

**EU YEAR 2010:  
Building a Europe for all**

**Marking the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of EAPN**

10 – 12 June 2010 – Limassol

Venue AJAX Hotel

Speech by Lenia Samuel  
Deputy Director General

Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities DG  
European Commission

Your Excellency, Minister of Labour & Social Insurance, Mrs  
Charalambous,  
Dear Deputy Minister, Mr Christofides,  
Dear President of EAPN, Mr Horemans,  
Distinguished Delegates,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am delighted to be with you this afternoon to participate in your General Assembly that marks the **20th anniversary** of the European Anti-Poverty Network.

On behalf of the European Commission I want to join in the celebration. Over the years a lot has been achieved by your network. **EAPN has had a decisive impact on keeping the struggle against poverty and social exclusion on the policy agenda**, both at EU and national level. It has played an important role in shaping the strategic decisions that have been taken on the EU policy framework in the social field.

Your network has never ceased to emphasize that social inclusion policies can only be effective if people living in poverty participate in the policy process. Although in this respect a lot remains to be done, it has to be recognised that important progress has been made. The annual European meetings of

people experiencing poverty have become an established tradition.

Over the years EAPN has grown and you have successfully dealt with the important organisational challenges this has entailed. Your network now covers no less than 25 national networks and 23 European organisations. From the Commission's side we consider EAPN to be a **vital partner** in the EU social inclusion process and we hope this will continue in the future. **So, EAPN, congratulations on your 20th birthday and all the best!**

Just a few days back, Ministers of Employment and Social Affairs reached an agreement on a **concrete target** to reduce poverty in Europe. A target based on three indicators: relative poverty; material deprivation; and jobless households, a target that aims at reducing poverty by 20 million people.

Following this agreement, Heads of State and Government are expected to adopt this ambitious, but realistic target on the 17<sup>th</sup> of June.

This will no doubt reinforce the impact of the 2010 European Year for combating poverty and social exclusion. This success

also shows the results of the efforts and determination by civil society.

I will come back to this target and the EU2020 strategy in the last part of my speech.

Let me emphasise the **highly relevant themes** that you have chosen for this General Assembly. Migrants face a much higher risk for unemployment, marginalisation and exclusion than the native population in Europe. This makes migration, including its social impacts, an important issue that needs to be tackled across a range of policy areas.

I am also happy that you have dedicated this session to the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion.

Poverty has a profound and often tragic or dismal effect on the life of far too many Europeans. Some segments of the population are more at risk of poverty than others: women, children and young people, the elderly, those on precarious contracts, migrants and people from ethnic minorities.

Having a job may be the best route out of poverty, yet **8% of people in work** don't earn enough to escape from it.

Poverty and social exclusion can be prevented and alleviated, by tackling both their structural and individual causes. We know for example that the number experiencing poverty would be considerably higher without the contribution of social protection systems, which lie at the heart of the European social model.

The crisis is of course adding considerably to the challenges. As a priority, we need to tackle rising unemployment, pave the way for a sound economic recovery, while also managing the social impacts of the crisis.

## **1. European Year 2010 – Taking stock**

A European Year is an original instrument, complementing existing tools to reach out to a wider audience and engage the hardest to reach. It promotes freedom and creativity, and provides a real space to engage from the local to the European level.

This European Year 2010 raises many expectations among those who live below the poverty threshold in their country of residence. It also raises expectations among people who are hit by the current crisis; who face precarious uncertainty or fear for

their future; and among people who have relatives or friends affected by poverty.

Let me reiterate briefly the main objectives for the Year:

One of our first objectives is to promote a **better understanding** of what poverty and social exclusion mean today, in such a diverse European Union.

People experiencing poverty are of course central to the Year, which has to be developed *with them*, rather than *for* them. We hope it will create momentum to strengthen their **active participation**. A milestone will be the European Meeting of People Experiencing Poverty, taking place at the end of June in the European Parliament.

Secondly, we aim at a better recognition of the **rights of people experiencing poverty to play a full part in our societies**. Combating **stereotyping** and stigmatization are crucial in this respect.

Finally, we want to spread the message that combating poverty is a **shared responsibility**, where we all have a role to play. We can do this through **strengthening existing partnerships and creating new ones**, by reaching out beyond those traditionally engaged in social exclusion issues.

It is a call for NGOs and public authorities of course, but also social partners, business, media, regional/local authorities, and decision-makers to put poverty on their agenda in 2010 even higher than they usually do.

The European Union wishes to bring to all affected a message of solidarity and a commitment to achieving a better future that everybody can believe in. We know that we can count on the EAPN to support this message.

There is still a lot of work to do before the end of 2010, but **our assessment is that the European Year is delivering on its objectives.**

From the opening conference in Madrid in January and onwards, the consensus has been on highlighting the need to strengthen the social dimension of the EU and giving more prominence to poverty reduction.

At the **EU level** we have the European campaign, which is well established as the driving force throughout the year. It is raising awareness, with its website that is translated into 23 languages and that is updated on a daily basis.

The strong involvement of the EAPN and its members in the European Year against Poverty and Social Exclusion is also raising awareness throughout Europe. I am very impressed by the broad range of activities and actions taken in relation to the Year showcased at the Market place session just now.

On the **national level**, the Year will result in about one thousand initiatives all around Europe. It is still too early to give a full overview of all the events and projects in preparation, but there is a lot of creativity ranging from conferences to solidarity chains, from debates in schools to training programmes for media, from interactive plays to the testing of new policy schemes. We have been very positively surprised by the energy, innovation and commitment that have gone into them.

A network of local communication correspondents in each participating country helps the national implementing bodies in making known what they are doing with the civil society to fight poverty.

## **2. Securing a lasting legacy of the 2010 Year**

You are aware that, according to the division of competences in the EU Treaty, combating poverty and social exclusion is primarily the responsibility of Member States. **Yet the EU has**

**brought important added-value**, and this contribution has increased with time. Many of our policies have been mobilized to this end, for example by supporting job creation and better working conditions, promoting social and territorial cohesion through structural funds, particularly the ESF, and combating discrimination.

Moreover, one decade ago, the EU also launched the **Social Open Method of Coordination**. This process has allowed Member States to formulate and work towards common objectives in terms of rights, resources and participation, develop national action plans and improve their governance by involving major stakeholders such as social partners, regional authorities or NGOs. It has highlighted best practice in crucial areas such as child poverty, homelessness or active inclusion.

In December 2009, **President Barroso**, who was shaping his new Commission, underlined that the current crisis was not just a financial or an economic crisis. It is also a crisis of the values of our societies. The answers to today's challenges do not lie in the market alone, or in the state alone. They must come from society so that they can respond to people's needs. We must put human dignity and solidarity at the heart of our endeavours.

Underlining the importance of the Year, the **Belgian Presidency** is planning a political **declaration** to be signed by the end of the Year by the Heads of State and Government.

To secure a lasting legacy of the 2010 year, we must work both on EU, national and local level, and with all stakeholders. To achieve our objectives, we must have clear strategies and ambitious and realistic targets. This brings me to the Europe 2020 strategy and the European Platform against Poverty.

### **3. The Europe 2020 strategy and the European Platform against Poverty**

As you know, the Commission presented its proposals for the new "Europe 2020" strategy in March. It stressed the importance of a real commitment to reducing poverty, in order to reach the broader long-term vision of putting Europe back on track through smart, sustainable and **inclusive** growth.

The main challenge in the coming years will be how we can make Europe prosperous and assure better social inclusion of its citizens while dealing with the consequences of the financial and economic crisis and amidst intense pressure on public expenditure.

Unquestionably, there is need for budgetary consolidation to restore confidence in our economies. Without such confidence there will be no economic growth and without growth we will not be able to maintain and reinforce our social model.

Measures aimed at budgetary consolidation should, however, not endanger or lead us to forget about the social objectives that are at the heart of the proposed Europe2020 strategy.

There is a need to continue smart investment in measures that will reinforce **both competitiveness and social cohesion**. We should in particular invest in social innovation. The challenge is to make budgetary reform compatible with social expenditure. It must be emphasized that budgetary reform not only implies looking at public expenditure, it also means looking at government income. In many countries there are important problems regarding fiscal fraud.

Due to the crisis, problems of income insecurity have grown and from there it is a small step to poverty and social exclusion. There is no time to waste. We have a struggle to fight to get out of the crisis and prepare the future.

With the Commission proposal of the Europe2020 strategy we plan to put in place the conditions for an inclusive Europe. The essence of an inclusive Europe is to be found in the education, employment and social inclusion triangle. This is why **three** out of five common Europe2020 targets the European Commission has proposed refer to this triangle.

By 2020:

- The share of early school leavers should be under 10% (15% now) and at least 40% of the younger generation should have a tertiary degree (31% now).
- 75 % of the population aged 20-64 should be employed (from 69% now).
- 20 million less people should be at risk of poverty or exclusion.

The European Council, in its meeting of March 2010, discussed the new strategy. For the first time, Heads of State and Government recognised the need for a European level target to promote social inclusion by reducing poverty. But they concluded, further work was needed for setting a measurable target.

As I mentioned, on the 7<sup>th</sup> of June the Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs Council (EPSCO), building

on the work by the Social Protection Committee and its expert group on indicators, recommended a target based on **three indicators**: relative poverty; material deprivation; and jobless households, **a target that aims at reducing poverty by 20 million people.**

It is a sensible and sustainable compromise that reflects the multi-dimensional nature of poverty. It also encompasses national differences in conditions and priorities. Member States will be able to set national targets according to their situation that contributes to the EU level aim.

The challenge ahead for us will be to focus on the delivery of the reforms to turn the target into a reality both at European and national levels.

In order to reinforce our action and effectiveness the Europe2020 strategy proposes to dedicate **three out of seven flagship initiatives** to the triangle education – employment – social inclusion:

The Flagship Initiative: "**An Agenda for new skills and jobs**". will modernise the labour markets and will accelerate lifelong learning. We have to increase participation in the labour market. We also have to match better the offer and demand for labour in Europe.

The Flagship Initiative: "**Youth on the move**" will set free Europe's innovative capacity by improving the quality of education and training.

The Flagship Initiative: "**European Platform against Poverty**" will aim at better sharing the benefits of growth and jobs. In the spirit of the renewed social agenda of 2008 the aim is to guarantee the rights of those that are socially excluded. Access, opportunity and solidarity are important.

A Commission Communication on the Platform against poverty is planned for October 2010.

The communication will have concrete proposals for the platform and how the Social OMC will help deliver the headline target. The goal is to combine what already works well with innovative new approaches.

The platform will build on the successes of the European Year 2010. Broad participation at European, national, regional and local level is needed. It will also have to engage with external stakeholders, including experts, NGOs and the interested public.

The EPSCO Council on the 7<sup>th</sup> of June also agreed on the **Guidelines for the employment policies** of the Member States, as part of the "Europe 2020" Integrated Guidelines. **"Guideline 10: Promoting social inclusion and combating poverty" sets out strategies to prevent and reduce poverty and to promote full participation in society and economy.**

These Integrated Guidelines emphasise that the new Strategy should be implemented through a partnership approach that includes representatives of civil society. This should give civil society a stronger role in the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Concluding, I would like to say that, with the support of all of you, the European Year is achieving its goals.

Member States have reached for the first time an agreement on an ambitious, but realistic European level target to reduce poverty and exclusion.

One of our challenges will be to build on the momentum from the European Year in implementing The European Platform against Poverty.

We must continue to show examples of solutions that have worked, of people making their way out of poverty. We must continue to build momentum for action, to be able to give hope to all those concerned.

Once the European Council will have taken a decision on the Europe 2020 strategy we will have to go from words to deeds. It is clear that if the strategy is to be effective it will have to be widely supported. Only a strong alliance of the Union, the Member States, the social partners, local and regional actors and civil society will be able to make it work.

Europe will need a continued commitment from **a strong EAPN in the coming decade**, so that we are able to secure a lasting legacy from the year, by delivering on the ambitious objective of bringing about a really inclusive Europe.

Thank you.