



Refer: European Informal Council 27 October 2005

To: EU Heads of State and Government

Dear President, Dear Prime Minister,

In view of the preparation of the European Informal Summit devoted to the challenges of competitiveness and social justice in the context of globalisation, EAPN wishes to highlight that Social Europe should be at the core of the discussions, and stresses the links between the social aspects of the European project and the ambition of the EU to face the challenges of economic globalisation.

Social concerns are too often considered as antagonistic to economic constraints and ambitions, or are given too low a level of priority, in line with the assumption that economic challenges are to be addressed first, allowing social cohesion to derive from growth and competitiveness. This neo liberal vision is an inaccurate vision of reality, as well as a dangerous approach in the current context of lack of confidence and enthusiasm by EU residents in the EU project. It carries the risk of developing economic growth at the expense of poverty, social exclusion and inequalities, and it does not guarantee economic efficiency.

In the context of globalisation, necessary adaptation of labour markets should not be based on social dumping and delocalisation, but aim at a flexible and qualification-based model of inclusive labour market. Only a strong and generous social protection system, providing unemployed with personalized support, relevant training as well as adequate replacement income and quality structures likely to encourage a harmonious work/life balance, is likely to give people the security and the confidence they need to renew their knowledge and skills and access opportunities. Inclusive labour markets should provide quality employment and be supported by long term vision and investments. Only a strong and generous social protection system can protect from poverty and social exclusion those for whom work is not an option.

If there is no one model likely to apply to all of the EU Member States, the evolution of our societies should in no way be influenced by a short-term business-related vision, and depart from common values compounded over the years, that define the specificity of our vision of society. These values include respect for human dignity, justice and solidarity, equal access for all to fundamental rights, parliamentary and participatory democracy, allowing the participation of all to the building of society. In this respect EAPN wants to reinforce the views of the Platform of European Social NGOs as expressed in the attached document.

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The development of a competitive social Europe should be guided by these values and implemented through existing tools, some of which should be strengthened, including strong Social Welfare States, accessible quality services of general interest, social standards including a right to minimum income and strong anti-discrimination policies.

Only such a Social Europe, addressing both economic competitiveness and social cohesion challenges, is likely to restore confidence in the EU project amongst the citizens and the residents of the EU. This boost in confidence is badly needed after the rejection of the Constitutional Treaty by voters in France and the Netherlands and the failure to agree a future budget for the Union at the June Council earlier this year.

Such a vision for a Social Europe means a strong coordination of economic and social policies, placed on an equal footing, at all levels of governance all over the EU 25. It implies a high level of ambition in terms of social inclusion and social cohesion, and the dedication of adequate funding, including the use of EU Structural Funds. In this respect, we wish to highlight the importance of a satisfactory outcome to the debate on the financial perspectives for the EU: an agreement on a reduced budget would jeopardize the effectiveness of the structural funds, putting social cohesion at risk.

A Social Europe needs a strong commitment by decision-makers at European level, and the political will to implement a balanced Lisbon agenda as well as a strengthened Social Protection and Social Inclusion Open Method of Coordination.

We urge that your Government also contribute to developing such a vision, and await with great interest the outcomes of the Informal Council.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Fintan Farrell". The signature is written in a cursive, slightly slanted style.

Fintan Farrell  
Director

cc

Mr Barroso, President, European Commission,

Mr. Josep Borrell, President, European Parliament

Mr Spidla, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Gender Equality