

15 October 2012

Safeguard Democracy and back Social as well as Economic Union
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To: EU Prime Ministers and Heads of State,

The award of the Nobel Prize to the European Union for its contribution to peace, reconciliation, democracy and human rights is as President Barroso said, “a message of hope and confidence in the EU at a time when the EU faces a great challenge”. It is an honour but with it comes the responsibility for EU Leaders to ensure that the EU will contribute to maintain peace and to ensure all human rights, including the right to live free of poverty and exclusion, are respected. In this regard addressing the current social crisis with the expansion and deepening of the numbers living in poverty, while inequality is growing, must become the number one priority for the European Union. Ensuring implementation of the inclusive growth pillar of the Europe 2020 while ensuring the EU has a visible and viable strategy to combat poverty and exclusion will be vital to this task. In this letter we present from the perspective of people experiencing poverty and those fighting for a social Europe how a credible EU anti poverty strategy can be implanted. We hope our experience and proposals will contribute to the outcomes from your important reflections and debates.

On the 18 and 19th October, the European Council meets to discuss next steps on the future of the Economic and Monetary Union, against a backdrop of increasing poverty, social exclusion and inequality and rising social tensions, across the EU. The EU’s objective is to drive forward a strengthened EU project, but **this cannot be based on economic and monetary union** alone. Neither can it be imposed from above without any apparent accountability nor transparent democratic decision making through national parliaments or engagement with stakeholders and debate with the people suffering from the austerity approach to the crisis. Increasing numbers of EU citizens perceive the EU as a negative force imposing austerity through economic governance, particularly in Troika countries, which are undermining social Europe and attacking the basis of the welfare state. The backlash against these decisions will continue to grow unless **EU political leaders commit themselves to public debate - back democracy, participative stakeholder dialogue, and insist on Social Progress to balance economic and monetary objectives**. For EAPN members this means concrete steps to achieve a **Social Union, Social Governance, Social Investment, Social Standards and Better Democracy**.

In EAPN's conference: is Europe 2020 delivering on poverty? On the 28th September, drawing together over 200 stakeholders, speaker after speaker highlighted their disillusionment with Europe 2020 and more broadly with the EU approach to the crisis:

- for its failure to deliver on its promises on poverty reduction: with a shortfall of 8 million on the national targets currently set and an increase of 2 million of people at risk of poverty and social exclusion (115 million) from the latest figures available;
- for the EU role in generating increased poverty, by the insistence on economic governance on austerity as the main way to reduce public deficits, delivered through the economic semester,
- on the failure to take seriously democracy – both in terms of engagement of national parliaments and also national stakeholders, like NGOs working with people experiencing poverty, through the NRP and NSR process and to back civil and social dialogue.

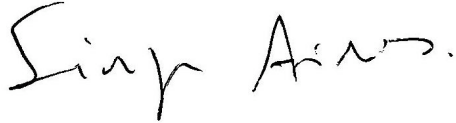
The EAPN 2012 NRP assessment: An EU Worth Defending and shadow country-specific Recommendations, presented at the conference set out a disturbing picture of the failure of the Europe 2020 narrative, dominated by only macro-economic imperatives, which are tangibly generating increased poverty and undermining democratic decision-making. EAPN member's message was clear. *"We are not prepared to go on backing this strategy unless we see some tangible change in direction and concrete results. Why should we support an EU that does not listen, nor have our interests at heart?"*

The participants called on the Council to:

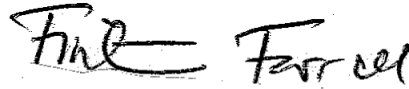
- 1) **Urgently change tack to back a Social Union and Social Governance** - giving priority to an inclusive exit to the crisis and inclusive growth.
- 2) **Demonstrate a visible commitment to reducing poverty** – by adopting a viable poverty target, setting clear priority to measure social impact and restrict austerity attacks on welfare states, and support to integrated anti-poverty strategies which ensure access to rights, resources and services.
- 3) **Launch a new Social Investment package, which goes beyond quality jobs**, that backs adequate social protection and minimum income, access to quality services (education, health, housing, childcare, with fair financing through Tax Justice.
- 4) **Back concrete Social Standards:** overcome inequalities by agreeing common EU social standards frameworks – adequate minimum income and unemployment income support, ensuring public service obligations and the right for all to access affordable quality public services, and minimum wage.
- 5) **Make Structural Funds a key instrument to deliver on poverty** – implement the European Commission's proposal to allocate at least 25% of Cohesion Policy to supporting people through ESF, and earmarking at least 20% to poverty reduction and social inclusion.
- 6) **Re-launch Europe 2020, as a democratic, participative social process** through the National Reform Programmes and National Social Reports, and Recommendations – engaging national parliaments in key decisions and supporting NGOs and people experiencing poverty to engage as partners at all stages of their development and delivery.

We urge Prime Minister's to make a public statement and road map to demonstrate its commitment to a Social Union, and to ensure a process of engaging with stakeholders and parliaments to work out how this can be achieved.

Yours faithfully,



Sergio Aires
President



Fintan Farrell
Director

Cc:

President Van Rompuy, President of the European Council
President Christofias, President of the Council of the European Union
President Schulz, President of the European Parliament
President Barroso, President of the European Commission

See

[EAPN proposals for Country-Specific Recommendations](#) (June 2012)

EAPN 2012 NRP Report: An EU worth defending (July 2012)

EAPN conference – see www.eapn.eu.

