

socialplatform

European Spring Council of March 19-20, 2009 Open letter to the 27 EU Heads of State and of Government

Brussels, March 12, 2009

Dear Prime Minister, Dear President,

Social Platform, an alliance of 40 pan-European networks of social NGOs, has identified three steps you can take that will help restart your economy and protect people from the economic crisis:

- **At EU and national level, commit to invest in and reinforce social protection systems, and guarantee adequate minimum income**
- **At EU and national level, make investment in educational, social and health services a chapter of your recovery plan and account for it as an investment and not a cost**
- **Support civil society by including a chapter in each of your recovery plan on cooperation with NGOs and work with them to find a way out of the crisis**

Please see below a more detailed discussion on how these steps can and why they should be implemented.

1. At EU and national level, commit to invest in and reinforce social protection systems, and guarantee adequate minimum income

Why?

- Employment ministers on March 9 2009, recognised that social protection systems (like adequate minimum income, first pillar pension and education) *"play an automatic stabiliser effect and are key to restore and strengthen confidence and help pave the way to recovery"*.
- Against the background of social unrest in several member states (eg France, UK, Greece, Bulgaria, Latvia, Lithuania), promoting social spending will send a positive signal to EU citizens that member states are prepared to invest directly in their well-being, and not only in the financial system.
- Investing in adequate minimum income as well as being necessary for people living in poverty is also good for the economy as the investment will immediately be put back into the economy in the form of spending on essential goods and

services¹. This will also be vital for families as risks of poverty do not only concern one person but most of the time children and the family itself.

How could this be done?

In the Spring Council Conclusions:

- Commit explicitly to strengthen social protection systems by supporting and implementing the recommendations made by the European Commission Spring Communication on providing adequate minimum income, making full use of social protection benefits, considering temporary expansion and/or reinforcement of minimum income provisions and maintaining access to financial services
- Commit explicitly to implement all pillars of the Active Inclusion Recommendation, as endorsed by the EPSCO Council on December 17 2008 and reaffirmed by the EPSCO on March 9 2009
- Commit to increase minimum income, pensions and other benefits to levels that can take people above the poverty line and provide a stimulus to consumption
- Commit explicitly to invest more in disadvantaged groups and commit to take this forward in the debate on the post-Lisbon 2010 agenda

2. At EU and national level, make investment in educational, social and health services a chapter of your recovery plan and account for it as an investment and not a cost

Why?

- Social and health services increase social cohesion as recognised by the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the Lisbon Treaty. The ultimate objective of social services is both to improve the quality of life of people living in Europe and to provide protection and assistance. They also help ensure the social integration of people already at the margin of society and mental well-being of the population. Providing support for people in need is even more necessary when the financial and economic systems break down.
- The demand for services exists and grows: With rising unemployment rates, the number of people living in poverty increase.² Secondly, between 2008 and 2060 the population of the EU-27 aged 65+ is projected to increase by 66.9 million. Thirdly, existing care services for children are currently not coping with the demand. These groups will need the care that health, social and long-term care services provide.
- People working in social and health services represent 10% of the workforce³: With 6 million unemployed by 2010⁴, this sector cannot be ignored by leaders. In addition, over the last 15 years, jobs created in the health and social services sector targeted primarily people who are most affected by the crisis: younger

¹ See economist Mark Zandi's analysis of the US Recovery Plan. He shows that most of the money from tax rebate will be saved rather than spent, then blunting its stimulative benefit. By comparison, other options—such as infrastructure spending or adequate minimum income—are much more cost-effective because they target the needs of those most likely to channel money back into the economy.

² For example, there is a direct link between the lack of affordable childcare facilities for more than 1.5 million women in Europe and their non-inclusion on the labour market. See the [Commission's report on the implementation of the Barcelona targets on childcare](#)

³ See the 2006 EC commissioned study on [social and health services of General Interest in the European Union](#)

⁴ Calculation based on the Commission Interim Forecast January 2009

workers, older workers, migrants and women – the population categories that are usually more likely to be left out from labour market inclusion policies⁵.

- As clearly stated in the European Commission recommendation for active inclusion (October 2008) and endorsed by Employment ministers in December 2008, services have a spill over protective effect on your labour market: Even with an adequate minimum income, a job offer and activation schemes many people will never be able to obtain or keep their job if they don't have access to affordable and accessible quality services (eg child care facilities).

How could this be done?

- In the European Council Conclusions, request the European Commission include a new "Social justice" pillar in the European recovery plan, which would address social investment, particularly in social and health services
- In the European Council Conclusions, affirm the role of the European Social Fund in delivering social services and social infrastructures
- Adopt national strategies to promote social and health services in all of their dimensions

3. Support civil society by including a chapter in your recovery plan on cooperation with NGOs and work with them to find a way out of the crisis

Why?

- Our members (such as Eurochild, EAPN, EASPD) and their members working at local and national level report decrease of funding when actually demands from people they seek to help increase on a daily basis. NGOs in all Member States are often the frontrunners to provide immediate support to people in need such as people who lose their jobs now, providing employment advice, family support services, shelters, food assistance and help to deal with income loss and rising debts. NGOs are your allies in fighting against the crisis and should be recognised.
- Civil society organisations are not only services providers. They are also active citizens that are fighting for more social justice in Europe. In that instance, they are an important partner to promote consensus and a common vision to find a way out of the crisis, complementing the necessary dialogue member states must have with trade unions and employers.

How could this be done?

- Together with social partners, invite European social NGOs to participate in the Employment Summit to benefit from their expertise
- As proposed by the European Commission Spring Communication, engage with NGOs as active stakeholders in the debates on the causes, consequences and solutions to the crisis by organising workshops, seminars, hearings, roundtables at national and local levels, particularly with NGOs where people living in poverty themselves express their views
- Strengthen funding to NGOs at national and European level to provide vital services and defend the interest of people on the frontline

⁵ See the 2009 SPC/EMCO joint assessment of the social impact of the economic crisis and the 2006 EC commissioned study on [social and health services of General Interest in the European Union](#)

- Provide specific guidance, simplification of Structural Funds to enable NGOs to access funds

It is time to show bold leadership: In the current crisis, the value of investing in people, based on fundamental rights and ecological solutions is far more important than speculative investment as it benefits the whole of society.

We hope you will give the issues we have presented in this letter your best attention.

Yours sincerely,



Conny Reuter
President



Roshan Di Puppo
Director

Please find also attached to this letter Social Platform's contribution to a European recovery plan, as well as the joint letter prepared and co-signed by the Social Platform, the European Environment Bureau and the European Trade Union Confederation.