

“Delivering Lisbon” - Social Europe stalls

SOLIDAR statement to the Spring European Council,
25. and 26. March 2004

Executive Summary

SOLIDAR is the alliance of social and economic justice NGOs involved in social policy, social service provision, development and humanitarian aid. We bring together organisations across the European Union who regroup over 8 million citizens. Many of our members are actively involved in the field of social inclusion and social protection on national, regional and local level, and were involved in the drawing up of the first two rounds of NAPs/inclusion. On European level, SOLIDAR had been actively involved in the discussions on the future of EU social policy and been part in the Advisory Group of the EPC project “Lisbon Revisited – Finding the way to European Growth”. It is based on this experience and expertise, that that SOLIDAR for the second year in a row presents its evaluation of the Lisbon Strategy on the eve of the Spring Summit.

4 years ago, the Lisbon Presidency Conclusions stated the aim of “*making the Union the most dynamic, competitive, sustainable, knowledge-based economy, enjoying full employment and strengthen social cohesion*” by investing in people and combating social exclusion, as well as sustaining the healthy economic outlook and favourable growth prospects at the same time.

Notwithstanding repeated statements about the need for a really integrated policy mix and the fulfilment of the Lisbon objectives concerning all policy areas made by many stakeholders over the last years, the new report from the Commission once again fails to do equal justice to the questions of economic, employment, social and environmental policy, but focuses solely on the question of employment and economic growth. The report also fails to mention anything about the partnership with civil society. The lack of consideration given to social inclusion and social cohesion targets is obtrusive.

The disproportionate emphasis on growth becomes even more obvious in the way the report views the upcoming enlargement of the European Union. EU accession is referred to only as a big opportunity to boost growth. The high potential of growth in the new member states is seen as a chance to meet the 2010 targets. The questions of how the growth can be sustainable, as well as how the social situation in accession countries compare to the current EU member states, are not even posed.

Even more striking is that the EU and member states have failed to take the responsibility for not meeting social inclusion targets. Initiatives like the “making work pay” approach simply shift the responsibility for unemployment, poverty and social exclusion away from the governments and onto the people affected.

The strength of the Lisbon approach is that is based on balance. In a balanced reading, Lisbon is not about beating Japan or the US in the run for the greatest economic growth and competitiveness, but also about improving people’s lives, ensuring social cohesion, creating opportunities to learn and a clean environment to live in.

SOLIDAR calls upon the European Spring Council

- To ensure that economic and social objectives are equally taken into account, heads of governments should take full responsibility for the annual evaluation of the Lisbon Strategy. Other Council formations, including the Council of Ministers of Finance (ECOFIN), should be excluded from the annual evaluation at the Spring Council.
- To strengthen the policy coordination between the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines, the Employment Strategy and the Social Inclusion Strategy, allowing for the mutual recognition of all Lisbon targets. Especially in setting the framework for the 2005 mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy a rebalancing of the economic, social and environmental dimension is strongly needed.
- To ensure a policy mix, the guidelines should be proposed by the Commission and should be approved by the European Parliament and the Council in the co-decision process linked with majority Council decisions. Before making its proposals the Commission should consult with civil society and with the social partners.
- To adopt a more holistic approach in combating unemployment, including positive measures to assist those in vulnerable situations to take up quality jobs.
- To acknowledge public investment as factor of enhancing productivity, and serving the higher goal of social inclusion. Necessary public investment must be exempted from the calculation of state deficits in the understanding of the Stability and Growth Pact and the criteria of European Monetary Union have to be rethought.

- To include a gender perspective into the evaluation of all areas of the Lisbon Strategy and to actively promote gender equality.
- To live up to the targets set for the provision of education and training, while at the same time ensuring equal access for all to life-long learning measures.
- To make it mandatory for companies to declare their CSR policy/principles and report annually on how they integrate them across the company. Special guidance and attention should be provided for SMEs.

solidar is an international alliance of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working in development and humanitarian aid, social policy, social service provision and life-long learning.

solidar works in Europe and worldwide in alliance with trade unions, organisation of the labour movement and civil society for an equitable and sustainable world.

solidar is a member of the Platform of European Social NGOs and of the Civil Society Contact Group that launched the act4europe.campaign on the Convention on the Future of Europe.

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