

EUROPEAN ANTI-POVERTY NETWORK (EAPN) FINAL DECLARATION GENERAL ASSEMBLY 2016

Bruges, 29 Oct 2016

IN DEFENSE OF A EUROPE BUILT ON PROTECTING FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS FOR ALL

The EAPN General Assembly meets while Europe is in a critical situation¹. Some of its features are the post-BREXIT; the humanitarian crisis suffered by people arriving in Europe; the accelerated deterioration of Greece's economy and welfare, as well as the failure to do more to help the continent's ailing southern economies; the failure to raise social standards in most central and eastern European Member States, critically low incomes in Baltic and Balkan States, the spread of xenophobic and racist messages, with far-right parties rising in many Member States. On top of this, inequality is rising and more than 123 million Europeans are at risk or living in poverty and exclusion. People without income or savings that allow them to overcome their daily difficulties are unprotected against the present and future hardships and poverty and exclusion is often transmitted to their children.

Moreover, **the concentration of wealth** is reflected in who holds the economic and political power. Through their current macroeconomic and fiscal policies, EU governments and Institutions are seen to be serving the interests and preferences of the wealthy. By increasing their wealth they can continue to maintain their opulent consumption, comfort and opportunity levels, living in a world apart from the majority of the population.

Underlying this critical situation, are deep **fundamental challenges for the EU**. Namely, the weakening of the EU's mission, the breakdown of its founding values, and the EU's alienation from the citizens' interests.

EAPN requires governments to combat inequality, including inequality of outcomes; to **prevent and alleviate poverty and injustice** now, and to avoid its transmission to future generations. EAPN demands that Member States fight for their social cohesion, by strengthening social rights, enabling affordable access to essential services, ensuring high levels

¹ Bratislava Summit. Angela Merkel and others used this expression.

of social protection and a society where employment provides people with a decent job and living wages.

EAPN reminds European companies and corporations which are offshoring their output that the globalization they are profiting is a double - edged sword, and that there is a need to create shared value, given that the competitiveness of a company and the welfare of surrounding communities are mutually dependent. The recognition and capitalization of **these connections between social and economic progress has enormous potential for economic and human development.**

The European economic policy must leave the *austerity ideology*, in order to enable it to promote **a fairer society, better redistributive policies and tax justice**, starting with a global tax on wealth across the EU.

To include the quarter of the European population that is currently marginalized the proposal for **a European Pillar of Social Rights must provide a European floor of social standards**, capable of acting as a springboard for accessing a decent standard of living for all throughout Europe. The key components of such a social floor are:

- An agreed **EU Framework on minimum/living wage** that covers the costs of housing, food, clothing, education, health, transportation and personal development;
- An **unemployment insurance** which protects workers and their families supported by an EU unemployment insurance to assist countries in moments of economic shocks;
- It is indispensable to develop a European labour market, with a wide range of offers for people excluded from the labour market, to **facilitate access to work** in all Member States, including rural and urban areas experiencing disadvantages.
- An **EU Directive on adequate minimum income systems**, to facilitate labour insertion, access to services and a decent living during jobless periods,
- A **Framework for EU pensions** that enable older people to live in dignity and **for Child benefits** for children under 18 years-old, in order to eradicate child poverty and follow up on the Child well bring recommendation.
- Establishing a threshold or **benchmark below which spending on social protection should not fall** in a country will be;
- EU action to strengthen **Access to Quality services** – including social services, education, health, decent housing, including a strategy to address homelessness;
- It is crucial to promote an EU strategy to invest resources **to close the gender gap in pay and pensions**, and to mainstream the **combat against discrimination** in all its manifestations.

These proposal should form the basis of a **comprehensive EU Strategy to fight poverty, exclusion and inequalities** backed by earmarked EU funds to deliver such a strategy.

Finally, Member States and the EU should recognize the **role of civil society**, including organizations fighting poverty, as guarantors of the coherence of EU and Member States' policies, through a structured political dialogue. We are at a critical time in Europe; this quandary must be solved by retrieving and implementing our common Fundamental Rights and emblematic values for the wellbeing of all and, particularly, for the 123 million people living in poverty and exclusion who have being waiting too long.

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