



SOLIDAR conference

“Together for a Social Europe”

Background Paper

Paris, 25 June 2008

2009 – A decisive year for Europe and Europe’s citizens

The **Lisbon Treaty**, solemnly signed in December 2007, is currently under ratification throughout Europe. The regulations of the Lisbon Treaty to build upon a more social Europe and the instruments put in place to promote civil dialogue and participatory democracy will have to be broadly and proactively used to help making a more social and just Europe a reality. With the Irish NO-Vote in the referendum held mid of June its fate is unclear, although 18 out of 27 countries already have pronounced a YES.

Even though it will not take effect begin of 2009 it might still influence the future of Europe as the legal and policy framework to further develop the **European Social Model**. In SOLIDAR’s view it builds on common values such as the respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. It becomes a reality in societies in which pluralism, non-discrimination, tolerance, justice, solidarity and equality between women and men prevail. The Lisbon Treaty is a valuable starting point to promote our aims and values. They, however, need to be fleshed out, these values and the regulations of the Lisbon Treaty promoting a social and citizenship dimension have to be defended and promoted in future political debates.

The European elections, to be held in June 2009, will be equally important for European citizens and civil society. People’s votes will determine the composition and the political majorities of the European Parliament which, based on the Lisbon Treaty, will see its competencies strengthened. National parliaments will have slightly longer delays to issue their opinion on European legislation in subsidiarity-related matters. The Lisbon Treaty also incorporates the principle of participatory democracy, strengthening the **civil dialogue** and the right of petition at European level. SOLIDAR member organisations are confronted with the challenge to build up capacities to more effectively make use of this channel at national and European level.

Building cohesive, inclusive and solidarity societies across Europe

Our **European societies** are **facing identical challenges** and are **confronted with similar problems**. Let’s only mention a few: 1) The social and demographic change and related new needs, in particular in caring for children, elderly persons or handicapped persons to support families or to step in where family support is only partially or not possible. 2) Labour market inclusion, also of disadvantaged persons or groups. 3) How to guarantee access to life-long

learning? 4) A growing number of working poor due to growing shares of precarious, temporary and/or low paid work. 5) Non-discrimination and equal opportunities for all. 6) Increased migration flows to and inside Europe, implying supportive integration policies, but e.g. also diversity management in the provision of personal social services. 7) We already today become increasingly aware of the social consequences of climate change. 8) Finally and somehow summarising the issues listed above: **How to safeguard decent working and living conditions for all?**

Progressive forces, citizens and civil society organisations across Europe, amongst them SOLIDAR members, should actively make use of different channels amongst them new instruments at European level to make their voices better heard and to defend their values and views on **how our societies and a Social Europe** should look like. Several amongst them currently are involved in processes to define and promote their view of a society based on solidarity, equality, justice and fundamental rights and to set out strategies and concrete steps on how to **make our European societies both inclusive and cohesive**. Also building on these processes trans-national events of the SOLIDAR network are crucial to shape a common understanding of our views of a Social Europe, on joint priorities and common objectives and on pathways how to get there.

SOLIDAR members are close to the needs, expectations and concerns of European citizens

In dealing with challenges and problems as sketched out above, social NGOs have particular strengths and can play an important role. They are **at the fore-front of experiencing social changes and social risks**, based on community-based, neighbourhood or local social work. SOLIDAR member organisations work with poor, disadvantaged persons and support vulnerable groups aiming at their empowerment. They also provide personal social services to a broad range of citizens along their life course, knowing about the importance of social mix. They involve volunteers and build on active citizenship of their members. This taken together, they are **close to the needs, expectations and concerns of people across Europe**.

SOLIDAR key messages

With this resolution and based on conclusions from the Paris conference “Together for a Social Europe” – the third in a series of trans-national conferences and linking to the statements of the 2006 Vienna and 2007 Berlin events in the framework of the “Save our Social Europe’ campaign” – **SOLIDAR wants to deliver a powerful message to the French EU Council Presidency, to the Czech and Swedish EU Council Presidencies during 2009, to European institutions and to governments** across Europe:

- A Europe building on fundamental rights, solidarity, justice, equality, non-discrimination, on fair life chances and decent working conditions for all, on the full societal inclusion and participation of all citizens and on sustainable development is possible.
- It is close to the expectations, needs and aspirations of (the large majority of) European citizens.
- SOLIDAR calls upon the French EU Council Presidency in the second semester of 2008, on the Czech and Swedish EU Council Presidencies during 2009, on European institutions and on policy makers and governments across Europe to **make clear commitments to a Social Europe** and to **deliver on concrete legislation, on tangible, coherent and co-ordinated policies** and on tailor-made programmes and actions supportive of this overarching goal.

Together for a Social Europe!

1. European Social Model – Lisbon Treaty – Civil Dialogue

- SOLIDAR favourably accompanied the processes of the European Conventions to elaborate the Charter of Fundamental Rights and a Constitutional Treaty for Europe.
- SOLIDAR shares the core values of Europe as enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty and acknowledges regulations and instruments supportive of a strengthened social Europe.
 - The Charter of Fundamental Rights, in particular in view of individual and collective labour rights, social protection, health care and SGI and the rights of children, of elderly persons and of handicapped persons;
 - The horizontal social objectives, non-discrimination and gender equality;
 - Art. 14 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU (TFEU) confirming the shared responsibilities of the Member States and the EU to set up conditions for a smooth and effective functioning of services of general (economic) interest, also including social, health, employment, and education services and the Protocol No. 9 on Services of General Interest;
 - The strengthened Open Method of Co-ordination (OMC) on social protection and social inclusion;
 - The Lisbon Treaty also incorporates the principle of participatory democracy, strengthening the civil dialogue and the right of petition at European level.
- It is crucial to rebalance economic and social objectives; the fundamental freedoms of the internal market, in particular the right to provide services and the right of establishment, must not prevail over fundamental rights of EU citizens as laid down in the Lisbon Treaty and the Charter of Fundamental Rights
- Policies should be supportive of inclusive and cohesive societies and sustainable social protection schemes, building on social infrastructures and investments in people
- Policies need to put a particular emphasis on the issues of the (re)distribution of wealth, also effectively reducing the transmission of social risks, and the more equal distribution of life chances in society from the start and across the different life cycles. They have to actively fight all forms of discrimination.
- In designing, implementing and evaluating policies at European and national level, civil society organisations should play a decisive role in partnership with other stakeholders. In order to make this happen civil dialogue, i.e. the full regular and structured involvement of civil society organisations, should be a key element of governance.
- The role of volunteers and their contribution to social cohesion and a realisation of active citizenship need to be fully recognised and further promoted.

2. Social infrastructures and (Social) Services of General Interest

- Our European societies need sustainable social infrastructures (social protection schemes; services of general interest) with strong elements of solidarity, important shares of collective financing and building on the responsibility and political decisions of the competent public authorities.
- Social services of general interest (SSGI) have not just – or not primarily – an economic nature, but a social and political nature as well, with the latter being largely shaped at local level by local conditions and culture. The concept of general interest needs to be brought back to/strengthened in the debate around SSGI at EU level as the point of departure and of main reference. General interest concerns/objectives have to prevail in case of conflict with Community competition, state aid, public procurement or internal market rules.
- SSGI help realise fundamental rights and a broad array of objectives of social, health, employment and housing policy, they are institutionally embedded into social protection schemes and mainly financed by taxes and social security contributions. SOLIDAR recalls the need to elaborate a policy and legal framework at Community level which recognises the

specificities of SSGI and their users and which is supportive of quality services and an orientation towards users' needs and expectations.

- SOLIDAR supports competition in a 'social market' if it is based on quality and not on price, if organised on a level playing field applicable to all types of providers and if taking into account the positive effects of services provided by social economy organisations and civil society, also involving volunteers and therefore implying active citizenship.
- As a starting point for the development on common principles for social services SOLIDAR considers rather undisputed that European citizens need accessible, affordable and quality social services SOLIDAR would welcome if the European Commission could take on board already available knowledge from and results of ongoing own-initiative processes of European social NGOS to define quality principles and a European quality principle framework and could refer to them in own strategies and initiatives to foster the elaboration of European-level quality principles, guidelines or requirements. SOLIDAR is looking forward to participate in and contribute to such initiatives.
- A clear description of quality principles for the provision of social services is necessary to ensure high-quality services for everyone. This does not mean a harmonisation of quantitative standards in Europe; as such a development would most surely lead to the undermining and lowering of existing standards in a number of Member States. SOLIDAR's request to work on quality principles, guidelines or requirements throughout the EU.
- SOLIDAR advocates for a broad understanding and concept of quality of (personal) social services. Central elements for safeguarding quality social services are 1) the combination of a diversity of socio-pedagogic and caring approaches and methods, 2) the implementation of quality management processes and systems, 3) a focus on processes and outcomes, 4) a monitoring of effects and impacts, 5) user orientation, i.e. taking into account users' needs when designing and implementing social services, 6) the involvement of volunteers, 7) an embeddedness of social service provision in local communities and 8) partnership and co-operation between funding agencies and providers of social services

3. Building Inclusive and Cohesive Societies – Migration and Integration

- People should have the right to a guaranteed minimum income independently of the chances of participation in the labour market or previous employment tracks. SOLIDAR calls for minimum income rule which do not stigmatise people concerned by forcing them into low labour rights, low pay, low employment stability and low professional training level jobs. Minimum income should be defined on the basis of individual rights and attributed on an individual basis in order to ensure equality between men and women, to avoid dependencies and to strengthen the position of children and handicapped persons in families.
- Flexicurity policies should be designed in a way so as not to increase insecurity for more vulnerable groups in relation to the labour market, including the group of "working poor". SOLIDAR also emphasises the need to devise flexicurity strategies taking due account of the essential elements of investment in services of general interest and in education, training and life-long learning. The concept of decent work needs to be a clear point of reference in the debate on the reform of labour law.
- Vulnerable unemployed groups need more support in the transition to stable employment and non-precarious jobs. SOLIDAR calls for policies comprising personalised accompanying measures, in particular for multiple disadvantaged persons, as well as tailored professional training and other measures of life-long learning to empower their users and to promote improved participation in society with a mid- and long-term perspective. Policies favouring labour market inclusion should also entail measures to directly address inequalities and discrimination in recruitment and access to training.
- SOLIDAR supports social policy to be adapted to the multi-dimensional nature of poverty and social exclusion. Social NGOs have an important role to play at the interface between labour market integration and personal social services and in view of catering for comprehensive

and integrated service provision adapted to multiple needs as this corresponds to an holistic and person-oriented approach to social problems and needs across the life cycle.

- A fundamental rights-based approach to migration and integration is necessary: treat migrants not only as mere economic components, but as human beings with equal rights to EU citizens. Issues such as low pay, low status, unsociable hours, lacking or insufficient social protection linked to jobs in some sectors where the EU is experiencing staff shortages, such as in long-term care with increasing numbers of undocumented migrants, have to be tackled. Migrants and EU citizens alike should be offered good working conditions and social protection including in the health and care sector.

4. Decent Work and Decent Life

At this crucial stage of European integration process with an enlarged Europe still looking for a more effective decision making process, and with a difficult Treaty ratification process, Europe needs more than ever to have a vision for the future, a vision to push Europe ahead. The Decent Work Agenda provides a vision which is grounded in the daily life of women and men and in the values of freedom, equity, security and dignity.

For that we ask the French EU Council Presidency, European institutions and policy makers and governments across Europe to be the promoter of this vision and commit itself to:

- Put Decent Work – access to employment, social protection coverage, workers' rights, social dialogue – at the heart of economic and employment policies in order to build more balanced and secure societies.
- Refocus social and economic policies on the creation of decent work. The dramatic number of working poor in Europe has widely demonstrated that job creation is not enough. There is the need to look at both the quality and quantity of jobs created.
- Implement the principle of non-discrimination through legislative measures in order to avoid unfair competition based on low wages, restriction in the exercise of fundamental rights such as the right to collective bargaining.
- Recognising the role played by social security system in pushing OECD countries economic development, the Presidency should push for a bigger Council commitment to ensure Social Protection coverage in developing countries.
- All EU Member states have ratified since 2007 the 8 core labour standards conventions. The Presidency should commit to effective application of these conventions and namely those not covered by EU legislation such as freedom of association and the right to organise and collective bargaining which are part of the EU Charter on fundamental rights.
- In order to deliver a clear signal to the rest of the world that globalisation also requires the ratification and application of up to date global standards by all countries in the world, it is important that all EU Member states ratify and apply those conventions that have been classified by ILO as up to date even if the issues are largely covered by EU legislation such as on health and safety at work.

SOLIDAR is a European network of 42 non-governmental organisations in 20 countries (17 of which Member States of the EU) working in development co-operation and humanitarian aid, social policy, social service provision, migration and lifelong learning. It has links with the trade unions and social democratic parties. SOLIDAR members are civic movements and service providers at the same time. They offer quality day-care centres for elderly and disabled, ambulance services, old people's homes, adult education, children's holidays, advice service and support for migrants and asylum seekers and many other socially excluded, disadvantaged or underprivileged people. As civic movements they contribute to social cohesion of local communities and encourage civic engagement, as well as mobilise social capital. As service providers members of SOLIDAR are organising efficient and high-quality social services close to people. The users of our services are at the same time clients and partners in the provision of the service delivered.

Links to SOLIDAR papers, documents and campaigns

The Reform Treaty – a first look at its social and citizenship dimension by SOLIDAR (December 2007)
[English + Spanish]

http://cms.horus.be/files/99931/MediaArchive/social_policy/contribution-Reform-Treaty-tiempo-de-paz-E.pdf

SOLIDAR contribution to Europe's social reality stocktaking exercise (February 2008)

<http://cms.horus.be/files/99931/MediaArchive/Solidar-Response-Consultation-Social-Reality-Stocktaking-15.02.08.pdf>

SOLIDAR letter to European Commission President José Manuel Barroso concerning the EU Social Agenda 2008-2013 (June 2008)

<http://cms.horus.be/files/99931/MediaArchive/SOLIDAR-letter-Barroso-EU-Social-Agenda-10.06.08.pdf>

SOLIDAR letter to European Parliament Vice-President Gérard Onesta et al. concerning the 1st Citizens' Agora on the Future of Europe (December 2007)

<http://cms.horus.be/files/99931/MediaArchive/071210%20letter%20CR%20Gerard%20Onesta%20EP%20President%20Presidents%20Groups.pdf>

NGO Social Service Providers facing the Challenges of the Future - Competition, organisational development, quality management (2007) – Documentation of SOLIDAR workshop series held in 2005
[English + French + German + Italian + Spanish]

http://cms.horus.be/files/99931/MediaArchive/social_policy/soildar_service_pub_EN.pdf

SOLIDAR letter to European Commission President José Manuel Barroso on a European framework for services of general interest and social services of general interest (October 2007)

<http://cms.horus.be/files/99931/MediaArchive/Solidar-letter-SGI-SSGI-Barroso-31%2010%2007.pdf>

TSEN/CSV/SOLIDAR documentation of seminar on commissioning from the third sector – lessons learned from Europe (forthcoming during summer 2008)

SOLIDAR response to the Commission's consultation on active inclusion (February 2008)

<http://cms.horus.be/files/99931/MediaArchive/Solidar-contribution-consultation-active-inclusion.pdf>

SOLIDAR summary positions on flexicurity (September 2007)

<http://cms.horus.be/files/99931/MediaArchive/Solidar-statements-labour-law-flexicurity-decent-work.pdf>

SOLIDAR brochure of Take Part! Project (December 2007) [English + French + German + Italian + Spanish + Dutch]

http://cms.horus.be/files/99931/MediaArchive/migration/Take%20Part_ENG.pdf

SOLIDAR discussion paper on co-development (February 2008) [English + French + Italian + Spanish]

<http://cms.horus.be/files/99931/Newsletter/Codevelopment%20EN.pdf>

Decent Work Decent Life Campaign (SOLIDAR; ITUC; ETUC; Social Alert; Global Progressive Forum)

<http://www.decentwork.org/>

Links to 2006 and 2007 conferences as part of the Save Our Social Europe campaign

Background paper for Save Our Social Europe Conference in Vienna (January 2006)

http://cms.horus.be/files/99931/MediaArchive/social_policy/SOSConference_Vienna_background%20paper.pdf

Documentation of Save Our Social Europe Conference in Vienna (April/May 2006) [German]

<http://www.soseurope.org/>

Statement of Save Our Social Europe Conference in Berlin (March 2007) [German + English]

http://cms.horus.be/files/99931/MediaArchive/social_policy/Solidar_Statement_Berlin.pdf

Documentation of Save Our Social Europe Conference in Berlin (October 2007) [German + English]

http://cms.horus.be/files/99931/MediaArchive/social_policy/SOS_Europe_07_EN.pdf