COUNCIL OF
THE EUROPEAN UNION

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Council conclusions on the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion: A European framework for social and territorial cohesion

3073th EMPLOYMENT, SOCIAL POLICY, HEALTH AND CONSUMER AFFAIRS Council meeting
Brussels, 7 March 2011

The Council adopted the following conclusions:

"THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

HAVING REGARD TO

1. Article 3 of the Treaty of the European Union, which inter alia states that the EU shall combat social exclusion and discrimination and shall promote social justice and protection, equality between women and men, solidarity between generations and protection of the rights of the child;

2. Article 9 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union which states that "in defining and implementing its policies and activities, the Union shall take into account requirements linked to the promotion of a high level of employment, the guarantee of adequate social protection, the fight against social exclusion, and a high level of education, training and protection of human health";

3. Article 160 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union, which attributes to the Social Protection Committee the task to monitor the social situation and the development of social protection policies in the Member States and the Union;

RECALLING

4. that, according to latest available figures, at least 1 out of 6 people are at risk of poverty and social exclusion in the European Union, and that this phenomenon has become even more acute in time of crisis;

P R E S S

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5. that certain groups of the population are particularly exposed to the risk of poverty and social exclusion while others are subject to the most extreme forms of poverty (such as homelessness) or to multiple disadvantages (such as people with disabilities and certain ethnic minorities, among them the Roma);

6. that poverty reduction should take into account the specific situation of both women and men and focus in particular on groups most at risk from social exclusion, in accordance with the Member States' national circumstances and policies regarding their target groups;

7. that the fight against poverty and social exclusion is one of the key priorities of the Europe 2020 Strategy with a quantified EU headline target for promoting social inclusion in particular through the reduction of poverty by aiming to lift at least 20 million people out of the risk of poverty and social exclusion by 2020;

8. the Council declaration on the European Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion: "Working together to fight poverty in 2010 and beyond" which states that the legacy of the European Year will be further developed through the flagship initiative “European Platform against Poverty”. The Council:

   - expressed its strong commitment to prevent and reduce poverty and social exclusion, which will require the mobilization of all relevant policies, tools and levels of government;

   - highlighted the potential benefits from further exchanges of best practices on social innovation and social experimentation to policies designed to tackle poverty and exclusion;

   - encouraged the participation of the civil society including social partners, the private sector and all relevant stakeholders;

   - stated that partnerships between decision makers and people experiencing poverty should be encouraged and should continue to be developed in a structured way;

9. the Conclusions on " The Social dimension in the context of an integrated Europe 2020 Strategy" as adopted by the Council on 6 December 2010, which inter alia:

   - highlighted the key role of the EPSCO Council in reviewing progress towards the headline target for promoting social inclusion and poverty reduction in the framework of the new European governance structure of Europe 2020 Strategy ("the European Semester");

   - called on the Commission to promote and reinforce the social component of its Impact Assessment system so as to ensure full reflection at EU level on Article 9 TFEU and the objectives of Europe 2020;

10. the discussion between Ministers responsible for the fight against poverty and social exclusion, meeting in Brussels on 19 October 2010, which stressed that the flagship initiative of the European Platform against Poverty should make the EU headline target for promoting social inclusion, in particular through the reduction of poverty**,** operational, and that it should not lose the wealth and dynamism of the Open Method of Coordination;

STRESSES

11. that action to prevent and alleviate poverty and social exclusion and meet the EU headline target for promoting social inclusion, in particular through the reduction of poverty, requires a combination of all relevant efforts and instruments at EU and national levels;

12. that the success of the Europe 2020 strategy depends on the simultaneous realisation of all its headline targets and that integrated and mutually reinforcing policies are therefore required. Social and territorial cohesion can only be achieved if growth and jobs also reach the most vulnerable;

13. that the Open Method of Coordination in the social field, which has proven its worth in supporting the development of national policies, should be reinvigorated to better play a key role in helping the Member States to meet their national targets for promoting social inclusion and poverty reduction and the challenges of the coming decade;

14. that the future development of the EU coordination for social protection and social inclusion will need to continue on key thematic issues that have emerged from the experience of the social OMC in the social inclusion, pensions and health and long-term care strands;

WELCOMES

15. the Communication on the Commission flagship initiative "The European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion: A European framework for social and territorial cohesion"[1] (hereinafter: the Platform), proposing an integrated and innovative approach aiming at a joint commitment among the Member States at national, regional and local levels, as well as among EU Institutions and the key stakeholders (social partners and NGOs) in their efforts to fight poverty and social exclusion;

16. the underlying key principle that actions at EU and national levels have to improve efficiency and trust by finding new participative ways to address poverty and continue to develop preventive policies and address needs when and where they arise;

17. the key areas for action of the Platform as set out in the Commission communication;

18. the integrated approach of the Platform to tackle the multiple dimension of social exclusion amongst those the most at risk of poverty and social exclusion.

19. the contribution of the Social Protection Committee (SPC) to the EPSCO Council discussions on the social dimension of the Europe 2020 strategy with a view to monitoring progress towards achieving the headline target for promoting social inclusion**,** in particular through the reduction of poverty, and the implementation of the social aspects of the integrated guidelines;

CONSIDERS

20. that in implementing the key areas for action of the Platform, due attention should be paid to:

    (i) delivering action to fight poverty and exclusion across the policy spectrum without prejudice to Member States' competence;

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[1] Doc. 18111/10.

(ii) making EU funding deliver on the social inclusion and social and territorial cohesion objectives in the context of the Europe 2020 Strategy and without prejudice to future negotiations on the multi-annual financial framework;

(iii) developing evidence-based approaches to social innovations and reforms;

(iv) promoting a partnership approach and the social economy;

(v) stepping up policy coordination between the Member States;

INVITES THE MEMBER STATES

21. to rapidly finalise, in accordance with the European Semester, their national targets on social inclusion and poverty reduction taking account of their relative starting positions and national circumstances and according to their national decision-making procedures, and to make every effort to at least meet these targets;

22. to proceed with developing and implementing their national policies to reduce poverty and social exclusion in accordance with their particular situations and challenges taking account of the approaches and areas of actions defined by the Platform. These include: actions across the whole policy spectrum, more effective use of Structural Funds to support social inclusion, use and promotion of evidence-based approaches and social innovation, the strengthening of partnership at all levels, encouragement of the social economy and the fullest application of active inclusion principles;

INVITES THE COMMISSION

23. to pursue the elaboration and delivery of the approaches and activities announced under the Platform with emphasis on areas which are likely to have the most decisive impact on poverty reduction, with due respect to the principle of subsidiarity and the division of competences between the EU and the Member States, and taking into account Article 9 TFEU by reinforcing the social component of the Commission's Impact Assessment;

INVITES THE COMMISSION AND THE MEMBER STATES

24. to clarify with the relevant stakeholders, and in the light of the experience of the first European Semester, how best the OMC can contribute to the governance of the Europe 2020 Strategy and to the implementation of the objectives of the Platform and vice versa;

INVITES THE SOCIAL PROTECTION COMMITTEE

25. to contribute actively to the further development of the content and the priorities of the Platform, ensuring a positive and coherent articulation of work under the Open Method of Coordination with that of the Platform and with the social objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy, with the aim of maximising their impact on promoting social inclusion while limiting administrative burdens;

26. to work together with the Commission to develop further and monitor EU initiatives in the whole spectrum of social protection and social inclusion policies, with particular attention to thematic priority areas and adequate instruments that are identified by the Committee."