



Brussels, 3 December 2009

**Reference: European Council 10/11 December 2009**

To: EU Prime Ministers and Heads of State and Governments

Dear Prime Minister,

Next week's European Council will give pride of place to discussions on the recovery packages and preparation for the EU 2020 Strategy. EAPN is deeply concerned about the Commission's working document and proposal for consultation on the future of the EU2020 strategy.<sup>1</sup> Neither the content nor the process appear to deliver on the promises made by President Barroso, for a full stakeholder debate on the development of a new "social and sustainable" post 2010 agenda, as expressed in his Political Guidelines<sup>2</sup> for the new Commission. Moreover, the new proposals seem to represent a step backwards on commitments made by successive European Councils to strengthen the social dimension of the strategy. We urge Prime Ministers and Heads of State to take action to ensure:

- An adequate **debate and consultation** process on the EU2020 strategy, involving EU and national stakeholders, including the European and National Parliaments. To give the necessary time for a full debate on this important strategic direction for the EU, the decision on EU2020 strategy should not be taken at the Spring Council in 2010.
- **Urgent action to ensure that the EU 2020 vision – includes a strong social dimension**, recognizing that growth alone cannot deliver better jobs or reduce poverty and social exclusion, without integrated measures to defend social rights, reduce inequality and implement Active Inclusion, as part of a transforming social and sustainable approach.
- **The separation of the debate on short-term crisis recovery measures** from the longer-term strategy for post 2010 – producing 2 separate proposals, including full debate and actions to tackle the broader social impact of the crisis through the recovery packages.

1) **The consultation process is deeply flawed and undermines commitments to a new partnership with Parliament and stakeholders underpinned by the new Lisbon Treaty.**

The rushed publication of the Commission's working document on the 24<sup>th</sup> November and the minimal period for consultation, will not allow for an adequate consultation with the new Commission, EU nor national stakeholders (including NGOs), council formations, nor the European Parliament. Despite the affirmations in the document of establishing "*clear governance through a partnership approach..... the desire that the European Parliament play a significantly greater role and be encouraged to express views before the Spring Council, .... as well as the need to get the "active support of social partners and civil society*". The consultation proposed risks to be a 'pseudo consultation' which could damage the credibility of the new context of the EU, and could endanger any chances of getting real ownership or support from the national level and from the stakeholders concerned.

<sup>1</sup> Commission Working Document – Consultation on the future "EU2020" strategy. COM (2009)647final.

<sup>2</sup> Political Guidelines for the next Commission (Oct 2009).

### **EAPN proposes:**

- To delay the development of the Commission's Communication until the Belgian Presidency, ensuring a full stakeholder process, debates in the European and National Parliaments and Stakeholder round tables at EU and national level that include NGOs and people experiencing poverty and social exclusion.

### **2) Don't lose the chance for an EU 2020 vision which really includes a social dimension**

Even before the crisis, the "growth and jobs" strategy had not succeeded in reducing poverty and inequalities. As the Social Protection Committee highlights, despite the growth in overall living standards, "*inequalities have often increased and poverty and social exclusion remain a major issue*".

EAPN welcomed President Barroso's Guidelines for the next Commission, when it emphasized the need for social progress and a social dimension, a "*value-based approach founded on rights and human dignity*" and action to fight against the "*scourge of poverty*" and "*defend environmental and social standards*". However, the current proposal seems to have stepped back from this vision. The focus on creating a "*Europe to lead, compete and prosper as a knowledge-based, connected, greener and more inclusive economy..... creating high levels of employment and social progress*". However the detailed content is in reality a "*greener version*" of the existing "*growth and jobs agenda*". Whilst the Consultation document recognizes that a job alone cannot "*secure a reduction in poverty levels*", recognizing the role of adequate social security and pension support, there is not a reference to defending social rights, despite the new status for the 'Charter for Fundamental Rights' in the new Lisbon Treaty.

With this *narrow EU 2020 vision* **key challenges** are missed:

- growth can only deliver on poverty if inequalities in income and wealth are reduced,
- a job can only be a route out of poverty if it is a quality job,
- additional efforts (integrated Active Inclusion approaches and support for social economy mechanisms) are needed to ensure access for all to quality jobs,
- adequate income and social protection, access to services must be reinforced as a key means to prevent and combat poverty
- the synergies between social and sustainable development need to be fully explored.

This misses a key opportunity to transform the post 2010 EU strategy into a challenging new vision capable of delivering on social and sustainable development and meeting people's expectations of the EU.<sup>3</sup>

### **EAPN proposes:**

- Take on board the analysis of the Social Protection Committee and other analyses (See EAPN: EU we can trust<sup>4</sup>) on why growth and jobs haven't reduced poverty and what is needed.
- Develop an ambitious EU 2020 proposal for developing an integrated social and sustainable model<sup>5</sup> which defends social rights, reduces inequalities and implements Active Inclusion – particularly through strengthening inadequate minimum income and social protection systems, guaranteeing access to public services and supportive pathways to an inclusive labour market.

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<sup>3</sup> (the Eurobarometer Standard 71 highlights that 64% of EU citizens believe that the EU should take more action/decisions on defending social rights ( an increase of 9 points).

<sup>4</sup> An EU We Can Trust: EAPN proposals on post 2010. [www.eapn.eu](http://www.eapn.eu)

<sup>5</sup> Spring Alliance Manifesto: Putting people and planet first: [www.springalliance.eu](http://www.springalliance.eu)

**3) Short-term approaches to exit strategies from the crisis must not drive consideration of longer term challenges. Ensure Social cohesion becomes a key driver for exit strategies.**

The discussion on short-term responses to the crisis is vital, but must not condition the longer term strategy for the EU for the next decade. A full analysis of the social impact of the crisis on poverty, exclusion and inequality has not yet been made, nor a sufficient stocktaking of the impact on people who were already in poverty, outside the labour market or trapped in increasingly "poor and precarious jobs". EAPN is concerned that the Social OMC and the Social Protection Committee's contribution is not being fully taken on board. EAPN's survey<sup>6</sup> highlights that the EU is seriously at risk of undermining social cohesion, not only through the consequences of the crisis but through its recovery packages which are threatening social protection systems, reducing contributions and recouping public deficits through cuts in social protection and public services. Alternative approaches to recouping public deficits must also be discussed.

**EAPN proposes:**

- Separate the proposals on the Exit Strategies and Recovery Packages from the longer term assessment of challenges and proposals that should inform the EU 2020 strategy.
- Urgently develop a full social impact analysis of the crisis and the recovery packages and hold an Informal Council debate - taking actions to urgently reinforce adequate minimum income schemes as automatic stabilisers and as part of the follow up of the Active Inclusion Recommendations.
- Actively consider progressive measures to restore deficits which prioritise increasing revenue – particularly through recouping uncollected tax, actions on tax evasion and avoidance and taxes on the type of financial speculation that led to the need for 'bail outs'.

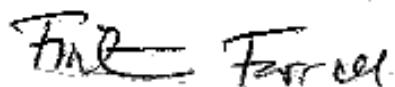
The December Council will be the last Council meeting before 2010 – the start of the EU year for combating poverty and social exclusion. This will be a vital opportunity for Ministers to show that they are committed to a transforming social and sustainable vision for the EU for the next decade and to deliver on a new partnership with civil society which can reinforce the trust of ordinary people in a fairer, more socially just EU.

We hope you will take on board our key messages in your debate,

Yours sincerely



Ludo Horemans  
President



Fintan Farrell  
Director

cc:

Mr Jerzy Buzek, MEP, President of the European Parliament  
Mr Jose Manuel Barroso, President of the European Commission  
Ms Pervanches Beres, MEP, President of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, European Parliament  
Mr Vladimir Spidla, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities

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<sup>6</sup> Social Cohesion at Stake: Social Impact of the Crisis and the Recovery Packages. EAPN December 2009.