

## engage

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

Conny Reuter, President of Social Platform (right) with Vladimír Špidla, EU Commissioner for Employment and Social Affairs, at Social Platform's bi-annual meeting with the Commission. The main topic on the agenda: the impact of the economic crisis on employment, which saw its sharpest drop on record for the first quarter of this year (June 2009)

Source: Social Platform

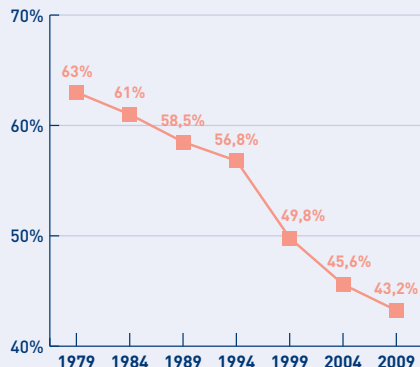


## Our top three achievements

- 1 **April 2009:** Platform confronts the crisis in employment, attending and contributing to three high-level EU Employment Workshops
- 2 **June 2009:** Platform calls for a strong anti-discrimination law, together with trade unions
- 3 **June 2009:** Spring Alliance Manifesto unanimously adopted by the initiators of the campaign: Social Platform, EEB, ETUC and Concord

## Did you know...

Turnout in European elections has been steadily decreasing since 1979



Source: European Parliament, July 2009

## What's next on the agenda

- 1 **September 2009:** Spring Alliance High Level Conference, where partners discuss the Manifesto with key decision makers
- 2 **September 2009:** Platform publishes proposals on the Open Method of Coordination and civil dialogue
- 3 **December 2009:** Negotiations between Member States on the adoption of the Stockholm Programme

## April

★ **European Parliament gives green light on anti-discrimination law**  
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 financial inclusion. It calls for a specific EU law on access to a basic bank account (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 people's skills, increase access to quality jobs, combat poverty 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)

## May

★ **Key votes**  
European Parliament adopts a report on Active Inclusion, but decides not to vote on Maternity Leave Directive, opting instead to renegotiate it in September (May 6)

★ **European Employment Summit**  
Social partners, the Commission and the Prime Ministers of Sweden and Czech Republic meet to discuss the impact of the employment crisis and develop the forthcoming Commission communication on Employment (May 7)

● **Platform lays foundation for civil dialogue**  
Social Platform meets Commission Vice-President Barrot to discuss collaboration with civil society organisations and the future 'Stockholm programme' (May 12)

What's this?

## June

★ **Employment Communication published**  
The Commission publishes its Communication on Employment, setting out concrete actions to manage the impact of the economic crisis on employment (June 3)

★ **European elections**  
785 MEPs are directly elected to the European Parliament. Turn-out is at an all-time low; conservatives gain a majority while far-right parties, the greens and eurosceptics are strengthened (June 4-7)

★ **Social Affairs Council**  
EU Social Affairs ministers adopt conclusions on a variety of issues including social services, inclusion of the Roma and equal opportunities between men and women (June 8)

★ **Commission adopts 'Stockholm Programme'**  
The Commission approves a five-year strategy on freedom, justice and security. It will be debated by Member States in December (June 10)

What's this?

● **Spring Alliance Conference**  
100 members of the Spring Alliance meet to finalise the campaign's Manifesto for a greener and more social Europe (June 17)

What's this?

★ **Agreement on parental leave**  
Trade unions and businesses agree on the revision of the parental leave directive. The law is now put to the European Council for final approval in December (June 17)

★ **European Summit**  
EU leaders agree to nominate José Manuel Barroso as the next President of the Commission, and put forward a plan to regulate financial markets (June 18-19)

● **Platform and trade unions call for a strong anti-discrimination law**  
At an EU conference on anti-discrimination in Budapest, Hungary, Social Platform and ETUC demand a strong directive to protect people from discrimination (June 25-26)

What's this?

## July

★ **Swedish Presidency starts**  
The six-month Swedish Presidency of the EU begins (July 1)

★ **Social Affairs Ministerial Council**  
Social Platform addresses the 27 EU Ministers of Employment and Social in Jönköping, Sweden, calling for reinforced solidarity in society (July 8-9)

★ **European Parliament's first plenary**  
The Commission President presents his programme for the coming five years (July 13-17)

★ **Informal Justice and Home Affairs Council**  
Justice and Home Affairs Ministers discuss the five-year 'Stockholm programme' (July 15-17)

What's this?

## August

● **Platform publishes proposals on OMC and civil dialogue**  
Platform releases two sets of recommendations: on how to improve the Open Method of Coordination and reinforce civil dialogue (September)

What's this?

● **Platform study visit**  
Ahead of the Spanish presidency, Social Platform organises a visit to Spain to strengthen links between Spanish civil society and European NGO networks (September 7-8)

● **Spring Alliance High Level Conference**  
Spring Alliance partners discuss the Manifesto with President Barroso and other key decision makers (September 28)

What's this?

## September

### 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.

### Financial inclusion

Financial inclusion involves enabling all groups of society, including the most disadvantaged, to have access to a basic bank account and financial services. This is particularly important because without a bank account it's virtually impossible in the EU to sign a contract for a job or pay rent, energy bills or other living costs.

### Stockholm programme

The Stockholm Programme is to define the framework for EU police, criminal and civil law cooperation, asylum, migration and visa policy for the period 2010-2014. The Programme will be discussed at the informal ministerial meeting in Stockholm in July 2009 and ultimately adopted by EU Heads of State and Government at the Summit in December 2009.

### 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.

### Open Method of Coordination

The Open Method of Coordination provides a new framework for cooperation between the Member States, whose national policies can thus be directed towards certain common objectives. Under this intergovernmental method, the Member States are evaluated by one another (peer pressure), with the Commission's role being limited to surveillance.

Source: European Commission

What's this?

# The five-minute interview

Erny Gillen, President, Caritas Europa



## Who are you?

I'm the President of Caritas Europa, a European confederation of Catholic relief, development and social service organisations operating across Europe. I'm also working as President of Caritas Luxembourg, as

well as teaching Theological Ethics and fulfilling my duties as a priest.

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

I was born into a worker's family in Luxembourg, and during the 'steel crisis' I got an early impression of how it can feel to be treated unfairly. From the age of 9 I was active in the movement of Young Christian Workers (YCW), and at 17 I started volunteering at holiday camps run by Caritas Luxembourg for the poor and disadvantaged. I quickly learned that the prejudices about poverty in our society – the fear that those experiencing it could be bad people or even violent – were hiding the real faces of people in need. The children at these camps made a deep impression on me and I wanted to devote myself to helping them. I continued working there throughout my theology studies, joined Caritas Luxembourg full-time and rose to the position of President of Caritas Luxembourg and later also of Caritas Europa.

## What's your biggest achievement?

Strengthening the internal network of Caritas Europa. It's a broad organisation, with members of varying sizes – from a handful of people in Andorra to 500,000 full-time employees in Germany. We set out to implement a com-

mon set of management standards to improve how the organisation is governed and run, and to ensure that the Caritas name stands for quality and the efficient delivery of services to those that need it. The process is ongoing; we've adopted the standards Europe-wide and are now in a phase of national ratification. This should lead to the running of peer-review schemes next year, so our different member organisations can learn from each other and improve how they work, using the standards as a guide.

## What's your next battle?

Poverty and homelessness are increasing; this is forcing us to question how social services are delivered. We need to totally reinvent the aid system to enable so-called 'marginalised people' to once again truly manage their own lives, and to shift the role of the social worker from someone who delivers aid to more of a facilitator of integration and social cohesion, at the service of the whole of society – not just of those living in poverty. At Caritas, we've kicked off this process by deepening the involvement of our 'clients' (the people we're helping) in improving how the aid is delivered. It's a first step in what will be a long process, but a necessary one.

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

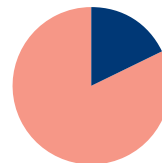
Behave as a citizen of Europe should – by participating in debates, and expressing your opinion on European society. This can be done via civil society organisations, but also don't underestimate the mechanisms that the Commission offers for feedback and discussion. They do exist – but are sadly very under-used by Europe's citizens.

**A homeless woman in Riga, Latvia. The country is one of the most affected by the global economic crisis**

Source:  
Rudi Roels -  
flickr.com/  
rudiroels



## Did you know...



**In Romania, 82% of Roma families lack running water**

Source: Open Society Institute, 2006

**In the EU, 1 in 10 positions on company boards are held by women**



Source: European Professional Women's Network, 2009

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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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