9 Challenges for the Polish Presidency
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SOLIDAR is a European network of 56 NGOs working to advance social justice in Europe and worldwide.

SOLIDAR lobbies the EU and international institutions in three primary areas: social affairs, international cooperation and education.

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1 July marks the beginning of Poland’s Presidency of the Council of the European Union. Donald Tusk, Polish Prime Minister, in his statement to the European Parliament, recalled that when Poland was living under martial law in the 1980s, the European Parliament sent clear signals of solidarity which helped the transition from Communist rule, and that this same solidarity now needs to be shared with Greece. He also called for more Europe, opposing border control and for more integration as a response to the crisis.

SOLIDAR strongly supports these statements. Nonetheless the consequences of the austerity measures being implemented by Member States, and which are widely promoted by the European Institutions, are having a direct impact on the most vulnerable in Europe. In addition, the speculation against larger EU countries, the Euro, and the European project as a whole are leading to a weakening of the union.

We need to defend a strong European project by strengthening social cohesion in Europe. The European Union is more than a market. We need a Europe which is economically, socially and territorially cohesive, that promotes the full economic, social, political and cultural participation of all in society. Active citizenship and social inclusion are of utmost importance if we want EU citizens to stand together in times of crisis.

This Presidency has to be more ambitious in implementing the social and education objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy aiming to reduce unemployment, combat poverty and social exclusion as well as enhancing socially and economically sustainable development.

Outside of Europe, there is a lack of priorities going further afield than Eastern Partnership countries. It is crucial that Europe stands in solidarity with countries around the world and keeps its commitment to achieve the Millennium Development Goals.

With the current debate on the future on EU migration policy sparked by the recent migration flows from North Africa, we need to ensure that a rights-based approach to migration is encouraged and that we address the roots of the cause of migration by supporting a democratic and social development in North Africa and Arab Countries.

Nowadays, as the EU is closer to the idea of a Financial Transaction Tax, the Europe-wide tax on the financial sector, the Polish Presidency should encourage the G20 presidency and other G20 countries to join the EU effort to implement the tax as soon as possible.

Finally, it is crucial that national governments and civil society work together in genuine partnership to realise policy goals which develop a proper governance model that engages civil society organisations in an enhanced structured dialogue at the EU level.

Conny Reuter
Secretary General
1. CHANGE THE GROWTH PARADIGM – PROVIDE FINANCIAL MEANS FOR SOCIAL PROGRESS

The Europe 2020 Strategy has three priorities: smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Complemented by the Employment Guidelines, the last priority sets clear employment, poverty reduction and social inclusion targets to be implemented through several flagship initiatives. In addition, primary law such as the horizontal objectives of the Lisbon Treaty and the EU’s Charter of Fundamental Rights commit EU decision makers to promote high levels of employment, education and training, adequate social protection, social inclusion and human health.

Yet, current EU policies to overcome the economic crisis focus on increased competitiveness and a rigid application of the Stability and Growth Pact. They lack not only a cohesive approach and in-depth social impact assessments but also an answer on how the fruit of growth can be shared equally. While this continues to hamper the situation of the most vulnerable groups, it also fails to develop a market that serves the people and contributes to general social prosperity and well-being.

Policies such as long-term sustainable public finances, investment in affordable high quality public services and infrastructure, in the creation of quality employment as well as poverty-proof minimum income schemes have a significant impact on social inclusion, decent income, labour market participation, quality education, work-life balance and wealth redistribution.

SOLIDAR therefore calls on the Polish EU Presidency to:

- Reflect the social objectives of the Europe 2020 Strategy and Employment Guidelines 7 and 10 of the Lisbon Treaty and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights in the next Multiannual Financial Framework by dedicating a specific budget heading to them, and integrating them into the other budget headings, allocating sufficient funding to ensure their fulfillment.

- Reduce social inequalities within the EU and among certain groups of people through European Cohesion Policy and especially the European Social Fund (ESF). The next ESF programming period should support all dimensions of social inclusion to enhance decent work, quality employment and competence development, combat poverty, social exclusion and discrimination. This can only be guaranteed by providing sufficient funding and by earmarking budget for the ESF within the EU Structural Funds allocated to the Member States. Additionally, there is a need for clear spending targets as well as evidence-based evaluation mechanisms that provide a visible demonstration to citizens of the added-value of the EU budget.

- Enhance socially and ecologically sustainable economic development, providing social impact assessments and coherency across all relevant policy fields. This includes the implementation of the active inclusion recommendation aiming to guarantee access to decent work, available and affordable quality social services and infrastructures and a poverty-proof minimum income. This aim must be reflected in the next cycle of economic policy coordination, the European Semester, and Annual Growth Survey which should develop a long-term perspective taking into account externalised social costs stemming from rigid budgetary discipline, harsh austerity policies, more flexible labour markets and wage cuts.

- Make clear reference and commitments to work towards strengthening the social dimension of the internal market - as made in the Monti Report on the Single Market - (i.e. labour rights, quality social and healthcare services, socially and ecologically sustainable public procurement rules, state aid rules). In this context, SOLIDAR calls for legislative recognition and protection of the specific character of Social Services of General Interest (SSGI) as well as the wide discretion of national, regional and local authorities in providing, commissioning and organising social services as close as possible to the needs of the users.

- In addition to promoting SMEs, recognise and support the contribution made by the social economy in achieving the Europe 2020 objectives, particularly in the area of
increasing employment and reducing poverty and social exclusion. This includes the need for a European Statute for foundations, cooperatives, mutual associations and associations to optimise their functioning and facilitate their development within the Single Market, in particular regarding cross-border activities. Further, when planning the EU Social Business Act, for-profit and not-for-profit organisations must not be confused, and the different nature and social sustainability of their motivations, measures and objectives have to be taken into account.

2. REINSTATE ‘SOCIAL’ SECURITY CONCERNS

Following ‘European Integration as a source of growth’, the second Presidency priority is a more ‘Secure Europe’, whereby ‘security’ is intended to be applied in macroeconomic, energy, Common Agricultural Policy and defense policies. In this context and against the background of the competitiveness pact and flexicurity debate, SOLIDAR points out that one crucial area of security has been disregarded: the social one, with social rights and protection at its core.

SOLIDAR therefore calls on the Polish EU Presidency to:

- Counterbalance national flexicurity arrangements which have proven to be an inappropriate and unsustainable means to combating precarious employment and reducing unemployment. Poverty-preventing social security schemes are a prerequisite for a socially sustainable economy, an integrated labour market and for enabling people to alternate, in a freely-chosen and flexible way, between periods of employment and unemployment, training and re-skilling. Where socially counterbalanced flexicurity measures are applied, they should be agreed within the context of social dialogue, properly monitored, balanced in their overall components and adapted to national realities.

- Support strong social protection schemes, in line with the European Platform Against Poverty flagship and in line with the Active Inclusion Strategy, as a basic human right, social need and an economic necessity. An individually granted, poverty-proof minimum income is fundamental to ensure a dignified life and a stake in social cohesion? providing individuals with the financial means to fully develop their potential and participate in the democratic shaping of society.

3. GENUINE PARTNERSHIP WITH CIVIL SOCIETY

With cooperation between the public sector and civil society being one of the social priorities of the Polish EU Presidency, SOLIDAR highlights the importance of a genuine partnership with civil society organisations.

SOLIDAR therefore calls on the Polish EU Presidency to:

- Engage social civil society organisations in an enhanced structured dialogue at EU level, with consultations prior to the adoption of legislative proposals, during their implementation and in their evaluation.

- Implement a new partnership approach involving different stakeholders and people - workers in precarious working conditions, working-poor, people experiencing or at risk of poverty, targeted groups such as young people and migrant workers - to be involved in decision-making processes affecting them. With this aim, resources should be invested into deepening mutual learning in participation practices and good governance, identifying guidelines to facilitate the engagement of relevant stakeholders and the development/monitoring of these plans.

- The recognition of volunteering in all its forms, to acknowledge its value and to provide support within an appropriate legal framework, for instance in terms of taxation and expense reimbursement. Voluntary activities are a tangible expression of participatory democracy. During its Presidency, Poland has to make the most out of the European Year of
Volunteering 2011. SOLIDAR recommends empowering volunteers and civil society organisations, providing solutions to challenges faced in funding activities and in the training of volunteers.

4. PROMOTE A GLOBAL SOCIAL PROTECTION FLOOR

The International Labour Organisation (ILO) estimates that the global financial crisis alone could have pushed 200 million people into poverty and is wiping out some of the progress made in achieving the Millennium Development Goals.

Despite the widespread acceptance that countries that had effective and efficient social security systems in place before the crisis hit were much better equipped to cope with its fallout, only 20% of the world’s population has adequate social protection coverage.

Investment in a basic level of social protection for all is not just a basic human right and a social need, but an economic necessity. Social protection does more than provide a safety net for countries, communities, families and individuals, it is part of a comprehensive approach to getting people out of poverty, allowing them not only to benefit from growth, but also to productively take part in growth. Most importantly, it is affordable: with only 2 per cent of global GDP, all of the world’s poor could be provided with a basic level of social protection. This basic level of social protection would make the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) a tangible reality by enabling those living in poverty to access vital education and health services and the employment opportunities to create a sustainable future for themselves and their families.

SOLIDAR and its partners in the Global Network in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Middle East call on the Polish EU Presidency to:

- Support the UN Social Protection Floor Initiative and incorporate the initiative into development strategies, that it guides policy advice and technical assistance to developing countries. More specifically, the Presidency should support the Communication on social protection in development cooperation tied to a concrete, time-bound action plan with dedicated resources.

- Provide technical and financial support to the development and implementation of nationally-driven, universal, social protection systems.

- In forthcoming G20 meetings, to support the initiative for a Financial transaction tax as an innovative way to raise financial resources to support the set up of a basic social security floor in developing countries;

- Acknowledge the indispensable role that civil society organisations have to play in ensuring vulnerable groups such as informal workers have access to a basic level of social protection and in holding governments to account where they fail to implement their commitments on social protection.

- The forthcoming G20 in France will be an important test for the Polish Presidency and the Troika to demonstrate how serious the EU commitment to eradicate poverty is as well the political will to change the system which caused the crises (privatisation of redistributive policies through the credit system).

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1 European University Institute, European Report on Development 2010
2 European Working Group on Social Protection and Decent Work and the Grow Up Free from Poverty Coalition (2010)
5. PROMOTE EDUCATION AND LIFELONG LEARNING

In May 2009, the Council adopted five EU benchmarks for 2020 for education and training; one of which states that an average of at least 15% of adults should participate in lifelong learning. 77 million Europeans aged 25-64 (close to 30%) still have at most lower secondary education and only 9.5% of this age group participated in education or training in 2008, lagging behind the 2010 benchmark of 12.5%. Those with low qualifications are also much less likely to participate in up-skilling and lifelong learning.

Lifelong learning is recognised as a key factor for growth, jobs and social inclusion in the Europe 2020 flagship initiatives: “An agenda for new skills and jobs”, “European platform against poverty and social exclusion” and “Youth on the Move”. However the role of education and training should not be reduced to being just a tool for raising people’s employability and a strategy to exit the recession.

SOLIDAR therefore calls on the Polish EU Presidency to:

- Support people in accessing the labour market by empowering them to realise new life opportunities: avoiding social exclusion and taking part in education and training, with special attention given to adult education.
- Encourage Member States to integrate transversal key competences for personal fulfillment and development, active citizenship and employment (such as creativity, cultural awareness and intercultural capacities, mobility, social and democratic competences) into national vocational and lifelong learning policies, as well as stressing the importance of promoting both “hard” and “soft” skills to improve peoples’ life opportunities.
- Promote the necessity of improving the mutual recognition and valorisation of skills and competences acquired through non-formal education and diplomas in Member States.
- Follow the Council’s work plan and continue the work done by the previous EU Presidencies focusing on the implementation of the strategic framework for European cooperation in education and training – Education and Training 2020 (ET2020) - as well as to start the discussion on the priorities of the second cycle of the strategic framework.

6. PROMOTE A RIGHTS-BASED APPROACH TO MIGRATION

The recent migration flows from North Africa to Italy and Malta have sparked a debate on the future of EU migration policy that is oriented towards border security and skilled migration. The European Commission Communications of 4 and 24 May 2011 advocate a strengthening of the EU border agency Frontex, promoting blue card migration in addition to fighting irregular migration as well as strongly emphasising bilateralism, conditionality for mobility, border control, re-admission and return facilities as priorities of engagement with the Southern Mediterranean.

This debate culminates in considerations of reviewing the Schengen agreement towards reintroducing internal border controls in the case of emergency. As with the above-mentioned narrow focus on border security and skilled, this paradigm shift questioning an essential symbol for freedom of mobility and European integration is unwarranted. Only a fraction of the migration flows recently occurring in North Africa were directed towards Europe (38,000 compared to a total of 1,000,000 to Tunisia and Egypt). In addition, there is a danger that this debate is hijacked by xenophobic far-right political parties, as the recent example of Denmark reintroducing regular internal border controls clearly indicates. In the context of these developments, migrant rights, lack of development and decent work opportunities as push factors for migration as well as the living and work conditions of irregular migrants already in Europe are often overlooked.

SOLIDAR therefore calls on the Polish EU Presidency to:

To broaden the focus and scope of EU migration policy by:

- Promoting a coherent rights-based EU approach to migration and ensuring the portability and exports of rights (social rights) in circular migration.
- Clearly prioritising the push factors for migration as well as policy coherence for development and decent work dimensions in multilateral mobility partnerships to be negotiated in the future as well as the upcoming review of the Global Approach to Migration (GAM).
- Actively promoting Member State solidarity in burden sharing and assuming humanitarian responsibilities as well as to clearly discourage debates on enhanced border security at the expense of rights and EU common values.

To promote the rights and interests of migrants by:
- Enhancing the protection of migrant workers by urging EU Member States to ratify and implement the ILO Convention 189 on Domestic Workers and Recommendation.

7. **TAKE INTO ACCOUNT SOCIO-ECONOMIC NEEDS OF PEOPLE IN EASTERN PARTNERSHIP**

In May 2011 the European Commission adopted the Communication spelling out six core pillars of the renewed European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) first launched in 2004: 1) support the progress towards ‘deep democracy’, 2) intensify political and security cooperation, 3) support sustainable economic and social development, 4) establish Mobility Partnerships, 5) strengthen the Eastern Partnership and building a Partnership for Democracy and Shared Prosperity in the southern Mediterranean and finally to 6) transfer an additional €1,240 million from existing resources to the €5700 million already available for 2011-2013.

The Commission also proposed to reinforce partnerships with people and societies, sustainable and inclusive growth, and to provide additional support for democratic transition by establishing a dedicated Civil Society Facility, Endowment for Democracy and a Facility for agriculture and rural development.

SOLIDAR therefore calls on the Polish EU Presidency to:
- Ensure that the proposed “financial mechanisms” are formulated in line with the principle that social cohesion, social inclusion and job creation are strengthened in order to answer the socio-economic needs of people.
- Encourage the new “financial mechanisms” to be developed in close partnership with NGOs, think tanks and social partners in order to guarantee their effectiveness and maximise their impact.

8. **SUPPORT DEMOCRATIC AND SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN NORTHERN AFRICA AND ARAB COUNTRIES**

The 2011 events and reform processes taking place in North Africa and the Arab world represent a historical milestone for the region’s democratic and social development. In all countries, the transformations at stake will only make sense if accompanied by economic and social development for all. Particular attention ought to be given to creating jobs and redressing imbalances between people. Civil Society has a fundamental role to play in the democratic and development processes in order to ensure the respect of human rights and provide equitable opportunities for all people to live in dignity.

SOLIDAR therefore calls on the Polish EU Presidency to:
- Support democratic transformation in the southern Mediterranean countries ensuring strong cooperation and supportive links with civil society organisations at both European and local levels who are leading the ongoing social, economic and political transformation processes.
- Ensure that all European policies towards the southern Mediterranean countries are based on the principles of justice and solidarity, promoting international cooperation, education and social protection, values that are crucial to SOLIDAR and its members.
• Commits to increase its support efforts to educate and raise awareness among EU citizens in order to promote a model of co-existence between cultures that encourages respect for human rights. The vision and message sent by the EU should move away from fears on migration towards rethinking the EU’s partnership with North African countries to enhance cohesion and solidarity.

9. IMPLEMENT A FINANCIAL TRANSACTION TAX

The EU is coming closer to the idea of a Financial Transaction Tax which is the only form of financial sector taxation that can both dampen speculation on financial markets and raise substantial revenue to finance development, environmental and social issues.

Recently, both Commissioner Algirdas Šemeta, who is expected to deliver a legislative proposal after the summer, and President Barroso in his recent statement before the EU Council, talked specifically about a Financial Transaction Tax. The Polish Presidency will therefore not be deciding whether or not to implement an FTT but rather determining how fast the implementation of such a tax should take. Further, there will be various opportunities to win more allies around the world for this tax, like for example at the 2011 G20 in Cannes.

SOLIDAR therefore calls on the Polish EU Presidency to:

• Ensure that both the impact assessment and the legislative proposal takes into account the recent studies published on the issue of financial transaction tax by Austrian Institute of Economic Research and by the Institute for Development Studies (June and May 2011 respectively). They should further take into account the various responses sent to the Commission during the consultation period in April 2011.

• Encourage the G20 presidency and other G20 countries to join the EU in its effort to implement the tax as soon as possible.