PRESS RELEASE

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**Electing CHAMPIONS for a Social Europe: A Call for Commitment**

**EAPN launches its campaign around the European elections to get candidates commitment to the fight against poverty, social exclusion and inequalities and encourage voters to get heard**

**Brussels, 04/03/2014 – Today, the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) launches its European-wide campaign *Elections for a Social Europe*, ahead of the European Elections next 22-25 May, mobilizing hundreds of European, national and local organizations, calling on the candidates to the elections to commit to make the fight against poverty, social exclusion and inequalities a priority item on the European agenda, and on people… to vote! The campaign launch coincided with a press briefing this morning gathering MEPs, European and Belgian media and civil-society organizations.**

“*This European-wide campaign builds around a manifesto which demands a commitment to fight for a more Social Europe, free of poverty, social exclusion and inequalities from the candidates to the elections. What we need is to see a real commitment from the candidates, so that they can be held accountable by the people who have elected them, millions of them dramatically living in or at risk of poverty. We need a European Parliament that is on the side of the people and fully represent their main interests.”*, says Sérgio Aires, President of EAPN.

“*Due to political and economical choices that we know are the wrong answers, the levels of poverty, social exclusion and inequalities have reached peaks that had never been seen before. The austerity measures have been dismantling welfare states and making people pay for a crisis they did not create. There are other ways and we all know it. With civil society being put away from the decision-making processes, we understand that people lose faith in the European institutions. And that’s precisely why it is more than ever important to elect people who will make the difference, when the EU is failing on its founding principles of democracy, solidarity that ensured peace and well-being*”, Sergio Aires added.

Despite the European Target on poverty set by the Europe 2020 Strategy to lift 20 million people out of poverty by 2020, statistics show dreadful increases in poverty rates. Between 2010 and 2011, the number of people at-risk-of-poverty or social exclusion in the EU increased by 3.7 million (+0.7%), reaching the number of 121.2 million people in 2011 (24.3 % of the entire population). In 2012, 124.5 million people (24.8 %) at risk of poverty or social exclusion. Since 2010, 6 million more people are living in or at risk of poverty in the EU.

“*The widening gap of inequalities and the absence of participation of civil society in decision making processes raise serious questions on the gap between the ones who hold the economic and political powers and the rest of the people. People are not fools but feel out of any control or power. We are at a turning point where democracy and peace are seriously threatened*,” said Barbara Helfferich, Director of EAPN.

***Electing Champions for a Social Europe*** is a pan-European campaign carried out by the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) and its members (29 national networks and 18 European organizations) representing hundreds of organizations on the ground working with thousands of European citizens, notably people experiencing poverty, as well as other partners supporting a social Europe.

The key demands of the campaign are:

**√** A Social **Pact** for a Social Europe
**√** An effective EU **Strategy** to fight poverty, social exclusion, inequalities and discrimination
**√** Strengthened **democracy** and civil-society **participation**
**√** An annual **Hearing** with People experiencing poverty in the European Parliament

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**NOTE TO THE EDITOR:**

* See MEPs commitments visible on the blog <http://Electionchampionsin2014.net>
* [EAPN and its members’ MANIFESTO for the 2014 European Elections](http://electingchampionsin2014.files.wordpress.com/2014/01/eapn-2014-ep-elections-manifesto1.pdf)

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##### **Established in 1990, the European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN) is the largest European network of national, regional and local networks, involving anti-poverty NGOs and grassroots groups as well as European Organisations, active in the fight against poverty and social exclusion.**