



QUESTIONS TO COMMISSIONER-DESIGNATE HEARINGS (ECON AND EMPL)

SEPTEMBER 2014



The Alliance for a Democratic, Social and Sustainable European Semester (Semester Alliance) is a broad coalition bringing together major European civil-society organisations and trade unions, representing thousands of member organisations on the ground at European, national and local levels in the European Union. It aims to support progress towards a more democratic, social and sustainable Europe 2020 Strategy, through strengthening civil dialogue engagement in the European Semester at national and EU levels.

ENABLING CIVIL-SOCIETY TO PARTICIPATE IN THE SHAPING OF EU POLICIES AND TO CONTRIBUTE TO PROGRESS ON THE TARGETS OF THE EUROPE 2020 STRATEGY CONCERNS US ALL!



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The Semester Alliance is coordinated by the European Anti-Poverty Network

INTRODUCTION

The EU Alliance for a democratic, social and sustainable Semester¹ is a new alliance of Social, Equality and Green Civil Society organisations. It aims to facilitate joint working at the national and EU level to achieve progress on the smart, sustainable and inclusive, as well as equality, goals of Europe 2020, based on democratic governance and meaningful civil and social dialogue in the European Semester. The Alliance has received one-year project funding from the European Commission under the EaSI programme to build on its previous work as an Adhoc Coalition. The Alliance is coordinated by the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) and involves the following partners: AGE Platform, Caritas-Europa, CECODHAS, European Environmental Bureau (EEB), EASPD, ETUC, Eurochild, Eurodiaconia, European Women's Lobby (EWL), FEANTSA, European Federation of Food Banks (FEBA), Green Budget Europe, PICUM and the Social Platform.

The EU Semester Alliance has prepared questions to probe the Commissioner-Designates' commitment to progress on the social, sustainable and equality targets and commitments of Europe 2020 and the European Semester, through strengthening democratic legitimacy and social and civil dialogue engagement, particularly in the context of the Mid-Term Review of the Europe 2020 strategy to be carried out in 2015.

QUESTIONS TO CANDIDATE COMMISSIONER FOR ECONOMIC AND MONETARY AFFAIRS

1. How and when will the Commissioner follow up on the demand made by European Parliament in the 'Gutiérrez Prieto report on the Annual Growth Survey 2014', for an inter-institutional agreement on the European Semester, in order to give a proper decision-making role to the European Parliament?
2. How can the Commissioner ensure a new priority to inclusive and sustainable growth, ensuring coherence between EU economic policies and Europe 2020 social and environmental objectives? Will you propose effective ex-ante and post social, sustainable and gender impact assessment of economic policies and mainstream social, environmental and equality indicators into macroeconomic triggers?

QUESTIONS TO CANDIDATE COMMISSIONER FOR EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL AFFAIRS AND INCLUSION

1. Will the Commissioner actively implement the commitment to develop Guidelines for effective stakeholder engagement in Europe 2020, as originally promised in the European Platform Against Poverty Communication, and ensure this is monitored and implemented? Will you continue and expand funding for such initiatives as the EU Semester Alliance, with national alliances to involve civil society and social actors in all stages of the Semester?
2. Will the Commissioner ensure that the Directorate works to rebalance social and economic priorities, including a priority to inclusion (including in the DG title) and inclusive growth as a core objective? How will you ensure that the poverty target is put at the heart of the Mid-Term Review, that Member States commit themselves to ambitious targets, and Country-specific Recommendations (CSRs) are given to all Member States not making progress on the target?

¹ Hereafter referred to as the Semester Alliance – for more information see: <http://semesteralliance.net/>

BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

EUROPE 2020 sets out to combat poverty, promote inclusive and sustainable growth

In 2010, the Europe 2020² strategy broke new ground by establishing five concrete targets for delivering on smart, social and sustainable growth. These included Poverty, Employment, Education, Climate Change and Energy Sustainability targets³. Gender equality is not an explicit objective of the Europe 2020 Strategy, despite the fact that the objectives to achieve gender equality and gender mainstream all policies are legal obligations enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty. The European Semester, an annual coordination cycle, primarily driven by economic governance goals, is the main instrument to deliver these targets. The Commission's Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs) are a key tool which could forcefully guide Member State policy to deliver more effectively. In 2014, however, although the number of CSRs that dealt with social, environmental and gender equality aspects increased, the overwhelming number and priority of the CSRs continued to focus on economic governance requirements primarily focussed on austerity.

Failure to deliver on Europe 2020 goals and targets

The Commission's Communication preparing for the 2015 Mid-Term Review of Europe 2020: Taking Stock⁴ recognises that progress has been poor. Although some progress has been made on **education** goals, and, in the case of the **environmental** targets, the EU has seen an 18% reduction in greenhouse emissions by 2012, national projections demonstrate that nearly half (13 Member States) will not achieve national targets by 2020. Whilst energy consumption fell by 8% between 2006 and 2012, mainly due to reduced production and consumption during the crisis, it will need a further 6.3% reduction to meet the target. But the **evidence on the two key social targets is much more damning, showing negative trends, moving away rather than towards the targets**: with the employment rate declining rather than progressing, from 68.5% in 2010 (compared to 70.3% in 2008) to 68.4% in 2012. **The worst result is on poverty** with an increase of nearly 10 million people since the start of Europe 2020 - 124 million people in poverty and social exclusion in the EU compared to 114 million in 2009 at the start of Europe 2020 (representing 1 in 4 people of the total EU population). To civil society and social stakeholders it is clear that the prioritisation of economic governance through austerity without consideration of the social, equality or environmental impact have undermined delivery on Europe 2020 goals for a more social and sustainable EU, threatening the credibility of the EU.

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² http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/index_en.htm

³ Fighting poverty and social exclusion: reduce poverty by at least 20 million by 2020; Raise the employment level of 75% of men and women; reduce rates of early school leaving below 10% and at least 40% of 30-34 year olds completing 3rd level education; Reduce Greenhouse emissions to 20% or even 30% and 20% increase of energy from renewables and a 20% increase in energy efficiency, all compared to 1990 levels.

⁴ EC COM (2014): 5.03. 2014: Taking Stock of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

⁵ EC COM (2014): 5.03. 2014: Taking Stock of the Europe 2020 strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth.

Improving democracy: social and civil society ownership

Europe 2020, also set a clear requirement to engage national parliaments, as well as social and civil society organisations in the development and delivery of the National Reform Programmes (NRPs).⁶ The Commission's Mid-Term Review stock-taking report highlighted *'that awareness and ownership of all actors – governments, parliaments, regional and local authorities, social partners and all stakeholders – is a crucial prerequisite for success,...* recognizing that *"the involvement of different stakeholders could still be improved"*. The EU Alliance members' assessments confirmed this finding, highlighting the continuing weak engagement, particularly of civil society organisations, in the majority of Member States. National Parliaments also continue to be minimally involved. Although the stronger focus on stakeholder participation was welcomed in the Annual Growth Survey and the Taking Stock Communication, it continues to be almost invisible in the NRPs, with a lack of concrete guidelines to channel Member States activity, nor a follow-up process through which the European Parliament could address the lack of democratic ownership and accountability of the process. The weakness in parliamentary engagement has been highlighted by the European Parliament in its last AGS report calling for an inter-institutional agreement with the EP, Council and Commission.

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See <http://semesteralliance.net/> and [Follow us on Twitter #semesteralliance](#)

⁶ Recital 16 – Employment Guidelines for Europe 2020 (European Council Oct 2010).