



Brussels, 15 March 2010

Reference: Call to Prime Ministers and Heads of State and Governments to support the Relative Poverty Target in the Europe 2020 Strategy and to defend a reinforced Open Method of Coordination on Social Protection and Social Inclusion.

To: EU Prime Ministers and Heads of State and Governments

Dear Prime Minister,

On the 3rd March 2010, the European Commission published its proposals for the [Europe 2020 strategy](#). These proposals build on President Barroso's Guidelines for the next Commission (September 2008) and the draft outline EU2020 strategy. While the Commission's proposals do not reflect the 'social and sustainable model' called for by civil society actors, it does however reflect a number of the key recommendations from Social NGOs, including EAPN and its National Networks, the Social Platform and the Spring Alliance, in the responses they made to the EU2020 consultation.

For EAPN, the inclusion of a target to lift 20 million people out of poverty in the EU as measured by the relative poverty indicator represents **a potentially historic step forward for EU cooperation in the fight against poverty and social exclusion**. The fact that this is one of five key targets for the EU for the next 10 years should ensure the necessary high level political attention to ensure the necessary measures are taken to ensure progress towards achieving this target, including investment in social protection systems. EAPN calls on Member States to support this proposal of the Commission and to ensure transparency in how this decision is made as was requested in our letter to you dated 25 January.

The ambition to lift at least 20 million people above the relative poverty line must not mean that the other 60 million people facing poverty in the European Union are ignored. Such an understanding would be inhumane and intolerable. The ambition must be to **improve the circumstances for all people living in poverty** while at the same time ensuring that this progress lifts at least 20 million people above the relative poverty measure, as an interim target towards the eradication of poverty.

For EAPN it is **essential that the relative poverty measure (60% median income) remains the indicator** used to measure progress towards the poverty reduction target. While all measures have difficulties and limitations this measure of poverty has proven to be a robust and well tested formula which links both to the resources available in the society and to the standard of living considered as 'normal' in the given society. This target must be combined with the work on 'deprivation indicators' so as to ensure that strategies are developed that address the different realities for people living at or below this poverty measure. This target has also within it the ambition to address inequalities and recognises that 'more equal societies are better for everyone'. It must also be communicated that meeting this target is not only good for people experiencing poverty but also for everyone in the society.

The Commission's proposal *"to transform the open method of coordination on social exclusion and social protection into a platform for cooperation"* is very confusing and potentially very worrying. EAPN calls on the European Council to deliver on previously agreed commitments to **an autonomous, but strengthened Open Method of Coordination on Social Protection and Social Inclusion**, a more

effective stakeholder engagement including the active involvement of anti poverty NGOs and people experiencing poverty will be needed to deliver this approach.

EAPN stresses that to make progress in relation to the poverty target requires that:

- The objective of reducing **poverty, social exclusion and inequality needs to be mainstreamed across the whole EU 2020 strategy and in particular the exit strategy from the crisis.** This needs to be achieved by ensuring that the strategy is framed by the implementation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights and responds to the new social mainstreaming clause (Article 3 in the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU). It also requires an ambitious approach to redefining 'prosperity' including a commitment to make progress on developing multiple indicators to monitor societal progress beyond GDP. It needs to be backed by the implementation of an effective social impact assessment process.
- **The EU and Member states must ensure a balanced approach to achieving the headline EU target.** This requires that the EU target is followed up with a set of national targets, agreed between Member States and the Commission, which are based on a rigorous assessment of the social and economic reality in each country and prevents selecting only those 'who are easiest to reach' for attention in the strategy. **Time needs to be given to arrive at the set of agreed national targets.** It would seem unlikely that this could be achieved in time for the June Council.
- **An Action Plan setting clear policy priorities to drive delivery on the targets.** This requires follow up of already agreed priorities such as action to implement the **Active Inclusion Recommendation (including the adequacy of minimum income schemes)** and follow up of the commitments to tackle **child poverty and homelessness.** In addition this balanced approach requires a focus on: the quality of jobs, investment in social protection, social security and public services, the mainstreaming of equality and anti discrimination in anti poverty policies and a commitment to using EU funds, including structural funds, to support the implementation of the strategy. **A revitalised social OMC with real stakeholder engagement including the active involvement of anti poverty NGOs and people experiencing poverty will be needed to deliver this approach.**

Attached you will find EAPN's detailed response to the Commission's proposal.

The key messages from EAPN are:

- 1) **Set out more clearly a vision that puts people first and show how the growth strategy will deliver social progress and mainstream social objectives.**
- 2) **Defend the proposed relative poverty target and establish an explicit Action Plan against Poverty.** Make it achievable by reducing social inequalities and being ambitious on social standards.
- 3) **Emphasize the need to invest in social security and social protection systems and defend public services.**
- 4) **Focus on how to create quality jobs and ensure access to people who are currently excluded through Active Inclusion approaches.**
- 5) **Strengthen the architecture and governance – guarantee a reinforced Social OMC and equal standing for all pillars, delivering on social cohesion.** Agree guidelines for meaningful participation of civil society actors including people in poverty throughout strategy.

In 1943, in the middle of the trauma of the Second World War Jean Monnet reflecting on what would be needed to avoid repeating such a catastrophe wrote:

What we are aiming for is "an organisation of the world that will allow all resources to be exploited as well as possible and to be distributed as evenly as possible among persons, so as to create peace and happiness throughout the entire world"

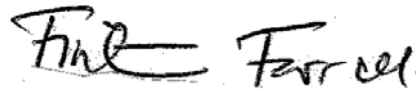
We hope that this 'old vision' for what European Cooperation should achieve, can inform a new shared **social and sustainable vision** for Europe which we all can contribute to and defend.

We await anxiously the outcome of your deliberation at the Spring Council.

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.

Mr H. Rompuy, President of the European Council.

Ms Pervanches Beres, MEP, President of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, European Parliament.

Mr Lazlo Andor, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion

Ministers for Finance.

Ministers for Social Affairs.

Attached:

[EAPN Response to the Europe 2020 strategy: Delivering on the Poverty Target](#)