

**Austrian Presidency of the European Union**

**5<sup>th</sup> European Meeting of People  
Experiencing Poverty**

***How do we cope with every day life?***

**Brussels, 12 and 13 May 2006**

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## **Key Messages: Austrian Presidency Report to EPSCO Council**

Luxembourg, 1-2 June 2006

### **Context:**

The 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting took place in Brussels on 12-13 May 2006. The theme was “*How do we cope with everyday life?*” It was attended by over 200 people. These included delegations of people experiencing poverty from 23 countries (21 Member States plus Bulgaria and Norway) together with many Social Protection Committee (SPC) and Social Exclusion Programme (SEP) committee members, representatives of the European Commission, EAPN and other European NGOs, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.

**The following are some of the key themes stressed by people experiencing poverty during the meeting:**

### **Participation**

**Participation is essential:** It is essential to involve people experiencing poverty in the decisions that affect their day to day lives. Policy makers must listen to and engage in meaningful dialogue at both European, national and local level. Such participation must be regular, be given a formal status and structure and be resourced. Indicators should be agreed for monitoring participation.

### **The Reality of Living in Poverty**

**Coping is a constant struggle:** Coping with poverty is difficult. It is a day to day struggle for survival. This is because if you live in poverty you are isolated and lack basic information. Your basic needs such as access to work, decent housing and health and education services are often not met. Even when available, essential services often treat you in a disrespectful, unresponsive and stigmatising manner. Racism and discrimination deepen your exclusion and isolation. You feel powerless, stigmatised and blamed. You lack choice.

**Inadequate and insecure work increasing:** For many, access to decent work is very restricted. Work is often low paid and insecure and not sufficient to lift people out of poverty. Access is worsened as a result of discrimination and racism, especially for the Roma, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants but also for others such as single mothers and disabled people.

**Fear for one's children:** Many parents fear that the things they missed in their own lives when growing up are now happening to their children. It is not only that children may lack basic necessities or have inadequate access to essential services but that they lack the possibility to participate in normal social, cultural and recreational activities.

### **Basic Needs for a Good Life**

**Human rights and dignity for all:** The most fundamental need for a good life is respect for the human rights and dignity of all people irrespective of their ethnic origin, religion or legal status. Every individual person and their story count.

**An adequate minimum income:** In as wealthy a part of the world as the EU every citizen should be guaranteed a sufficient minimum income to pay the bills and lead life with dignity. This should be enough not just for basic needs but also for participation in social and cultural life and for personal development.

**Enforced anti-discrimination legislation:** Strong anti-discrimination and equality legislation which is rigorously enforced and guarantees the right to work and equal access to services for all.

**Access to decent work:** Access to quality work is a key route out of poverty for many, but not all people, enabling them to become active citizens. Such access needs to be supported by linking appropriate training opportunities, supportive social services and flexible income support systems.

**A roof over one's head:** Decent and affordable housing is essential. This means investing more in building social housing, controlling rents and evictions, prosecuting bad landlords and ensuring respectful housing services.

**Access to essential services:** Essential services need to be: available locally, up-to-date, efficient and universal (not targeted at particular groups).

- equal opportunities in **education** is a springboard for life and access to life long learning, including free higher education and training in new information and communication technologies is essential for all;
- access to essential **health care** services, including dental services, needs to be guaranteed for all;
- access to affordable **transport, social services** and **child care** are all important for a decent life;
- opportunities to participate in affordable **cultural and creative activities** and in **sporting and leisure activities** are an essential element in a good life.

**Access to information:** access to relevant and understandable information about rights, services and opportunities is vital to surviving and leading an independent life.

### **2006-2008 NAPs/inclusion**

- **Participation** of people experiencing poverty and NGOs representing them in the preparation but also the implementation and monitoring of the new NAPs must be extended and deepened. Training on participation techniques should be organised for civil servants responsible for the NAPs.
- The next NAPs need to be more **concrete, focussed and specific** and thus more understandable and effective than previous NAPs.

- Preparation of the NAPs must involve the **whole policy system** and **link** different policy fields together.
- The NAPs should take into account the **range of needs** that are necessary for a good life and not only focus on activation measures.
- The impact of the **privatisation of utilities** (e.g. water, gas, electricity) needs to be taken into account in the NAPs.
- Ongoing **monitoring and evaluation** of what has actually happened because of the NAPs need to be strengthened.

### **Proposals of the Presidency:**

The Presidency supports the view that participation is essential. Member States should, in accordance with the common objectives for social protection and social inclusion, step up their efforts to include people experiencing poverty.

The exchange of information between the Member States on their experiences with the participation of people experiencing poverty should be intensified. In this context the Presidency proposes to focus the debate on sustainable development in the Council on 1 June 2006 on social inclusion and especially on the question how the involvement of people experiencing poverty at all levels could be improved.

Poverty is a day to day struggle for survival. In the European Union too many people have to fight this struggle every day. This has continuously to be kept in mind when policies are designed.

The issue of access to decent work is of key importance and has to be considered in all the relevant policy areas so that it can work as route out of poverty and social exclusion.

The Presidency encourages all participants and guests of the 5<sup>th</sup> meeting to disseminate the results and experiences of this 5<sup>th</sup> meeting as widely as possible.

The European meetings of people experiencing poverty have proved very useful and should be continued.

## **AUSTRIAN PRESIDENCY'S FOREWORD**

Poverty means a daily struggle for survival. In the European Union there are still too many people having to win this battle day after day. At the European Spring Summit on 23/24 March 2006 it has therefore been a major concern of the Austrian Presidency of the Council to reaffirm the commitment of the heads of government to make a decisive impact on the reduction of poverty and social exclusion by the year 2010.

In this process it is indispensable to involve the people directly affected by poverty. Based on their own experience, people living in poverty are obviously in the best

position to judge which measures should be given priority. I am therefore very pleased that during the Austrian Council Presidency we have succeeded in continuing the tradition of European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty, and thus the consultation process.

This meeting would not have been possible without the valuable contributions of all those involved, for which I would like to thank them sincerely. My very special thanks goes to the delegates of the meeting for their dedicated work and their courage to participate in the discussions, notably as the lessons from their personal experience will be fed into the National Strategy Reports for social protection and social inclusion 2006-2008. In the future, these National Strategy Reports must be drafted in a more concrete, goal-directed and precise language to ensure that they are more comprehensible and effective.

The key results of the participants' discussions on the subject *"How do we cope with every-day life"* were submitted in a message of the Austrian Presidency to the Council of Ministers on 1 June 2006. They mirror the realities of living in poverty and formulate basic needs and prerequisites for a "good life".

I hope that this Report will allow a large public, including both the interest groups active in the combat against poverty and the political decision-makers at national and European level, to share in the exchange of experience of the participants of the 5<sup>th</sup> European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty.

I am convinced that this is an important and successful way of conducting the consultation process and I therefore welcome the continuation of the European meetings of people experiencing poverty during the first half of 2007, as announced by the incoming German Presidency.

Ursula Haubner  
Federal Minister of Social Security,  
Generations and Consumer Protection

*(photo)*

## CHAIRPERSON'S NOTE

When I was invited to chair the 5<sup>th</sup> European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty in May 2006 in Brussels, I was more than happy to accept. My participation in the conference has enriched me enormously (and yes, I am using the notion "enriched" consciously). Thus, rather than providing a mere overview of the results of the meeting (the details of which are included in this report anyway), I would like to share my impressions and memories of it.

At the core of the two-day conference held in the clinical building of the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions was the question on how to cope with poverty in everyday life. I was struck by the different experiences of participants across countries. I was struck by the enormous variety of problems that have been brought forward. We have, for example, learned about the struggles of the Roma population; the unsolved problems of unaccompanied young migrants; about people living in asbestos-affected housing, the problems of unemployment and insecure employment, and about much, much more.

Despite these different problems and experiences of the participants, it was astonishing how much exchange was nonetheless possible. I remember the poster presentations, which not only reflected the struggles of people experiencing poverty within each country, but also demonstrated the many similarities across Europe. I remember the many chats and discussions during the informal lunches and dinners, which also allowed for an exchange of experiences. Clearly, in these chats, without interpreters, different languages have made it impossible to comprehend precisely everything that has been said; still there was a broad mutual understanding.

I remember the many questions that have been collected in the workshops to be addressed to the politicians and civil servants sitting at the panel, people who are not experiencing poverty themselves, but who are engaged to combat poverty. I also remember that time was scarce. As chairperson, I have not been able to give everyone who wanted to contribute the possibility to actually do that. I remember the disappointment of many participants, including myself, that the meeting was over so fast: not all questions have been asked, nor have all answers been provided.

Fortunately, this meanwhile well-established conference is set to continue next year, under the auspices of the German Presidency of the EU. There is so much more that people experiencing poverty have to say and demand; there is so much more politicians and officials from national governments and the European Union institutions need to listen to. I wish the Austrian Ministry who organised this event and the European Anti-Poverty Network who ensures continuity for this process, many more meetings that are as enriching as this one. I am honoured to have been a part of it!

### **Karin Heitzmann**

Assistant Professor at the Institute for Social Policy,  
Vienna University of Economics and Business Administration

## INTRODUCTION

The 5<sup>th</sup> European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty took place in Brussels on 12-13 May 2006 under the auspices of the Austrian Presidency of the European Union and supported by the European Commission, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions. The Meeting was organised with the support of the European Anti Poverty Network (EAPN) who assisted the organising committee with the development of the content, methodologies and practical arrangements for the 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting. The theme was *How do we cope with everyday life?*

The event was attended by over 200 people. These included delegations of people experiencing poverty from 23 countries (21 Member States plus Bulgaria and Norway) together with many Social Protection Committee (SPC) and Social Exclusion Programme (SEP) committee members, representatives of the European Commission, the European Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions, EAPN and other European NGOs, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.

The organisation of the Meeting was aided by an organising committee which brought together representatives from the Austrian Federal Ministry for Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection, the European Commission, the German Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, the Belgium Ministry for Social Integration, EAPN, ATD 4<sup>th</sup> World, FEANTSA, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions.

While the event itself was held over two days it was, in fact, the culmination of considerable work over the preceding months. Most of the national delegations of people experiencing poverty had undertaken a detailed preparatory process and compiled a report prior to attending the 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting. This ensured that delegates came to the meeting well prepared and with important information to share during the discussions in the different workshops. Indeed, the extent of the preparation contributed significantly to the success of the actual meeting. In many countries the level of preparation was more extensive than in previous years. In this regard it is notable that in a number of countries, following the recommendations from the previous meeting under the Luxembourg Presidency, the preparation received financial support from National or Regional Authorities. This enabled the appointment of co-ordinators in each country who assisted national organising committees with the planning of the meeting and helped to ensure a good preparation with the delegates attending the meeting. This report draws on the reports prepared in advance as well as on the discussions at the 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting.

In addition to the reports prepared by delegations another important element in the lead up to the event was the preparation by delegates of posters illustrating aspects of coping with every day life. These were presented at different points during the conference and greatly enlivened and informed the proceedings. (These posters may be viewed at [www.eapn.org](http://www.eapn.org) or at [www.bmsgv.at](http://www.bmsgv.at))

The meeting was structured so as to ensure a high level of participation by all delegates. Following an initial welcoming session with speeches by representatives



of the Austrian Presidency, the European Commission, the Economic and Social Committee, the Committee of the Regions and by a participant to the 4<sup>th</sup> European Meeting in 2005, and a first presentation of some of the posters that had been prepared by delegates the emphasis was placed on four workshop sessions. Delegates stayed in the same workshop group throughout. Then, following a second round of presenting posters, there was a plenary session at which a synthesis of the main points emerging from the different workshops was presented. Following this a panel responded to a set of questions that had emerged from the workshops. The panel was made up of representatives from the European Commission, the Social Protection Committee, the European Economic and Social Committee and EAPN. In a closing plenary session statements were made by the Austrian Presidency, the future German Presidency and EAPN.

## 2. OPENING SESSION

**Ms. Ursula HABUNER**

**Federal Minister for Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection, Austria**

**Ms. Lenia SAMUEL**

**European Commission DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities**

**Mr. Luca JAHIER, European Economic and Social Committee**

**Mr. Harry DIJKSMA, Committee of the Regions**

**Mr. Paul ROSIERS, participant to the 4<sup>th</sup> European Meeting of People experiencing Poverty, Belgian delegation**

### ***Austrian Presidency***

In her opening address **Ursula Haubner**, Austrian Federal Minister for Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection and the current President of the Council of Ministers, warmly welcomed participants and thanked all those responsible for organizing the event, especially the European Commission, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions and EAPN. She emphasized the excellent preparatory work that was undertaken by delegates in advance of the conference, especially from her own knowledge in Austria. For instance a meeting was organized in Austria, “To Be Visible”, which was attended by many people experiencing poverty and was an excellent preparatory meeting and helped us to listen to many different experiences. She stressed that it would be up to those experiencing poverty attending the conference to make policy makers present understand what it is like to experience poverty on a daily basis. The challenge for policy makers is to listen and to respect the dignity of human beings. This is an ongoing challenge for policy makers if they want to deliver in terms of human rights and to make sure that everyone has a decent life and that people are empowered to have control of their daily lives. Poverty is a multi-faceted reality. To understand it better policy makers need to know what the actual daily experience of poverty is.

The Minister acknowledged that of course there are big differences between and within Member States. Contexts and environments can widely vary. For instance the share of GDP for social protection provisions can vary widely in the different Member States – it can go from 13.4% in some countries to more than 30% in other countries. There are huge discrepancies in social standings and these contrasting situations have an impact on the daily lives of people experiencing poverty. There are some country-specific poverty factors and differences between specific groups as well, for example unemployed people, the working poor, migrants, people who are disabled and lone parents. She expressed the hope that the theme of the conference, *How do we cope with everyday life?* would yield some outcomes both at EU and national levels.

She stressed that the European Council had endorsed the new common objectives and working methods for social protection and inclusion and had confirmed that steps

have to be taken to make a decisive impact on the reduction of poverty and social exclusion by 2010. It is very important that growth and employment are discussed at EU level but it is equally important to know that growth is impossible without social progress. That is the reason why the social dimension has to be taken on board. She went on to emphasize that new National Action Plans on social inclusion will be due by mid-September and that the time has come to translate words into deeds. She reported that the previous week there had been a preparatory meeting to discuss the drafting of the Austrian plan and this had highlighted just how important it is to involve all stakeholders from all backgrounds - from municipalities and regions, from the NGOs and civil society actors and people experiencing poverty themselves.

Mrs. Haubner concluded by stressing that we have to do whatever is possible to exclude exclusion, to get rid of poverty, to make sure that people are included in mainstream society and on the job market and that is why we have to build up an inclusive European society.

### ***European Commission***

Welcoming delegates on behalf of the European Commission, **Lenia Samuel**, Deputy Director-General in the Directorate General for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities, recalled messages from the four previous Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty and the progress that had been made since the first meeting under the Belgian Presidency in 2001. The first message she highlighted is that people experiencing poverty have a right to have their voices heard. The 2001 meeting was a significant step forward in having the voice of people experiencing poverty heard at European level. 5 years later, the right to be heard has been accepted. It is now very clear that policy makers cannot develop effective policies if they do not understand what it is like to be poor and it is only the poor that can tell them this. Secondly, she said that over the last five years, the meetings have acted as a catalyst for all those involved, to reflect on how best they can ensure the formal commitment of people experiencing poverty and social exclusion to policy making processes. Last year opened up a dialogue between, on the one hand, those who represent the 68 million people facing poverty and social exclusion in the EU and, on the other, the key people at official and decision making level who actively participated in the discussions and who help to define national policies. Thirdly, the meetings have confirmed the view that the causes of poverty are complex and varied. Poverty and social exclusion are not simply questions of income, important though that is. They are questions also of education and training, of housing, of health care, of access to social and financial services, of integration more widely. The voices and concerns of all the groups who experience poverty need to be heard on all these aspects and the responses required from the policy makers need to respond to this multi-faceted nature of poverty. She added that the challenge of making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and social exclusion by 2010 involves more than just improving state provision for people living in poverty. It is necessary to tackle the causes of social exclusion in Europe and to make a determined effort to remove them.

She acknowledged the big efforts made by Member States to involve NGOs, social partners and regional and local authorities, and said that they should be given credit for that. But to date, despite the fact that people experiencing poverty are key

stakeholders, the level of their participation in designing national responses to poverty and exclusion still remains low.

She went on to stress, as had Minister Haubner before her, that the 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting was happening at a crucial moment following the strong statements at the Spring European Council confirming that promoting social inclusion is a key goal of the Union and is a key part of the Partnership for growth and jobs. The Council also endorsed the new simplified objectives and working arrangements for the streamlined Open Method of Coordination on social protection and social inclusion. She stressed that the European Commission will look very carefully to see how Member States have involved stakeholders in the preparation of their next NAPs/inclusion which are due in September.

Mrs. Samuel also stressed the importance of the continued exchange of learning and good practice. She said that when the new Community action programme, PROGRESS, is launched in 2007 it will be very important to capitalize on the experience and knowledge that has been accumulated under many different strands of the Community action programme on social exclusion over the past four years. This will include learning about how to include people with direct experience of poverty and social exclusion.

She then highlighted two recent initiatives by the Commission which she hoped will have an impact on the everyday life of European citizens. The first is a Communication issued by the Commission containing a consultation on what the European Union should do to help excluded people back into work and to support people for whom a job is not a viable option. It looks in particular at minimum income schemes. By launching this consultation, the Commission is looking for ideas and suggestions about how welfare and employment policies can help those capable of working find decent jobs, while still providing a decent standard of living to those who remain outside the labour market. The second initiative she mentioned was the Commission's Communication on social services of general interest in the European Union. She stressed that it is important that social service providers and national administrations have the necessary clarity about how the European legal framework applies to them so that they can carry out their tasks effectively.

Finally, she recalled that 2007 will be the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All. She stressed that discrimination can often lead to or compound poverty and social exclusion. Thus, during the year, the Commission will try to reinforce the links between discrimination policy and social inclusion policy to ensure that the most disadvantaged groups benefit from our efforts.

*We have to respect the dignity of human beings. This should be an ongoing concern for policy makers if they want to deliver proper policies. The idea is not to be charitable and to extend some solidarity towards you (rather) it is really important to deliver in terms of human rights and make sure that everybody has a decent life that people are empowered, that they can really have power on their daily lives.”* Ursula Haubner, Austrian Federal Minister for Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection and the President of the Council of

## Ministers

*Even the best intentioned and best informed policy makers cannot claim to be able to develop policies, programmes and practices to combat poverty and social exclusion if they do not understand what is like to be poor. And the only people who can tell them are those who live in such situations.* Lenia Samuel, European Commission

*. . . we insist continually that the policies of growth and employment must be at the service of social cohesion. Thus social policies must not be considered so much as a passive cost but over time as a productive investment in the social and human capital of the European Union.* Luca Jahier, European Economic and Social Committee

*All those facing poverty in their daily life are very often facing situations of humiliation and lack of respect, disrespect. It is as if we had less value than the others. But we must go one step further we shouldn't limit ourselves to our own situation but we should find our way in society.* Paul Rosiers, representative from 4<sup>th</sup> Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty

### **European Economic and Social Committee**

**Luca Jahier**, Vice-President of the European Economic and Social Committee, welcomed delegates on behalf of the President of the Committee. He told delegates that their point of view is important for the whole of society. He stressed that the theme of the conference, how to cope with everyday life, is not only the concern of people experiencing poverty but is one of the main preoccupations which nourishes the fear and uncertainty about the future for a

significant number of European families. This is borne out by a recent Eurobarometer survey on the future of Europe. This reveals very clearly a number of concerns shared by citizens of the 25 Member States: the struggle against unemployment, the struggle against the effects of globalization and the protection of social rights. These create a growing sense of fear and raise some explicit questions about how to make Europe bigger and better. In the face of this 32% believe that the best way to construct a true European citizenship is through the harmonization of social protection systems. It seemed to him that the diverse European institutions are increasingly drawing the lesson from these reports that it is above all on this theme that it is possible to restart the European project after the dangerous halt to the process of ratifying the constitution.

He went on to stress the significance of the outcome of the Spring 2006 European Council. After a long period where there had been a lack of balance in European policy the conclusions of the European Council had reiterated the importance of social policy and in particular the struggle against poverty and social exclusion. He drew particular attention to paragraph 69 of the Council conclusions and the aim of making a decisive impact on the reduction of poverty and social exclusion by 2010.

He emphasized that most of the key policy areas affecting poverty and social exclusion are still in the competence of Member States. Thus the Open Method of

Coordination on social inclusion is a voluntary process. However, five years after it started the results have been less than was expected.

He pointed out that while absolute poverty may have diminished since 1970 inequalities have continued to grow, particularly in the Mediterranean and Anglo-Saxon zones. According to Eurostat there are still some 72 million people, that is 16% of the European population, living in poverty. This rises to 19% in Italy, Spain and Portugal and 21% in Ireland, Greece and the Slovak Republic. The richest 20% of Europeans have nearly five times more than the poorest 20%. He then outlined a series of figures highlighting poor working conditions and low pay and showing that many working people are in poverty and are in precarious jobs with many earning wages below the poverty ceiling. Around a quarter of employed Europeans may be considered to be in precarious or low quality work.

Mr. Jahier emphasised that the Economic and Social Committee insists that employment and growth policies should serve social cohesion and that social policies should be seen as a productive investment in the social and human capital of the European Union. It is thus necessary to give substance to the European Social Model. He further informed delegates that the Committee for Employment and Social Affairs of the European Parliament intend to propose a resolution on the future of the European Social Model in September and that their work at the 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting would feed into the preparation of the resolution. He ended by saying that in order to regain the confidence of citizens and to make Europe move on from the impasse of the last few years, we must be capable of giving some concrete and efficient responses to the social challenges.

### ***Committee of the Regions***

**Harry Dijkstra**, representing the Committee of the Regions, welcomed delegates. He outlined the role played by the Committee both as an advisory board representing the views of local and regional authorities and as a platform for all cities and regions to meet and generate projects and ideas. The members of the Committee deal with all kinds of social issues at local and regional level including combating poverty and improving the situation of those facing difficult circumstances.

He then went on to stress that there are no easy solutions to the problem of poverty and social exclusion. The situation varies from country to country, from region to region, but also from family to family and from person to person living in poverty. Thus in many cases tailor-made solutions are needed. The added value of local and regional authorities with regard to combating poverty is found in them providing a sound framework and a very precise definition of mutual responsibilities of all the actors involved. The government can help but it cannot always judge the situation on behalf of the citizen. Thus Governments should refrain from interfering on the personal level even when it concerns poor people. He warned against looking for easy or quick solutions. However, drawing on his 23 years experience as a banker, he stressed that in situations of debt early intervention to assist people is very important. Finally he stressed the importance of exchange of knowledge and best practice on poverty and assured delegates that the Committee of the Regions would contribute as much as possible to the European debate about poverty.

### ***Representative of 4<sup>th</sup> Meeting***

**Paul Rosiers**, a participant at the previous European Meeting, reminded delegates of some of the main outcomes of the 4<sup>th</sup> Meeting. He explained that the meeting had focused on the image of poverty - how do people perceive people living in poverty, how do we want them to look at us? It concluded that a lot of things still need to be done to improve the image. Commenting on the figures mentioned by Mr. Jahier he said that it is a pity to hear that figures of poverty are that high in such a rich region as the European Union.

He went on to say that in preparing for the 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting delegates had been given a report of the activities organized after the fourth Meeting. This made them realize that, even if progress had been made and if small steps and sometimes extraordinary steps had been taken, there are still a lot of things to do. He stressed that during the next two days there would be a further opportunity to speak with each other and to discuss with representatives of our different countries. Even though two days is not enough it will be possible to make a small step. He said that after the 4<sup>th</sup> Meeting delegates had been encouraged to go on working. It will also be necessary to go on working after the 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting and translate all that will be said into practical actions. However, he stressed that to do so people living in poverty will need the support of politicians. That is the reason why they should really listen very carefully to delegates. The observations we will make and the conclusions we will reach will have to be taken aboard by ourselves and by politicians and policy makers.

He emphasized that this year's topic, how do we cope with everyday life, is quite important for people living in poverty. It relates to what people must do to survive. He pointed out that results of the many surveys on poverty which are made throughout the European Union may be quite different from one Member State to another and thus it is difficult to give a bird's eye view of poverty. That is one of the reasons why the image of people living in poverty is sometimes so negative. He said that people speak about poverty by speaking about a ceiling, a threshold of poverty which is calculated according to income but he stressed that it is also important to know what we can do with the income we have. That is why delegates tackled that particular issue when preparing for the 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting – they addressed the questions of what must be spent to have decent housing? to find accommodation? how much money do you need to spend for food? He stressed that it is not only for scientists to examine these questions. Surveys are instrumental but not sufficient to provide an answer. Thus he hoped that over the next two days of discussion it will be possible to contribute some small solutions. It is a first step which will be followed by many other steps when delegates prepare for the 6<sup>th</sup> Meeting. He said that the objective is always the same: to convey a better image of poverty, what it means for us and how we cope with everyday life.

Mr. Rosiers went on to stress that it is quite important to contribute solutions now, as discussions are currently taking place at European level about minimum income. People experiencing poverty want to be taken on board in those discussions and to contribute to them and to stress that poverty does not only relate to financial matters but also to issues such as working conditions and living conditions. All citizens are entitled to a better quality of life. He said that the delegates at the conference need to feed into this debate.

He also emphasized that the 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting was happening at an important moment because the new National Action Plans on Inclusion will be due in September. He hoped that the discussions at the conference would be instrumental in contributing some priorities to the new National Action Plans and that the priorities delegates would be discussing would subsequently be mainstreamed in the NAPs. He stressed that if the NAPs/inclusion do not take into account the realities of the lives of people experiencing poverty they would remain a purely theoretical exercise. He hoped that the new NAPs/inclusion would become an engine, a motor, for more social inclusion at European level. This is needed if we want to have a significant impact on the eradication of poverty by the year 2010, which is one of the most important objectives in the European Union as defined at Nice in the year 2000.



### 3. MESSAGES FROM WORKSHOPS

#### 3.1 The importance of participation

If one had to sum up the wide ranging discussions in the eight workshops in one sentence, one message would stand out above all others: it is essential to involve people experiencing poverty in the decisions that affect their daily lives. Two major arguments were made in support of this view. First, it is because people living in poverty have a right to be heard and to have their views valued. As one delegate put it, “we want to be respected”. Secondly, it is because people who live in poverty are the experts on their lives. Thus their participation is the only way to ensure effective policies to prevent and eradicate poverty and social exclusion. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that policy makers must listen to and engage in meaningful dialogue at both European, national and local level.

Delegates of course recognised that achieving real involvement and participation is difficult. For real participation to happen systems and services must be open and transparent. This means that people experiencing poverty need to ‘teach’ governments how to cooperate with them and continuously explain to people what the reality of living in poverty is like. Or, as one workshop concluded, it means “reconciling the different worlds of administration and people living in poverty”. However there are increasing numbers of examples of good practice in promoting involvement. For example, in Belgium a project has been started for people who live in poverty to work in several government administrations to increase the accessibility of the services for these groups. They receive a special training so that they can use their poverty experience in a professional way. In Portugal there have been 3 regional meetings of people experiencing poverty. In Austria this year the Ministry of Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection with the Austrian EAPN (Armuskonferenz) have started the “Sichtbar Werden!” (“get visible!”) meetings. In Ireland a project promoting active citizenship through encouraging people living in poverty to vote was highlighted. The Champagne-Ardennes region of France has promoted the preparation for the European meetings of people experiencing poverty. Bordeaux has an initiative on integration through employment. UNIOPPS (A large French Social Association) has created a working group in favour of participation for the health sector which enables people living in poverty to meet health workers. The municipalities of Santa Lucia (Gran Canaria) and Cordoba in Spain have developed practices in participative budgets.

A number of suggestions were made of ways to enhance participation. In particular it was stressed that resources are important to enable participation in policy making, resources of money, time, hardware and software. Portugal was mentioned as an example of good practice in this regard as it has allowed participation by providing financing for the past four years for meetings of people experiencing poverty. Another practical suggestion was to agree a set of indicators which can be used for monitoring participation and measuring progress in Member States each year. EAPN could coordinate this process.

It was stressed that participation must be regular, be given a formal status and structure. In particular European meetings of people experiencing poverty should be formally recognised and be guaranteed on a regular basis not just be dependent on the goodwill of the Presidency.

### 3.2 The reality of poverty and social exclusion

#### ***Coping is a constant struggle***

Coping with poverty is difficult. It is a day to day struggle to live and to survive, though a good universal social welfare system can be a great help. There were many explanations of why coping is hard:

*Isolation:* If you live in poverty you are often isolated and cut off from friends and family. This can be because you live in an isolated rural area. But it can also be that you are cut off living in an urban ghetto. High levels of crime and vandalism in your area may mean you don't feel able to go out during the evening and you become a prisoner in your own house. Members of families are often far from each other. Thus more people live behind the window and the social help of a neighbourhood doesn't exist any more, in such situations one participant noted that if you are members of churches you have some possibilities for social events.

*I have lost friends as I cannot participate in their activities; even to participate in self-help groups needs money and time; I'm short of money and time to participate in discussions.*

*I cannot afford a daily paper; books, especially scientific literature is too expensive.*

*People living in poverty cannot access information the same as others. So...some people don't know where to go for help. Others don't even know that the possibility to ask for help exists.*

*Lack of information:* A lack of access to information or knowing who you can ask about something limits your access to support and services or, as one delegate put it, "the system is too complicated, I don't know where to get what". However, sometimes you can have too much information and it is difficult to select what you need to know. The growing digital gap also cuts off some people from important sources of information.

*Basic needs not met:* Your basic needs such as access to decent housing, health services and schools are often not met. This can be both a cause and a result of poverty and social exclusion. Life in bad or poor quality housing involves lack of essential repairs, exploitative landlords, high rents, overcrowding, living in conditions that are bad for your health and which can be further worsened by things like asbestos. All of this leads to family stress and break up. People are even forced to move away from the region in which they live because they cannot afford to stay there anymore. Even when housing support is available, the system often seems too complicated and essential services often treat you in a disrespectful, unresponsive and stigmatising manner. Often public services are seen as being too bureaucratic, with too many documents and lacking coordination.

*I have slept in cardboard boxes. I had the choice to die on the street or to take back my life in my own hands. I went to the social services with the question to help me to find a house. I was confronted with an enormous bureaucracy. I had to tell several times my story, each time again and it took years before I got a house.*

*Our houses are devastated but we still have to pay huge amounts of money for rent and gas and electricity. But when we need a repair the council won't come because they say our houses are a disaster and they are not going there.*

*In Spain the apartments for tourists are empty during the calm periods. On the other side there are a lot of homeless who have no roof above their head. How can we explain those injustices to our children?*

*I cannot repair my broken TV.*

*Racism and discrimination:* Racism and discrimination deepen your isolation and sense of exclusion and are a cause of poverty. Discrimination can take different forms: violence and abuse, disrespectful services, lack of access to housing and job discrimination. Asylum seekers, migrants and refugees often experience a double discrimination. They find that their access to employment, public services and housing is made even worse by discrimination. Having dark skin, a foreign sounding name or an accent is already sufficient reason to be rejected by a landlord.

*I am looking for a job. I do really everything I can to find a job .... What can I say? I want to work. I am young. I want to work and everyday I am faced with poverty. We are discriminated against because we are of Roma origin.*

*I am using the expression the white child and the dark because that's how they talk about us... They call us dark people but we belong to the Czech society. We were born there. We went to school there.*

*Lack of resources:* Sometimes, particularly if you live in some of the new Member States, life on a low income can be very extreme and harsh and you can lack very basic necessities. This is particularly the case for groups such as the Roma and undocumented migrants. The costs of essential utilities like water, heat and electricity are constantly rising. If you live in a richer country your situation may not be so extreme but you may still lack a decent quality of life and be unable to participate fully in society and participate in social and recreational activities. Being poor you can't afford healthy food, new clothing, to take a holiday, to go to the pub, to go to the cinema or theatre, to go dancing, to entertain friends, to buy medicines, to visit the dentist. If there is no supermarket nearby you might have to shop in local shops which are more expensive so your cost of living is higher. You live on a razor's edge. Unexpected circumstances such as long-term illness, damage to durable goods or the loss of employment can upset the family budget. You have no savings or reserves. You live from day to day.

Lack of sufficient resources can arise because you receive low benefit levels or because you are ineligible for benefits, whether because of age or lack of documents, or because you are unemployed or in low-paid or insecure employment. Lack of resources can lead to indebtedness and sometimes this can lead to you being exploited and forced into illegal situations or into prostitution.

*I can afford only cheap food; fruit and vegetables to feed children is too expensive; fish not affordable; "healthy food" is too expensive for me.*

*The problem is not that we run out of money occasionally. The real problem is that we live our entire lives this way and our children grow up into this too.*

*Every time I tell my life to civil servants I receive a lot off compassion, but rules prevent effective aid.*

*If you don't have an income or a job, or only a minimum income, you can't pay the rent.*

*Because of unemployment we cannot buy anything nice for our house. We can't borrow from a bank or get a loan. If you are registered as unemployed no one will give you a loan.*

**Poor health:** The stress of poverty and discrimination can damage your mental and physical health. For some undocumented people the situation is made worse by lack of access to health services (except emergency healthcare). In some countries doctors and dentists refuse to see people who can't pay for medicines and the costs of medicine and other health products is a problem for some. Discrimination in access to health services can also be an issue.

**Powerless:** Living in poverty you feel powerless and that you have no choice because you have no say over the decisions that affect your life. You feel stigmatised and blamed for your situation. You have very little hope for a better life. You cannot move because it is too costly and would lead to debts.

*The way people look at you is humiliating. You are not considered as human being.*

*I don't see any progress since years. I have no future.*

*I feel a little bit like Don Quixote. I am fighting against windmills here and there and there is no real hope anymore.*

### **Widening gap**

The gap between rich and poor is widening. Income gaps are growing. This is not only because the gap between people in work and those outside the labour market is widening but also because of a growing problem of low pay that is insufficient to lift people out of poverty. The gap is widening in other areas as well. The increasing privatisation of utilities and services leads to increases in charges so that those on low incomes are less able to pay for them and thus use them less. Some people earn a lot of money buying and selling houses whereas others can't find an affordable house. The minimum wages are too low to buy a house and expulsions rise because people can no longer pay their rent. The sell off of social housing reduces options for people on low incomes. Increased charging for health services, medicines and dental services reduces access for those on low income. The lack of affordable public transport means that the poorest become less mobile. They therefore can participate less in society. The growing costs of participating in social, cultural and sporting activities limits further the participation of people living in poverty.

### ***Inadequate and insecure work increasing***

For many, access to decent work is very restricted. Work is often low paid and insecure and not sufficient to lift people out of poverty. Access is worsened as a result of discrimination and racism, especially for the Roma, asylum seekers and undocumented migrants but also for others such as single mothers and disabled people. This forces some into unregulated or illegal work. Workfare measures and cuts in benefits, which take no account of whether decent quality jobs are available, also result in exploitation and force people into low paid jobs. Often such measures seem to take no account that for some a job, because of particular difficulties, is not a realistic option. Often there are not enough jobs available and searching for a job does not mean you can easily find one. The relocation of factories to future Member States and beyond is creating new risks of unemployment as well as having potential negative impacts in terms of social standards in the countries to which they relocate.

*If I say I am from this street I am already discriminated against if I want a job.*

*I have no work and no housing. How can I form my life if I have no work?*

*I must admit to you that I work illegally and this is not because I think it is good. I am fully aware of the consequences, but this is the only way to get a job.*

### ***Fear for one's children***

Many parents fear that the things they missed in their own lives when growing up are now happening to their children. It is not only that children may lack basic necessities or have inadequate access to essential services but that they lack the possibility to participate in normal social, cultural and recreational activities. In many cases parents do without certain services to be able to provide food and education for their children.

*The EU must do something for the children. What is the sense of my life if I can give no future to my children?*

*Children in poverty are a very important issue for me; this is what we need to talk about . . . We must not allow them to live as we do, we must do all we can to make life easier for them.*

*Poverty in childhood is discrimination.*

*It is impossible for me to invite the friends of my children at home, because my home is so small. So my children at their turn are not invited any more. Thus they become also excluded. We are obliged to lead a hidden life.*

*My children cannot participate in school holidays for skiing or a language week abroad. Training for lifelong learning is not affordable. I cannot afford cultural activities.*

*My children will inherit my poverty.*

### **3.3 What is needed for a good life?**

*We are tired to talk and to see no results. The political world must engage itself. We want to see progress, we want results and concrete action. We want to know what the EU does to solve poverty. The effort to come here is enormous for us. We take risks and want thus to be taken seriously by the politicians.*

*We must take democracy back in our hands. We must be aware that we do have the right to be angry and the right to fight injustice and poverty.*

#### ***Human rights and dignity for all***

The most fundamental need for a good life is respect for the human rights and dignity of all people irrespective of their ethnic origin, religion or legal status. Every individual person and their story must count. Governments must guarantee social rights. While NGOs can play an important role and provide services and opportunities it is the role of government to be the regulator and ensure that competent social policies are in place.

#### ***An adequate minimum income***

In as wealthy a part of the world as the EU every citizen should be guaranteed a sufficient minimum income to pay the bills, especially rent and everyday living costs, including being able to buy healthy food, and to lead life with dignity. This should be enough not just for basic needs but also for participation in social and cultural life and for personal development. This requires not only increasing access to work but a fairer redistribution of resources. All Member States should have a minimum income scheme and provide protection for those who cannot work. This should be at an adequate level. The amount should take account of the increasing needs of children as they get older and the additional costs faced by some people such as those with a disability. Young people under 25 should not be excluded from support. Benefits

and minimum wages should be linked to increases in the cost of rent and utilities such as water, gas and electricity.

*There is enough money but we need better distribution*

### **Enforced anti-discrimination legislation**

Strong anti-discrimination and equality legislation which is rigorously enforced and guarantees the right to work and equal access to services for all, including undocumented migrants, the Roma and disabled people, is essential. This needs to be backed up by solidarity between people in poverty to oppose political extremism and racism. The efforts of extremist right wing political parties to set different groups living in poverty against each other and thus become each others enemies needs to be opposed. A good example of doing this was highlighted in the Netherlands where a women's group brings together women from several cultures. As one delegate explained, "this way we learn about each other and each other's culture. Knowing each other better we learn to appreciate each other." However, it is not easy and some of the women are not used to think for themselves and to make their own opinion, so they don't come anymore. In Belgium the law against racism (The Law Moreau) which puts the burden of proof on the discriminator was cited as a good development. In Hungary the inclusion of Roma in the National Plan, a state grant to support tackling discrimination and the creation by the government of a structure to guarantee the rights of people in precarious circumstances and legal assistance to punish discrimination were highlighted.

### **Access to decent work**

Access to quality and healthy work is a key route out of poverty for many, but not all people, and enables them to become active citizens. Such access needs to be supported by linking appropriate training opportunities, supportive social services and flexible income support systems. Employers paying marginalised groups below the minimum wage should be prosecuted. Where training is provided there must be recognised diplomas so that they provide a real second chance for adults. Training must also lead to real jobs or it just creates frustration. The social cooperatives and training centres supported by the Barka Foundation in Poland, which provide support and guidance, were highlighted as examples of good practice in helping people into employment. Another good practice example from Spain described how the secretariat of a Gypsy organisation offers training to people from the target group so that they later integrate professionally. Also in Spain the Special Employment Centres which receive incentives to hire people are seen as a good approach. In Italy a community work initiative in the Enzitetto neighbourhood of Bari which focuses on the self-empowerment of women through the development of training opportunities, support networks and self-help groups has led to personal development and helped them to find jobs. In Malta a project between the Richmond Foundation and the Employment and Training Corporation aims to provide personalised training services to persons with mental health difficulties with a view to ensuring them secure employment.

The European Union and governments also need to address the problem of firms relocating to countries where remunerations are lower. Europe should not allow

subsidised companies to move, nevertheless if this happens, Europe must reclaim the subsidies.

### ***A roof over one's head***

Decent and affordable housing is essential. This means investing more in building social housing. However, social housing should not be built in ghettos or bad neighbourhoods but should be dispersed. Concentrations of social housing can lead to stigmatisation and to reducing people's chances of getting a job.

Governments need to introduce controls on rents and to control evictions. They should impose taxes on speculation that is driving up the price of housing and make sure that empty houses are made available to those in need of housing. Bad landlords should be prosecuted. Housing benefits which are too low need to be raised to a realistic level and help needs to be provided to people on low incomes when they have to pay up to three months rent as a guarantee. Public housing services should be run in a way that is respectful of people. Social services need to develop preventive work so that vulnerable groups such as women, immigrants and young people between 18-25 coming from reformatories or broken homes do not become homeless. There needs to be mediation programmes between tenants and problematic groups to facilitate renting.

The example of the Belgium system of social rent offices was highlighted as a growing success. NGO's rent houses on the private market, they guarantee the landlord to pay every month the rent and a good maintenance of the house. Then they rent the houses to certain groups who don't have access to the private market. In Spain positive experiences were cited of the re-inhabitation of deserted villages and in these villages small, successful enterprises have been founded by the new inhabitants. In Denmark the Councils on Homeless People protect people at the social level by giving them food and hospitality in 52 shelters and helps them to fight for their rights. In Luxembourg the example of good housing associations, for example the Housing Foundation, was mentioned. In Malta the Supported Housing Scheme for persons with mental health problems was highlighted. This provides accommodation to those persons who are dependent on a mental health institution but who do not need hospitalisation. It provides accommodation to persons with mental health problems who are living in the community to prevent them from either having relapses or becoming institutionalised.

### ***Access to essential services***

Essential services need to be: available locally, up-to-date and efficient. To avoid stigmatisation and to ensure decent standards they should be universal and not targeted at particular groups. They need to be less bureaucratic and there needs to be good coordination between services and better public information. Also people delivering services, particularly people working in the front office, need to respect people's rights. This means providing better training so as to overcome prejudices. This might involve people experiencing exclusion.

*Education:* Equal opportunities in education is a springboard for life and access to life long learning, including free higher education and training in new information and communication technologies is essential for all. Educational systems must be reinforced and real efforts must be made to ensure that parents are involved.



Teenage mothers who don't study any more and in this way hand down their poverty to their children need to have projects developed for them so that they don't become marginalised but have a future. Particular efforts need to be made, as in a Belgian project, to encourage parents to send their children to school instead of taking them along to beg. Another good practice mentioned in Spain involved supporting medium and higher education for young Gypsies. The Foundation Gypsies Secretariat (FSG) both provides economic help to student Gypsies undertaking medium or high studies and also organises participation meetings between student Gypsies, Gypsy families and teachers and Administration representatives.

*Health care:* Access to essential health care services, including dental services, needs to be guaranteed for all and the current very widespread discrepancies across the EU need to be addressed, possibly by establishing minimum standards. Discrimination against groups such as the homeless in making an appointment with a doctor needs to be stopped. Health education, preventive campaigns and access to healthy food should be increased. Alternative medical care needs to be refunded on a more consistent basis across the Union. Good examples of a number of free services in Andalusia such as children being able to go free to the dentist were highlighted. However, the number of free services needs to be extended.

*Child care:* Access to affordable child care is important both to enable participation in social life and to enable people to take up a job. It is also important for the development of children. Sweden's provision of free childcare for the unemployed was identified as a good practice. Another good practice highlighted was the Casas Nana in Cordoba in Spain, which is a new service created by the Equality Agency and supported by the municipality with the aim of offering support for mothers unable to work, start a business or get education because they have small children. By providing affordable child care the service aims to enable women to combine work and family.

*Transport:* Access to free or cheap public transport is essential both for avoiding social isolation and keeping in touch with friends and relations and for accessing job opportunities. In rural areas special initiatives are needed to ensure that transport is available to people who are living in isolated areas. A rural transportation scheme in Ireland and a free transport for older people were described as good practices. While in Spain in the city of Vitoria the municipality gives a free transportation card to people in need who have been under the protection of an NGO for more than six months.

*Social services:* There is a need for support for individuals and families struggling to survive in poverty. The important role played by both official and NGO social services was highlighted. However, in many countries social services networks need to be strengthened and better resourced. Also social services need to be focussed on the individual's needs and not just give "standard" responses. The Robin Hood House in Norway was highlighted as one example of good practice and the centres for social support in Portugal as another.

*Culture, sport and leisure:* Opportunities to participate in affordable cultural and creative activities and in sporting and leisure activities are an essential element in a good life. Yet too often there is disrespect for people's culture and there is a lack of

support for self expression. The right to have free time and leisure is as much a right as the right to basic needs. There needs to be more awareness raising sessions to involve people in cultural activities and cultural activities need to be more decentralised, not only in the big urban areas. There were also demands for more public leisure areas in the neighbourhoods where people live and more well maintained and cleaned parks and green areas.

The access to museums, libraries and university in France and the provision of the Kulturpass in Vienna and Aktivpass in Linz which allow poor people access to some theatres were given as examples of good practice. In Brno University in the Czech Republic there is a department which promotes education of Roma at all levels from primary school to university. In Belgium the provision of cultural cheques in the French Community and in the French Community of Brussels and the provision of some funds for cultural participation in the Flemish Community were highlighted as good practice.

### ***Access to information***

Access to relevant and understandable information about rights, services and opportunities is vital to surviving and leading an independent life. The important role that is often played by voluntary organisations in providing information and in providing access to the information society was highlighted. Public information services can also be important and internet libraries and cyber-café's play an increasingly important role in providing access. More training opportunities in using computers, including for the elderly, is important.

### ***Support networks***

Relationship networks surrounding a family living in poverty can be very important in helping people to cope. Such networks can consist of parents, grandparents or even neighbours. Such relationships operate as a matter of courtesy, based on mutual consideration, substituting services that people cannot buy.

*I cannot go out for three weeks now because the lady next door is going away and there is no one to leave my children with. I've been lucky. She has been living next door for thirty years. This relationship is more intimate than that of relatives . . . She even asks me every day if I have eaten something.*

## **3.4 Strengthening the Social Inclusion process**

### ***Better NAPs/inclusion***

*More participation:* Participation of people experiencing poverty and NGOs representing them in the preparation but also the implementation and monitoring of the new National Action Plans for social inclusion (NAPs/inclusion) must be extended and deepened. It must go beyond just public meetings to actual involvement in drafting and negotiation. A strong emphasis in the NAPs should be investing in empowering people to take charge of their own lives.

Some positive examples of NGOs being involved in the drawing up of the NAPs/inclusion in several countries such as Poland, UK and Greece were highlighted. It was suggested that to increase effective participation in the future, training on participation techniques should be organised for civil servants responsible for the NAPs.

*More focussed plans:* Plans have often been too vague and difficult to understand. The next NAPs/inclusion need to be more concrete, focussed and with specific commitments and thus more effective than previous NAPs. People need to be convinced that they will achieve real results.

*Understandable:* In future more effort needs to be made to make the NAPs/inclusion readable and understandable for people in the field. There needs to be clear and non technical language – jargon free – and with bigger fonts to facilitate reading.

*Whole system:* Preparation of the NAPs must involve the whole policy system and link different policy fields together. What is not needed is an approach which tries to patch up emergencies but an integrated set of policies able to facilitate the access for all to rights and services.

*Go beyond activation:* The NAPs should take into account the range of needs that are necessary for a good life and not only focus on activation measures. Access to social protection and to decent housing were particularly mentioned as being priority issues.

*Prioritise the Roma:* The NAPs should give particular attention to the discrimination experienced by the Roma and give particular attention to assisting them to get employment and decent housing.

*Prevention important:* It was stressed that the NAPs should not only deal with existing situations but should also be concerned to stop people falling into exclusion. The NAPs should not be part of a residual and charitable welfare system repairing damage already done but should be about ensuring citizenship rights which guarantee everybody's inviolable rights and dignity. In relation to prevention special attention should be given to new forms of vulnerability such as young people unable to find accommodation, divorced people, retired people and to preventing children with special needs growing up in poverty.

*Address privatisation:* The impact of the privatisation of utilities (e.g. water, gas, electricity) needs to be taken into account in the NAPs.

*Monitoring and evaluation:* Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of what has actually happened because of the NAPs need to be strengthened. People experiencing poverty need to be involved in the monitoring and EAPN needs to involve them in their response to the NAPs.

### ***Mainstreaming in EU policies***

In future social inclusion objectives should be mainstreamed across all areas of EU policy making. This includes economic and employment policy but also areas such as culture and transport.

### **Promoting Exchange and Learning**

There is much value in having opportunities to exchange learning and good practice. The support for such exchanges should continue to be an important part of the European social inclusion process. Many examples of good practice were mentioned during the workshops, a few of which are mentioned in this report. From these emerged some practical suggestions of what to look for when trying to identify examples of good practice. The key features of a good practice should be that it:

- is backed by well drafted, long- lasting, well financed law which is enforced;
- promotes a good partnership between actors and NGOs;
- fosters a culture of participation;
- promotes solidarity between the institutions involved and people living in poverty and solidarity between the people at large and people in poverty and a recognition that my well-being is part of your well-being and your well-being is part of mine.

### **3.5 Title of Future Meetings**

*In the title of the meeting the word "poverty" must be preserved. We cannot smuggle away poverty from a false feeling of being ashamed. It is an injustice that there is poverty and that there are people living in poverty. They are however not guilty for their poverty.*

*You have to say things as they are. We are not going to give rich people another name. Why should we make more beautiful what is very concrete and very real in the field?*

*Whatever the name we still have people living in poverty.*

*Poverty is an injustice...it is how poverty is understood that determines whether people feel stigmatised by the term poverty.*

Some people felt that the title of the meetings, "European Meetings of People Experiencing Poverty", is stigmatizing and suggested some alternatives. However, the more frequent view was that it is essential to keep the word "poverty" in the title as it is a very strong and powerful word. It is needed to make poverty in Europe visible. Some people stressed that they wanted to keep the focus of the meetings as an encounter between officials and people experiencing poverty. If the title indicates that focus then overall it should stay. It was suggested that it might be time now to focus on the European Meetings as a meeting of people who are taking measures and actions to eradicate poverty.

#### 4. DEBATE WITH PANEL

Following the presentation of the main discussions and conclusions from the workshops a debate took place between delegates and a panel. The panel consisted of representatives of the European Commission (Jérôme Vignon), the Social Protection Committee (Elise Willame), the European Economic and Social Committee (Nicole Prud'homme) and EAPN (Letizia Cesarini Sforza). A series of 8 questions, which had been agreed by delegates as a result of their discussions in the workshops, were put to the panel by volunteers from the different workshops. Following this further questions, comments and statements were made from the floor.

##### **Minimum Income**

*What can the European Commission do to encourage Member States that don't have minimum income schemes to establish them and to improve the adequacy of many of those that do? What does "flexicurity" mean and how can it be enforced in countries which do not have minimum wages or minimum income schemes?*

In responding, Jérôme Vignon prefaced his answer by saying how impressed he had been by the posters presented by delegates and by the report back on the workshops. He said it would take time for him to digest all that had been presented.

On minimum income he explained that the European Union and all its institutions have a tool available to it as the European Treaty provides for the possibility of voting laws that will make sure that for those who are further away from the labour market a system of minimum income is put in place that will meet their basic requirements. In February 2006 the Commission relaunched an initiative on this basic income issue on which there had been stalemate for the last five years. The first stage is a consultation process and this will probably lead to the European Commission taking a new initiative in this area. However, he stressed that this is a difficult process and that it is necessary to have wide ranging discussion before the Commission can come up with a proposal for legislation.

He explained that in its consultation paper the Commission asks all Member States, both those who already have a minimum income system and those that do not, to directly address the issue of a setting up a fair minimum income system that addresses the concerns that have been expressed. Such a system should abide by the definition set out by the Commission which has outlined three essential conditions. First, minimum income schemes should be set at a high enough level to ensure a decent life and thus meet people's human rights. It should be unconditional. A minimum income scheme is there to ensure that you can lead a decent life. The second condition is that it is important that those who might find a job are helped to do so. Thus providing a minimum income might be coupled with some activation measures which increase a person's potential to access a decent job. Thirdly, such a minimum income system needs to be part and parcel of an effective system of social services covering all those areas mentioned in the workshop reports such as housing, health, transport, life-long learning, culture and sport. He stressed that if people are to lead a decent life

and to be fully fledged citizens fully participating in society and having access to services, these three principles, which are enshrined in the Commission's paper, are essential.

As regards what the outcome of the current consultation will be he said that, if all actors come to the conclusion that verbal incentives are not enough and the Open Method of Coordination on social protection and social inclusion is not sufficient to guarantee an adequate minimum income for all and that there is a need to establish a minimum requirement to be met by all Member States, then the Commission will come up with a draft proposal for legislation. This will be on the basis of clause H of Article 137 of the Treaty. This will be decided on the basis of a majority vote by Member States. Thus there is the potential for the European Union to establish a legal basis for social justice and redistribution in the Union.

Mr. Vignon went on to warn delegates that such an outcome may not be welcomed by some. In relation to this issue not all have been favourable towards an EU approach and many have emphasized the principle of subsidiarity and that a basic income system should stem from an internal national procedure. Also some of those countries that currently do not have minimum income schemes have pointed out that they will find introducing one very costly. Some states have argued that they have other more urgent priorities such as health and social services on which to spend scarce resources. However, he said that the Commission's reply to this would be that social justice is not just a matter for the social area. The European Union already has a competence in economic matters and in relation to tax systems looking at budget deficits. If the European Commission asks Member States to abide by some rules on budgets why should it not also ask them to foresee such a basic system as a minimum income scheme in their budget discussions. It could be made a top ranking priority on Member States' social and budget agenda. Thus he concluded by saying that the Commission has put forward quite reasonable proposals in this area and they are in line with points that had been made at the conference.

### ***The NAPs/inclusion***

*What can the Commission and Member States do to increase the participation of those experiencing poverty in the preparation of the NAPs? Will future NAPs be sufficiently focused and effective to ensure that the overall goal of making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty and social exclusion by 2010 is achieved?*

Responding to the question Elise Willame stressed that the new Common Objectives, just as was the case with the original Nice Objectives, emphasize the importance of fostering participation as being essential to promote greater social inclusion. However, she acknowledged that the level of participation varies a lot in different Member States. She said that the participation of many representatives from Member States in the 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting bears witness to the willingness to further increase participation of people experiencing poverty. However, it is a challenge to listen to the felt needs of people living in poverty and to devise policies to meet those felt needs. So participation is not a piece of cake. Training of officials to listen to the needs of people experiencing poverty and to translate those needs into policies takes time. She warned delegates that they

shouldn't expect a maximum level of participation for the next NAPs but said that at least we are making headway, we are progressing and improving our capacity to listen. We are improving the level of response that is given by Member States and their governments to those felt needs.

She went on to stress that governments have been asked to be much more concrete in their next NAPs and added that of course the higher the level of participation the more concrete the proposals put forward are likely to be. She also said that we have insisted that some indicators and evaluation mechanisms are coupled with those concrete proposals so that follow up and monitoring can be done about those proposals. She also stressed that better integration and mainstreaming of social inclusion policies would result in better progression on all fronts.

Letizia Cesarini Sforza stressed that the time to participate in the NAPs is now as the next two month is when national meetings will happen. She urged delegates to join forces with others such as the trade unions to encourage them to participate. In order to be taken seriously it will be important to be well organized and to prepare and present a dossier to national authorities responsible for preparing the NAPs.

### ***Industrial relocation***

*What can the European Commission do about the relocation of factories to other countries such as possible future Member States when in fact this leads to poverty in both existing Member States and in future Member States?*

Nicole Prud'homme said that this was an issue which has concerned the Economic and Social Committee which has highlighted the dangers referred to. The link between unemployment and poverty is a critical one and EESC has highlighted this in several of our opinions and put forward proposals to relaunch employment and so help to reduce poverty.

Jérôme Vignon acknowledged that the question of employment being suppressed in one Member State and moving to another Member State or applicant country is a very relevant but not an easy question. However, the Commission can do something. First, if the Commission has provided European Social Funds to develop economic activity in a particular region to a company and if the beneficiary of those funds decides to relocate elsewhere the Commission can ask that those funds they have received are reimbursed. That can be a disincentive to firms moving. Secondly, in the Financial Perspectives 2007-2013 the European Commission earmarked some money for a "Globalisation Fund" that can be used in the case that people are dismissed due to relocation of a firm. So there is a new possibility at European level to assist areas suffering from relocation. However, he warned that the Commission can not interfere with the current tendency for greater free trade and free movement of workers. On the other hand, the Commission can act through the European Social Fund. Also it can work on the development of "flexicurity" in order to ensure that those who lose their jobs do not fall into poverty. However, he admitted that we are far from reaching this objective. Thus the Commission wants to increase the level of security including increasing the minimum income and minimum wages and

improving assistance to individuals. It is now more widely recognized that in a world where there is more mobility of employment there is a need to provide workers with a greater level of security. This has become a priority objective of the European Union and of the finance ministers and not only the employment ministers.

***Anti-discrimination and support for the Roma***

*How can the links between social inclusion policies and anti-discrimination policies be strengthened, more particularly when it comes to discrimination against the Roma population, and how can the implementation of anti-discrimination policies be ensured?*

Before the panel responded to this question a Roma delegate from the Czech Republic further illustrated the issue as discussed in his workshop. In particular he raised the possibility of introducing quotas for employing Roma for instance in legal, social and economic areas. They could then participate by introducing their own opinions to these issues and these could be provided to decision makers. He went on to stress that as far as discrimination is concerned policy makers should not take account of the colour of people's skin but this is often not the case. Thus he stressed the importance of the Roma being involved in dialogue and decision-making processes and the need for this to be done in an open way to counter the risk of discrimination. He raised the possibility of the Roma using hidden cameras to show that they are not employed because they are Roma. The Roma feel that they do not have any legal protection and when they are discriminated against by employers the courts do not trust them. It takes ages to go through the legal system and thus they do not see any solution.

Nicole Prud'homme stressed that the question of discrimination goes beyond the Roma and is an issue for all the minorities throughout our countries. Gender discrimination also needs to be considered. As regards the use of quotas she said that this is an issue still under discussion and there is as yet not unanimity on it. For instance there is no agreement on whether to use quotas to increase the participation of women in employment. She didn't know whether agreement could be reached at European level on the issue of quotas whether it is in relation to ethnic minorities or gender.

Jérôme Vignon said that the European Commission has an important role to play in this area. There is already very strong legislation concerning ethnic and racial discrimination. Next year will be European Year for Equal Opportunities and this will act as a beacon to shine light on the issue. It will be an opportunity to review the state of the art on anti-discrimination legislation. As regards the use of hidden cameras, meaning that the proof should be provided by the one being discriminated against, he said this should not be necessary if existing anti-discrimination legislation is implemented. With this legislation the burden of proof lies with the person accused of discriminating. The question is, is the legislation being implemented and what can the Commission do to assist Member States in taking actions in this area? He drew attention to the results of a survey undertaken under the Community action programme on social exclusion which showed that three things are needed to tackle discrimination: strong legislation, targeted actions to support those affected and supportive actions that cut-across



a range of different policy areas, for example minimum income. He stressed that with the Social Fund there are tools to implement this triangle if the Member States choose to make use of it as much as they should in this area.

Letizia Cesarini Sforza agreed with the three areas proposed by Jérôme Vignon but she said a fourth element is also needed. People at large must take consciousness of what is happening. Thus in addition you need good information to make them aware of what currently happens to our Roma populations throughout Europe.

During the subsequent plenary a Belgium delegate stressed that if quotas have to be introduced to overcome discrimination and to improve the position of migrants it should be on a short term basis to give society time to get used to hosting foreigners and Roma and also to give migrants the opportunity to integrate into the mainstream society. However, quotas should only be a short term measure as they themselves could become discriminatory. He said that with an ageing population there are opportunities to integrate migrants but there is a need for Member States to prepare for immigration and to have good policies which promote an inclusive society and encourage all cultures to live in harmony. He stressed that we have to try to exclude exclusion, racism and xenophobia. He then drew delegates' attention to the racist murder of a two year old child and a woman of African origin who were both shot in Antwerp just the day before. Delegates stood and observed a minute's silence in solidarity with the victims.

At the end of the plenary session a representative of the German delegation speaking on behalf of his colleague also addressed the issue of racism and discrimination. He appealed for delegates to join them in resisting all efforts to exploit problems such as joblessness, precarious accommodation situations, poverty and social exclusion, to advance nationalism, racism and xenophobia and promote hate, exclusion and violence. He stressed that people facing such problems need to be supported by all Member States. They have a right to exist and to have their human dignity respected and to assistance in improving their living conditions.

*The decision makers and policy makers should not look at the colour of our skin. And they should introduce the people never mind the colour of their skin. But then this is not the reality.*

*Sometimes you get the feeling that animals are better protected because if you beat a dog you will be sentenced and maybe put into prison whereas if you beat someone I am not sure that you will always be punished for that.... My feeling is that dogs are more respected and better treated than Gypsies.*

*The reality (of an ageing Europe) is there..... immigration is necessary for Europe and it is up to you now to prepare for immigration.*

*The way we act towards these people (asylum seekers and undocumented migrants) is the way we are. If we respect the fundamental rights of the less privileged groups, and they are the less privileged groups, we will respect ourselves because respecting ourselves starts with respecting the most*

*underprivileged groups of our society.*

*....we clearly and precisely distance ourselves from any ideologies which might be stating that the combat against poverty and social exclusion should be made dependant on issues like race, sex, colour of the skin, birth and origin, age or disability.*

### **Undocumented migrants**

*How can the politicians promise that they are going to eradicate poverty when at the same time those same politicians leave categories of the population in poverty for legal reasons – I am referring here to migrant people, to undocumented migrants, to all those in illegal situations, to those people who are denied all the rights, to the voiceless population, to people who are used in some economic sphere but as they are illegal they are exploited?*

In response Letizia Cesarini Sforza pointed out that national governments have laws, whether just or unjust, which we have to push to change. However, if you really want to tackle the question of undocumented people there is a need to start a reflection on what migration means in our societies so that we come to change our outlook. We need to recognize that our societies are changing deeply. We need migrants not as a favour to them nor just because we need workers to do the jobs that we don't want to do any more. We need them because our societies are opening up and we are globalising ourselves. We cannot pretend to live in a globalised world and at the same time to live in a little field, in a little corner. We need to respect the rights of migrants so we can respect ourselves.

During the plenary discussion a representative from Italy gave a vivid description of the harsh reality of life for many Gypsies and undocumented migrants and appealed for more help from Member States both within the Union but also to countries like Albania and Serbia. He talked about living in a camp in Italy with a family of eight in a twenty square metres flat. He pointed out that in spite of living in a country where the Pope lives and where there are many churches and many people going to church many gypsies are extremely destitute and live almost like rats. Then social workers take children away from families because they are begging because they have no money or because they are not able to send their children to school. He explained that many Gypsies are fourth generation living in Italy and are no longer travellers. They come from other countries but they are not granted asylum and they have no identity papers and are not citizens. They have no nationality, neither Italian, Turkish, Serbian, Albanian nor other nationality. Thus, though they have access to health services they often do not have access to employment. If their children go to school there is a risk they will be sent to their country of origin.

### **Privatisation of Services**

*It goes without saying that the privatization of services such as water supply and electricity does not work particularly for people living in poverty so what is the position of the European Commission concerning this Directive on Services?*

Jérôme Vignon said that the European Commission cannot oppose the privatization of some social services which were in the past public. That is a matter of national competence. On the other hand, under Article 16 of the Treaty, the Commission can insist on respect for the general interest whether they are public services, private services or NGO services. If this is not the case because of a Community regulation or because of a misuse of the single market rules the European Commission must change its decision. However, he admitted that the Commission is often not very well informed about what the actual situation is in Member States and it has a duty to become better informed. He hoped that the follow up to the Commission Communication on Social Services of General Interest will improve the knowledge base in this area. This should lead to better tools to analyse and know the situation so that the European Commission can take its decision in an informed way.

### ***Trafficking***

*What is the European Commission doing to combat the trafficking of women and young girls?*

Jérôme Vignon stressed that this issue has been very much on the Commission's agenda since the Amsterdam Treaty in 1997. Commissioner Fratini has put in place a number of measures. There is an action programme to encourage collaboration between European policies in this area. However, he agreed that up to now trafficking has not been dealt with in the NAPs/inclusion. However, it could become a priority in the future if people wanted it to be.

*There is a need to do whatever is needed to eradicate poverty and to have an integrated approach to combat poverty, particularly to combat women's poverty, because European societies cannot, just cannot, continue to have such levels of poverty among women and children.*

### ***Draft Constitutional Treaty***

*According to the European Treaty how is it possible to guarantee people's rights at the level of the European Union? How can people be helped to exercise their rights, be helped to meet the challenge of poverty and be helped to meet the challenge of all those difficulties induced by poverty? How can that be done through the Treaty?*

Elise Willame pointed out that there is a social dimension included in the existing treaty but at present progress can only be made in a joint way. We can't adopt any legislation to combat poverty together as the social dimension is mainly the competence of Member States. What we are doing now in the Social Inclusion Strategy is in line with the Treaty. However, the draft Constitutional Treaty incorporated the European Charter on Fundamental Rights and through this European Charter there was quite a break through and we were moving ahead in the recognition of the social dimension.

Nicole Prud'homme described how the Economic and Social Committee had taken an initiative in this area and succeeded in highlighting different aspects

relating to poverty, especially on women's poverty. A few months ago it published an opinion on all that relates to women's poverty in Europe. She stressed the importance of gender based indicators on poverty. She also expressed the hope that in 2007 when the new Gender Institute is set up it will be given the means to work properly. It is important that we do whatever is needed to eradicate poverty and to have an integrated approach, especially in relation to poverty among women and children. European societies just cannot continue to have such levels of poverty.

### ***Personal responses to poverty***

The first question from the floor following the agreed eight questions from the workshops asked the panelists for their personal reactions to what they had heard and received much applause from other delegates. The question was:

*I just wanted to know if during the comments and the replies you gave if you felt some empathy for us here in this room who are still experiencing poverty and I would like to know how you, policy-makers, explain poverty to your children and how you can explain to them that we are poor and they are not and why it is so?*

Nicole Prud'homme replied by stressing that her background was as a trade union person and not a policy maker and the Economic and Social Committee is made up of representatives of employers, trade unions and NGOs and not policy makers. She said that one should not judge people on what they look like. Having listened to delegates for two days she was able to say that lots of things she has experienced are on the same wavelength. Elise Willame said that she had been most touched and moved by the posters even though the personal stories during working sessions was also interesting. The posters and all the work behind them in terms of debates on what message people wanted to deliver was really what had struck her most. She said that the image of a young man with a tape across his mouth and trying to speak loud would particularly remain with her. Jérôme Vignon acknowledged just how important the question was. He said that he was one of those in the European Commission together with colleagues in the room responsible for speaking about injustice and telling what is wrong in the current system. The question for him was are we up to the task? It is not just a matter of addressing gaps and failures it is really a matter of having Europe closer to its citizens and people experiencing poverty. He hoped that from all he had heard at the conference he would not be up there in the limbos and in an ivory tower. For him the conference had been about taking away the tape from the young man's mouth and for EAPN being the megaphone through which people living in poverty could be heard.

### ***Asbestos***

A member of the Italian delegation highlighted the issue of asbestos. She pointed out that asbestos is still in the homes of many people living in poverty and young children are growing up with the risk of disease but nothing is being done. She highlighted the problem in Italy particularly in Naples where many people are living in sub-tolerable houses and the only solution is to risk eviction and homelessness. She appealed to the Commission to insist that Member States respect their commitments and asked EAPN to lobby on this issue on behalf of people living in poverty.

***Final comments from panel***

**Nicole Prud'homme** thanked the organizers for the invitation to take part in the 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting. The meeting had reinforced much of what was already known about poverty and social exclusion. She said that the European Economic and Social Committee in its forthcoming work would try and refine its opinions and actions so as to try more than ever to help to eradicate poverty. The level of poverty in our very wealthy Member States is a shame, not to say a scandal. She hoped that the voices of all those taking part in the conference would be heard by the European Commission so that we can go forward hand in hand to increase harmony and decrease discrimination.

**Elise Willame** said that as far as the Social Protection Committee and the Belgium administration is concerned she would take back some very important messages from the conference. She said that there was much food for thought which would nurture her future work in combating poverty, not only as regards the NAPs/inclusion but also the many other instruments that are important for promoting social inclusion.

**Jérôme Vignon** concentrated his final remarks trying to respond to the reality of poverty described by the member of the Italian delegation who had described the plight of Gypsies. He tried to answer the question why is it that wealthy and democratic countries are not able to improve the situation of people experiencing poverty? He said that an important reason is fear. Many people are afraid of people living in poverty and of Gypsies so they try to hide the problem. There is a need to build a movement of trust and to show people that they have no reason to be afraid. The reality is that poor people want to enrich society and be fully fledged citizens. He said that there are many good examples which can be used to build up confidence. This will lead to better understanding which in turn will lead to better remedies.

**Letizia Cesarini Sforza** said the conference had made her feel richer and more enlightened. Too often we are so busy doing our daily work that we lose sight of why we are here. The conference had reminded her why she, why EAPN, why all of us are here. It is a question of compassion and empathy. It is about asserting human rights which are denied by poverty. It is about working for the total eradication of poverty. She felt that the conference had highlighted and strengthened the good relationships with the European Commission and other bodies. They had showed a willingness to listen to delegates and the event was thus an immense step forward.

## 5. CLOSING PLENARY

### ***Austrian Presidency***

Speaking on behalf of the Austrian Presidency, **Sigisbert Dolinschek**, State Secretary for Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection, stressed that the 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting had been a very important event for the Presidency. It had provided an opportunity for a real discussion with people coming from throughout Europe whose daily lives are affected by poverty and social exclusion. He told delegates that it was only on the basis of their experience and knowledge that useful strategies would be developed that would be effectively implemented to combat poverty. There had been a very fruitful exchange of information and ideas. Delegates' contribution to the conference had been quite important to fill information gaps and to highlight good practices in different Member States so that they can be transferred throughout the European Union. He assured delegates that he would convey the key messages from the conference to his colleagues in the Council of Ministers and push them to collaborate more at European level so that we can together overcome the problem of poverty and social exclusion and so that we can avoid unnecessarily reinventing the wheel. He thought that what is needed is to exercise tolerance and to use those methods which prove to be useful outside our countries.

He went on to thank delegates for their very interesting interventions and said he thought that the discussions were an important step towards our final objective which is to make a significant reduction of poverty in the European Union by 2010. He also thanked again the organizers of the event and all who had made it possible as this is an event which is of tremendous importance at the European level. He especially thanked the European Commission, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions for their support for the event.

### ***Future German Presidency***

**Franz Thönnes**, Parliamentary State Secretary at the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, speaking on behalf of the future German Presidency of the European Council, thanked the Austrian Presidency for its brilliant organization of the event. He said that he had listened with great attention to the report of the workshops and that it had confirmed for him the relevance of such dialogue at European level on social issues. There is a need for a framework at European level so that NGOs and people experiencing poverty can express themselves and have a framework for exchange and discussion.

Mr. Thönnes told delegates that they were entitled to ask for more social policies. He said that although in Europe we have quite high levels of social protection we are facing major problems in terms of social exclusion due to the economic crisis and globalization process. For this reason, in Germany, it was decided to produce a Report on Poverty and Wealth during each political term. This is discussed and it leads to political measures. For instance it has led to measures being taken in relation to the youth. There are 500,000 young people in unemployment in Germany and 50% of migrants' children have no training whatsoever. These facts concerning the young generation and its reduced perspectives for the future couldn't be accepted. That is the reason Germany

decided to revise its employment policies and that is why we make it possible now for young people to be given a training after three months of unemployment. At the same time we want disabled people to take part in society and to participate in the labour market. We should be able to give all and everyone the possibility to take part in the labour market. However, he said that while there have been some successes in the recent past these are not enough and we must also relaunch the economy.

Mr. Thönnies stressed that we must see to it at European level that on the one hand we have competitiveness, employment and growth objectives but at the same time at European level social cohesion should also be prioritized. These are two sides of one single coin. He said that both aspects are to be given the same importance in the framework of the German Presidency in 2007. The Presidency will fight for a more social Europe and a more social world. Furthermore, 2007 will be the European Year of Equal Opportunities and in that particular framework the German Presidency will try to show that it wants to work for a truly social Europe.

He concluded by saying that the meeting had provided brilliant testimony. He stressed that Europe has a social face and wants to help those in need and that we all must work together to fight so that Europe remains on track. He warmly invited delegates to take part in the 6<sup>th</sup> European Meeting of people experiencing poverty in 2007 under the auspices of the German Presidency.

## **EAPN**

**Ludo Horemans**, EAPN Vice President, said that he had been involved in all five European Meetings and each had been better than the one before and the fifth had been even better than the fourth. He stressed that those of us who do not live in poverty but who are in daily contact must be strong and brave enough to really take into consideration what is done by people living in poverty, to take into consideration their feelings. This empowers us and gives us the strength we need to continue to combat poverty. He stressed that the goal set in Lisbon in 2000 of making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by 2010 is an enormous challenge. At first perhaps the governments did not fully realize what would be involved. However, little by little we realize that there is a huge commitment by the various institutions and governments to achieving this goal.

While there are many in our societies who do not feel sorry for the fact that people are living in poverty there are many who feel the way we feel. Even at the European level there are people who support our action though their daily work and daily life and we acknowledge that it is quite difficult for them to keep poverty on the agenda. The National Action Plans are something quite important and the European Commission knows that. We will have to continue to work to make it known.

*“The quality of life of all our citizens, particularly those in a weaker position should be improved. The quality of our society is based on the quality of life of those who are most disadvantaged.”* Sigisbert Dolinschek, State Secretary for Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection, Austria.

*“It is only on the basis of your experience that we will develop useful strategies that will be effectively implemented to combat poverty”,* Sigisbert Dolinschek, State Secretary Social Security, Generations and Consumer Protection, Austria.

*“Competitiveness, employment and growth objectives and social cohesion are the two sides of one single coin. Both aspects are to be given the same importance in the framework of our Presidency next year, 2007. We will fight for a more social Europe and a more social world.”* Franz Thönnies, Parliamentary State Secretary at the Federal Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, Germany.

He thanked all those who support on a continuous basis the work of EAPN at different levels, be it people from the governments, be it people from the local authorities, be it people from the European institutions or even the highest European Union level. He then thanked the Austrian Presidency for hosting the 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting and the European Commission for its support and everyone for all their efforts in preparing for the meeting. He stressed that we must continue on the same path and ensure that the outcomes of the 5<sup>th</sup> Meeting have a real impact on the daily lives of people living in poverty so that they can exit poverty in spite of their situation. He urged delegates when they arrived home to continue the work and to use the conclusions of the Conference to support their efforts.

## **Appendix 1: Participants**



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