



2014 Annual Convention of the European platform against poverty and social exclusion

Governance Workshop

Key Messages from the 'Semester Alliance'

Introduction

The EU Alliance for a democratic, social and sustainable European Semester (EU Semester Alliance) is a broad coalition bringing together 15 major European-wide civil society organizations and trade unions. It aims to support progress towards a more democratic, social and sustainable Europe 2020, by strengthening civil dialogue engagement in the Semester at national and EU levels. It builds on an adhoc coalition which has been operating since 2012 and is currently funded for 1 year under the framework of a Joint Action, supported by the EU Programme for Employment and Social Innovation Call (VP/2013/006).

Who we are

Age Platform Europe, Caritas Europe, Housing Europe, Eurochild, Eurodiaconia, European Anti Poverty Network, European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD), European Environmental Bureau (EEB), European Federation of Food Banks (FEBA), European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless (FEANTSA), European Public Service Union (EPSU), European Trade Union Congress (ETUC), European Women's Lobby (EWL), Green Budget Europe and Platform for International Cooperation on undocumented migrants (PICUM), supported also by Social Platform.

What we've done

Current 1 year Alliance project based on joint cross-sectoral engagement and assessments at the EU and national level. This has included at EU level: Advocacy and common inputs and positions: Alternative proposals on Country-specific Recommendations, an assessment of the Semester and contribution to Europe 2020 Mid-Term Review, capacity building and tool kit, 2 joint hearings (the next to be held on the 3rd December in the European Parliament), and at national level – the development of 3 pilot cross-sectoral alliances in Bulgaria, Denmark and Ireland to engage in the European Semester.

Key learning

- **The difficulties of engaging in the process as stakeholders**, in an increasingly non-transparent process.
- **The challenge of interesting people at the national level**, who see lack of results or impact on policy.
- **Key value-added of cross-sectoral working**, to get greater profile, political response and promote innovative solutions for a broader social, inclusive and sustainable agenda.

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, by strengthening civil dialogue engagement in the



1. **Europe 2020 not delivering on its potential for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth** or its key targets, missing a clear political commitment delivering on a balanced strategy, and missing commitments to equality and gender equality.

Recommendation: Political reconfirmation of a European Semester based on objectives/targets of Europe 2020 – smart, sustainable and inclusive growth, ensuring commitment to gender equality.

2. **The Semester is a closed governance process, with insufficient transparency in the decision-making process dominated by stability and convergence priorities.** The Semester is dominated by Ministries of Finance, and DGs focussing on macroeconomic and fiscal surveillance, developed between the Commission and Member States, with little role for Parliament and this is leading to a dramatic lack of transparency ie the NRPs have an increasingly unclear role in the cycle, with the CSRs dominant, based on unclear criteria or mechanisms to input or influence.

Recommendation: Ensure greater coherence and transparency in the decision-making process and ensure that the development and delivery of country-specific recommendations is clearly based on a balanced Europe 2020 agenda and strategies to deliver on the targets, delivered through the National Reform Programmes.

3. **The Semester is extremely closed to real consultation and participation of stakeholders,** particularly at the national level, involving civil society, social partners and national parliaments. Feedback from national level, including pilot alliances highlight the low quality with focus on information rather than dialogue and partnership, little impact on policy and failure to transfer of key good practices – eg Belgian Platform Against Poverty, attachment of stakeholder inputs to NRP (France).

Recommendation: Need for obligatory EU Guidelines to ensure debate in national parliaments and meaningful structured dialogue with all relevant stakeholders. These should ensure that NRPs are developed on the basis of regular dialogue involving multi-level governance, social partners and civil society organisations including people experiencing poverty through all stages. Financial and logistical support should be provided to support this engagement, facilitated by the European Semester Officers. Detailed monitoring of engagement and results, including annexing the views of stakeholders is crucial.

For more information on the Semester Alliance see: <http://semesteralliance.net> or contact

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