy began flagging badly, slipping into recession in early 2003. From being the envy of neighbouring countries in the 1990s for its robust growth and low unemployment, the Netherlands last year experienced its first full year of recession since 1982 (a 0.8% decline - one of the worst performances in the Eurozone).

Having wagged the finger at France and Germany over the size of their deficits, the Netherlands itself looks set to breach the European budgetary rules this year, with low growth exacerbated by a rising unemployment rate, which had climbed back to 4.5% in January 2004.

Vincent Forest

46% of over-16s living in poverty have a job

The 'voice' of those who experience poverty, exclusion and inequalities must be heard

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