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The Social Agenda: Transform the package into a pact

Social Platform contribution to the Informal Meeting of Employment and Social Affairs Ministers Chantilly, 10-11 July 2008

What we think

- We welcome the adoption of the so-called "social package"
- We view the package as a recognition by the European Commission that its agenda was unbalanced and that this needed to be addressed
- With 16% of the EU population living in or at risk of poverty, increasing food and energy prices, persistent discrimination and a decline in support for the European Union, the proposals contained in the renewed social agenda were badly needed
- We agree with much of the analysis included in the renewed social agenda and we are pleased with the emphasis on targets for poverty reduction and the decision to address discrimination through a legislative proposal
- However we are concerned that on the eve of European elections this "patchwork" of measures will not be enough to regain the confidence of European citizens
- We trust that the French Presidency, Member States and the European Parliament will use the follow-up to the renewed social agenda to strengthen the social consensus necessary for Europe to advance

What we propose

- Transform this package into a Social Pact alongside the Gender and Youth Pacts
- This pact could take the form of a Council commitment to make social progress central to the EU project by mainstreaming social issues in all EU policies, restoring the balance between social rights and market freedoms, fighting discrimination and promoting equality, and strengthening social infrastructure and services of general interest
- For this pact to generate a new consensus across Europe it needs to be negotiated in a fully participatory way, together with all key actors and in particular civil society organisations



The Social Platform's responses to the background paper

On globalisation and climate change

What we think

- "Growth and jobs" as the overarching EU strategy is too narrow an approach to address the challenges that the EU and the world are facing
- The EU must reverse the trends that are destroying our planet and its inhabitants in Europe and beyond, and propose a model for globalisation based on sustainable and social development

What we propose

- Merge the Lisbon "growth and jobs" strategy with the renewed EU sustainable development strategy
- Develop new indicators to go beyond GDP and to measure social and environmental progress
- Make decent work and respect for ILO conventions a cornerstone of European internal and external policies
- Use European job quality indicators as a scoreboard in the Lisbon strategy

On demographic challenges and the evolution of activity throughout life

What we think

- Solidarity is essential to maintain and strengthen the cohesion of European society
- Solidarity is not just an individual responsibility but a political commitment to tackle structural inequalities and ensure the dignity of all people through redistribution mechanisms
- Social protection systems and the provision of services of general interest are some of the concrete responses that Member States and people have developed to put solidarity into practice
- These social infrastructures need to be supported, rather than undermined, at the European level

What we propose

- Adopt EU common principles for inter- and intra-generational solidarity and report on what is done at national level to support solidarity and redistribute wealth
- Ensure that a legislative proposal is made before the end of 2008 on a better reconciliation between private and professional life
- Strengthen the social indicators and the participation of civil society to measure in a succinct way the impact of internal market regulation on services of general interest
- Expand the work on quality social services to health services
- Assess whether the objectives of the proposed cross-border health care directive could not be achieved through the existing regulation coordinating social security systems rather than by adopting a text that could increase inequalities in access to health services within and between Member States



On the need to define ways of ensuring social cohesion and non-discrimination

What we think

- Equality and social justice are at the heart of the European project
- Conditions are worsening for many people across Europe particularly in light of the recent rises in food and energy prices
- By taking actions in this field the EU comes closer to the interests and concerns of a vast majority of the population
- Some of today's immigration policies, both nationally and at the European level (e.g. the Return Directive), constitute a serious backlash to European values and limit the international credibility of the EU and its Member States as champions of human rights

What we propose

- Adopt active inclusion principles based on the universal right to a life in dignity, adequate minimum income and active participation in society
- Adopt before the end of 2008 meaningful EU targets to reduce poverty
- Adopt an EU anti discrimination directive with the same scope as in the Race Equality Directive (2000/43/EC) and covering age, disability, religion and belief and sexual orientation
- Improve the Commission's legislative proposal by ensuring that it is consistent with international obligations and by removing or strictly limiting the exception clauses that are contrary to the principle of equal treatment in the areas of education, financial services, healthcare, marital and family status and the activities of private individuals
- Add a provision on multiple discrimination to ensure an effective protection of all victims
- Make a commitment to level up by 2010 the gender equality legislation to ensure the same level of protection than all the other grounds covered in the Article 13 TCE
- Build on last year's JUMBO summit and establish the principle of a shared competence between employment and social affairs ministers and interior ministers on European immigration policies. This is needed to ensure that these policies work as a means of strengthening social cohesion and inclusion and encouraging the integration and participation of migrants in our societies.

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The Social Platform is the alliance of representative European federations and networks of non-governmental organisations active in the social sector. The Social Platform promotes social justice and participatory democracy in the European Union. Together we work to build a united, strong European social NGO sector, and to create a European Union based upon our common values.