

engage

THE QUARTERLY PUBLICATION OF SOCIAL PLATFORM, AN ALLIANCE OF 42 PAN-EUROPEAN NETWORKS FIGHTING FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE IN EUROPE

Claire Roumet, Vice President of Social Platform (second left) at the launch of the Spring Alliance, a participatory movement to ensure that the European Union puts people and the planet first. Also pictured: Philippe Pochet, Director General of the European Trade Union Institute (left), Andreas Carlgren, Swedish Environment Minister, and Catherine Day, Secretary General of the European Commission (January 2009)

Source: Social Platform



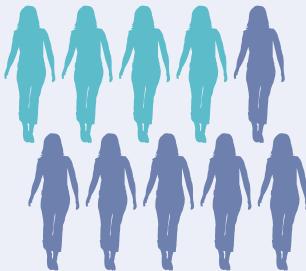
Our top three achievements

- 1 **January 2009:** Platform launches a joint campaign with EEB and ETUC for a greener and more social Europe
- 2 **March 2009:** Platform contributes to the EU's new law on maternity leave
- 3 **March 2009:** Platform presents steps for EU leaders to restart the economy and protect people from the crisis

What's next on the agenda

- 1 **June 2009:** European elections
- 2 **July 2009:** Launch of the Spring Alliance Manifesto "for an EU that puts people and the planet first"
- 3 **2009:** Negotiations between Member States on adopting EU laws on anti-discrimination and maternity leave

Did you know...



In the Netherlands, 40% of women have experienced some form of sexual violence in their lifetime

(Source: Rutgers Nisso Groep)

What's happened, what's coming up

2009

January

February

March

April

May

June

July

★ **Czech Presidency starts**

The six-month Czech Presidency of the EU begins [January 1]

● **Platform tests EU presidencies**

The French EU presidency is assessed by Social Platform as having "advanced the EU in several social fields, such as anti-discrimination". The Platform also releases tests for the Czech EU presidency [January 16]

● **Platform addresses ministers on worker mobility**

Meeting the Czech, Swedish and Spanish Social Affairs ministers, Social Platform calls on them to strengthen social security systems and increase the quality of jobs so people do not need to migrate for a decent life [January 21]

● **Spring Alliance kickoff conference**

Social Platform, the European Environmental Bureau and the European Trade Union Confederation launch a joint campaign for a greener and more social Europe [January 29-30]

What's this?

★ **Commission supports 2010 as Year of Volunteering**

After a campaign led by Social Platform member the European Volunteer Centre, the Commission agrees to put forward 2011 as the European Year of Volunteering [February 19]

What's this?

● **Platform pushes for better maternity leave conditions for EU workers**

Social Platform presents its recommendations for the EU's new law on maternity leave to the European Parliament and EU Heads of State [March 9]

● **Platform presents 3-step plan out of the crisis**

Social Platform presents three steps for EU leaders to restart the economy and protect people from the crisis: invest in social protection systems, invest in social and health services and work with civil society [March 13]

● **Platform issues joint proposals on sustainable development**

Social Platform, the European Environmental Bureau and the European Trade Union Confederation make a joint statement to EU leaders, outlining 13 proposals to ensure that short term recovery measures fit into a long term sustainable development strategy [March 13]

★ **European Summit**

Heads of State discuss their response to the financial crisis, and the overall European Strategy which focuses on 'growth and jobs'. EU leaders formally recognise the importance of social protection systems [March 20]

Maternity leave directive

Today, women in the EU who work are legally entitled after giving birth to a minimum of 14 weeks off to care for their child. They also have the right to be paid throughout this period, at least an amount equal to what they would receive in cases of sick leave. The European Parliament and Member States are currently negotiating to revise this law to allow for more time off and higher pay; Social Platform is making the case for 24 weeks and full salary.

★ **European Parliament gives green light on anti-discrimination law**

The European Parliament votes in favour of the proposed anti-discrimination law, adopting many of the recommendations made by Social Platform [April 2]

What's this?

● **Platform presents its view on health inequalities**

Responding to the Commission's consultation on health inequalities, Social Platform emphasises the need to work on poverty and anti-discrimination as a means of correcting this imbalance [April 6]

● **Platform calls for a law on financial inclusion**

Social Platform responds to the Commission's consultation on access to a basic bank account. It calls for a specific EU law on financial inclusion [April 6]

What's this?

● **Platform confronts the crisis in employment**

Social Platform speaks at three high-level Employment Workshops in Madrid, Stockholm and Prague, addressing Employment Ministers from across the EU to prepare a common response to rising joblessness. It puts forward proposals to upgrade worker skills, increase access to jobs and invest in social and health services [April 15, 20, 27]

● **Platform presents its views on the integration of migrants**

Social Platform addresses the European Integration Forum of the Commission in Brussels, calling for an approach to integration based on human rights and for equality between citizens and migrants [April 20]

● **Platform calls for investment in social services**

Social Platform speaks at a ministerial conference on social services in Prague, calling for more investment in these services to recover from the crisis [April 22-23]

Anti-discrimination law

Every day, people in Europe are mistreated because of their disability, age, religion, belief or sexual orientation. Although this kind of discrimination is already prohibited in the workplace, the Commission proposed expanding the law to include all areas of life such as schools, shops and hospitals, and in April 2009 the European Parliament supported this view. If approved by Member States, this new law will enhance the protection of the victims of unfair treatment, no matter where the discrimination takes place.

★ **Key votes**

European Parliament votes on Maternity Leave Directive and Active Inclusion Recommendation [May 6]

What's this?

★ **European elections**

785 MEPs are directly elected to the European Parliament [June 4-7]

What's this?

● **Spring Alliance Consensus Conference**

The Spring Alliance campaign meets with all participating organisations to finalise its common manifesto [June 17]

★ **European Summit**

EU leaders decide a common response to the employment and social crises [June 18-19]

★ **Swedish Presidency starts**

The six-month Swedish Presidency of the EU begins [July 1].

★ **Social Affairs Ministerial Council**

EU Social Affairs ministers meet in Jonkoping, Sweden [July 8-9]

What's this?

Spring Alliance

For the past four years, the EU has had a overarching strategy of "growth and jobs". As a result, EU policy has often put business competitiveness ahead of the welfare of the people of Europe and the sustainability of our planet. In 2009, a new vision for the EU will be adopted by its leaders. Therefore, the European Environmental Bureau, the European Trade Union Confederation and Social Platform have joined forces to form the Spring Alliance, a campaign to push for a new EU strategy that pursues simultaneously economic, environmental and social goals.

Active inclusion

The fight against poverty relies partly on the integration of people excluded from the labour market. In October 2008, the Commission proposed a "recommendation on Active Inclusion", which aims to encourage Member States to develop a strategy that provides an adequate level of income support and better access to services and employment. If implemented by Member States and executed properly, these policies will enable millions of people across the EU to live in dignity free from poverty.

The five-minute interview

Mohammed Aziz, President, European Network Against Racism



Who are you?

I'm the Chair of the European Network Against Racism (ENAR), a network of more than 600 NGOs fighting racism in the EU. I'm also the founder and Director of FaithWise Ltd, a consultancy that offers

legal and policy advice to governments and the private sector on race and faith issues.

How and why did you get involved in the NGO movement?

Although I'd done volunteer work before, I joined the NGO sector full-time ten years ago as a human rights lawyer in the UK. At the time the country had good laws on race discrimination but little to protect the victims of unjust treatment on the grounds of religion (this was felt to be an individual matter and there was little momentum for the state to get involved). I set up the advocacy organisation FAIR (the Forum Against Islamophobia and Racism) to address this problem. I left FAIR in 2005 to start my own consultancy, but continued the

volunteer work. Today I'm active in several UK NGOs as well as government equality bodies. Through my involvement with the UK Race & European Network, I was elected Chair of ENAR.

What's your biggest achievement?

Bringing together the UK's religious groups, its 'belief' groups (such as humanists and secularists) and the lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) lobby to form a common approach to working on equality legislation. This was a challenge and took us several years to develop. But this unlikely partnership resulted in significant legislation including the 2006 Equality Act, which outlawed discrimination on the grounds of religion or sexual orientation in goods and services. Today, these groups have a solid working relationship and meet regularly.

What's your next battle?

In the UK we've achieved strong anti-discrimination legislation and set up institutions like the Equality and Human Rights Commission to monitor how it's implemented. Now we need to replicate this success at European level, for example via the EU's new anti-discrimination

law which is currently under negotiation. This requires building strong alliances with the LGBT groups at EU level but also those who work in the fields of gender and disability.

Name one thing we could all do today to improve European society.

To paraphrase a well-worn quote: think of how you can help society, rather than waiting for society to provide. And then - most importantly - act on it!

Did you know...

In Romania, 1 in 4 people would be "very uncomfortable" having a homosexual as a neighbour



(Source: Eurobarometer, July 2008)



Disabled people represent 50 million people in the European Union (10% of the population)

This is equivalent to the populations of Belgium, the Czech Republic, Greece, Hungary and the Netherlands combined

(Source: Eurostat)

Rising unemployment, low wages and limited prospects result in riots in Thessaloniki, Greece (December 2008)

Source: flickr.com/teacherdudebbq2



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Social Platform is the largest civil society alliance fighting for social justice and participatory democracy in Europe. Consisting of 42 pan-European networks of NGOs, Social Platform campaigns to ensure that EU policies are developed in partnership with the people they affect, respecting fundamental rights, promoting solidarity and improving lives.

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