

Discussion note for the meeting with the Social Platform in Nicosia on 12 July 2012

The involvement of non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and local authorities in the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy, especially as regards the employment, poverty and social exclusion targets, and their involvement in the process of the European Semester.

The European Union's attention towards social partners, non-governmental organisations and local authorities has increased in the last decade in an effort to better reach EU citizens, involve them in European issues and restore their trust in the Union.

All relevant documents and information refer to the role of social partners, NGOs and local authorities in the successful implementation of the EU 2020 strategy as dialogue between national, regional and local government will bring the EU's priorities closer to people, strengthening the feeling of ownership needed to get everyone involved in moving Europe towards the 2020 targets and more specifically on:

- ✓ employment (75% of the 20-64 year-olds to be employed) and
- ✓ poverty/social exclusion (≥20 million fewer people in or at risk of poverty and social exclusion).

Examples include, combating discrimination and social exclusion, promoting active ageing, promoting employment at local level. In many EU countries, the regional or local authorities are responsible for policy areas linked to the Europe 2020 Strategy, such as education and training, entrepreneurship, and the labour market. In addition, local authorities can have a significant role in the design and planning of social policy strategies as they have first-hand knowledge of the needs of the citizens who live and work within their region. The *EU Commissioner for Regional Policy*¹, in an interview given in October 2010 stresses that:

... while the Council of Europe works for the promotion of democracy at regional and local level, and the EU is focused on promoting *economic, social and territorial* development and reducing gaps in prosperity between regions, improving local and regional governance is an important dimension for both of them..."

It is crucial for all levels of governance to be aware of the need to implement effectively the Europe 2020 Strategy. The content of the Second Committee of the Regions Monitoring Report² on Europe 2020, with regard to the involvement of local authorities in achieving the Europe 2020 objectives is indicative. Furthermore, the Commission's proposal for a Regulation laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European

¹ <https://wcd.coe.int/ViewDoc.jsp?id=1695001&Site=Congress>

² Second CoR Monitoring Report on Europe 2020. *Preface and executive summary*.

Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund³ states that:

(i) "Member States should organise a partnership with a series of partners", first of all local and regional authorities, with a view to preparing for Partnership Contracts, where (ii) "the purpose of such a partnership is to respect the principle of multi-level governance, ensure the ownership of planned interventions by stakeholders and build on the experience and know-how of relevant actors".

One of the key messages stated in the draft Joint report on Social Protection (2010)⁴ is that "Countries with established governance arrangements and practices have benefited from the engagement and mobilization of stakeholders. Social partners have often played a key role in designing and implementing short term labour market measures to maintain people in jobs. Local authorities and NGOs across Europe had to meet increased demand for social benefits and services while often seeing their own revenue squeezed..."

Although NGOs are in a difficult position this particular period due to the economic crisis and to their dependence on external economic resources, their involvement in the implementation of Europe 2020 is pivotal for the promotion of social cohesion as indicated by the Platform of European Social NGOs (Social Platform, 2008):⁵

"The primary objective is to engage all people in the fabric of society, and ultimately promote social cohesion, solidarity and social justice, creating a better quality of life for everyone. Participatory democracy also aims to achieve quality services for people that are better targeted to their needs. Participatory democracy creates public space for discussion and therefore gives people more ownership of decisions. ... It sets people as actors in all areas of life, extending the concept of citizenship beyond the conventional political sphere (e.g. involving users in the provision of services, involving parents in schooling, etc)...By involving people to intervene, participatory democracy can produce solutions that are effective and legitimate, and go beyond traditional political divides. In that sense, it strengthens the legitimacy of decision makers/services providers since their decisions will be based on the real views of people.

Participatory democracy therefore aims to improve trust and accountability".

In early 2009, social NGOs, together with the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), and environmental and development NGOs, set up the Spring Alliance, which calls for a Europe 2020 Agenda that 'puts People and Planet first'. Recalibrating the overall agenda will also demonstrate to citizens that the EU is taking their needs into

³ Proposal for a Regulation of the European Parliament and of the Council laying down common provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund, the Cohesion Fund, the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development and the European Maritime and Fisheries Fund covered by the Common Strategic Framework and laying down general provisions on the European Regional Development Fund, the European Social Fund and the Cohesion Fund and repealing Regulation (EC) No 1083/2006, COM(2011) 615 final, 6.10.2011.

⁴ Doc. 6500/10 Adopted by EPSCO 8.3.2010

⁵ Platform of European NGOs (Social Platform) (2008), *Shaping an effective civil dialogue at national and European level – policies for people with people*, Social Platform, Brussels.

account, in particular the needs of those in vulnerable situations and those who face discrimination.

The Europe 2020 Steering Committee of the European Economic and Social Committee⁶ recognises the importance of the involvement of local authorities and NGOs in the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy, based on the judgment that both bodies develop an in depth knowledge of the real problems due to the day to day work with those who face poverty, social exclusion and employment problems. It is believed that the use of evidence-based knowledge acquired through local authorities and NGOs can be crucial to developing targeted actions in order to achieve the Europe 2020 targets.

The role of local authorities and non-governmental organisations is particularly important, not only at EU level but especially at national level as these bodies, being closer to the ground, have a direct involvement in job creation as well as in promoting social cohesion and in improving the quality of life of citizens. They also act as early alert systems at local level to diagnose potential problems before these are evident at national or European level.

Questions:

1. Can you reflect on the content of this paper by sharing an example of good practice, where Local Authorities and NGOs became involved in the implementation of Europe 2020 targets with regard to poverty, social exclusion and increase of employment rates?
2. Under the financial circumstances that Europe is facing, what methods and practices would you suggest for strengthening the role of NGOs in the implementation of the Europe 2020 targets?

⁶ European Economic and Social Committee - The Europe 2020 Steering Committee, 28 February 2011