



## **STRONG, SOCIAL, JUST - A social Europe is possible**

### **Solidar calls on heads of state and government on the occasion of the Spring European Council 2007 to make a clear commitment to a more social Europe**

In 2007, we celebrate the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Rome Treaty, establishing the European Union. European integration has helped to secure peace in Europe, strengthen democracy and protect the rights of European citizens, and create a strong internal market with a stable currency. At the same time however, this anniversary should also mark the occasion for open and participatory debates on the future of Europe.

To contribute to this process, Solidar and its member organisations AWO and ASB (in cooperation with Aktion Mensch) have commissioned an online survey in 3 major German newspapers: Die Zeit, Der Spiegel and the Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung. Findings show strong public support for a social Europe focused on people rather than business, with respondents calling for a social Europe based on solidarity which guarantees social protection, social and healthcare services, education and dignity for all. The survey also revealed that Europe is seen as distant to its people and needs to take steps to connect with them and in particular to ensure the participation of all members of society.

An international conference organised by Solidar, AWO and ASB 1-2 March 2007 in Berlin provided such an opportunity for discussion and debate bringing together 300 participants including young people, academics, politicians, practitioners and social service providers. Fed by the survey results, this statement is their message to EU leaders calling for a strong, social and just Europe.

### **A decisive 'Yes' to a social Europe is essential for the future of Europe**

Solidar urges EU heads of state and government and the European Institutions to use the celebratory year of 2007 to make a real change for the future of the EU. What people want is not a Europe of markets and money, but a Europe that meets their needs and aspirations.

People in Europe recognise the potential of a strong, social and just EU in a globalised world. And they want to become involved in the further construction of the European Union. An active civil society also has an obligation to highlight the shortcomings of European integration. Solidar has since the beginning of European integration advocated strongly for social and economic justice through social policies, high quality social services and lifelong learning in Europe. At a time of lower economic growth, it is now more important than ever to speak out against cutbacks in social security. Today's challenge is how to reconcile the move towards economically competitive societies in a globalised world with the adequate social protection needed by citizens.



## What kind of EU do we want?

**Decisive commitments the European Spring Council 2007 should make to launch a more social Europe**

### **A Social Europe which meets the aspirations and needs of the people living in the EU...**

- In its conclusions, the European Spring Council should clearly acknowledge that the EU can only develop further in close cooperation with its citizens. And what **EU citizens want is a Europe with a strong social dimension.**

### **... where people can find a job that provides them with a basis for a decent life...**

Labour markets are changing and more and more people in Europe are working under precarious working conditions accompanied by limited workers' rights, less social protection and security. Large numbers of workers lack regular contracts and the social security that goes with them. Women and migrants as well as young and elderly workers are the hardest hit. The current discussions on flexicurity tend to prioritise the flexibility side of the coin and risk undermining the existing standards established in Europe. Flexicurity needs to profit both employers and employees, in order to create new opportunities and contribute to achieving employment targets as well as reducing barriers to the labour market by making employment accessible for more people. What we don't need in Europe is increased flexibility that will only further strengthen the segmentation of the labour market, by putting more and more people in precarious working situations.

- It is time to shift the focus of the Lisbon Strategy to social inclusion and social protection. This years' European Commission report "A year of delivery" (2006) shows clearly that the biggest remaining problems concerns questions of how inclusive and non-discriminatory the labour market is.
- Ensuring the rights of workers in part-time employment, active labour market policies, credible lifelong learning systems and modern social security systems are decisive elements of a real balanced approach of flexibility and security.
- Minimum income schemes are essential for human dignity and the development and maintenance of such schemes is vital in the fight against poverty and for decent work.
- Solidar calls upon EU heads of state and government **to make a clear commitment to decent work for a decent life within Europe as well as worldwide.**

The market beats the state – that is the slogan believers of liberalisation propagate, often echoed by the media. Experience in countries with individualized retirement provision schemes and care services for



example, however, shows that people with lower income often cannot afford retirement schemes or health care. They face poor health care provisions and face high risk of poverty. The principle of social security based on solidarity must apply to all people in the European Social Union and access to high-quality social services must be guaranteed for all.

- Solidar calls upon EU heads of state and government **to commit to ensuring the provision of high quality social and health care services for all in the future.**
- The right conditions for the provision of such services need to be **defined in a sector-specific directive for social and health care services, complemented by a Frameworks directive on services of general interest.**
- The current debates on health care services cannot be limited to issues of cross-border provision, but need to take the question of equal access and quality into account.

**... that celebrates its diversity and ensures anti-discrimination, and is based on equality between women and men....**

Migrants and ethnic minorities in Europe are still subject to discrimination. They lack access to quality housing, perform poorly-paid and dangerous work, and face difficulties concerning the recognition of their qualifications. The percentage of children with a migrant background in secondary schools is still extremely low. As workers, migrants' often uncertain legal status and, if they are documented, their dependency on a specific employer pave the way for their exploitation. The EU should live up to its commitments and ensure that migrants do not shoulder the burden of 'outsourcing at home'.

Men on average still earn one-third more than women. Men still hold about 75% of leading positions in politics, public administration and business, in spite of the numerous commitments to attain equal rights and equal opportunities.

The 2007 Annual report on Social Inclusion and Social Protection also shows that young people as well as elderly people are still discriminated in the labour market and therefore profit less from the first successes of the Lisbon Strategy.

- The Spring European Council should mark the Year of Equal Opportunities for All by committing to anti-discrimination measures within the Lisbon Strategy and pursuing approval of the Framework Decision on Racism and Xenophobia
- Strategies must be developed to encourage women and men equally to take up family and care responsibilities, and to allow work-life balance. Affordable high-quality child-care, accessible and available for all, is crucial in this context.
- In the debates about labour market reforms, what is needed are interventionist and active labour market policies that are not discriminatory, and include a set of measures actively addressing inequalities in the labour market.



**... which lives up to its responsibilities world-wide...**

The capital-oriented economic system has expanded to cover the entire globe. This has been facilitated not least by trade liberalisation but also new information and communications technologies. Globalisation could – under a fair system of rules and regulations – lead to poverty eradication and a more equal distribution of prosperity throughout the world. However, the current system encourages a race to the bottom, with wealth being concentrated in the hands of few at the expense of many. In many cases enterprises exploit the current lack of regulations to produce goods and services in developing countries without being subject to social and environmental requirements. Better living conditions for the majority of people in these countries remain a promise which has yet to be met.

- We urge the EU in the current negotiations of bilateral trade agreements with India, Korea and the ASEAN group of countries, to ensure that their negotiating mandates include an adequate level of attention to social and labour issues, in line with the commitment made by the EU in its prior statements on trade, decent work and the social dimension of globalization.
- In its current negotiations of Economic Partnership Agreements with ACP countries, we urge the EU to stick to the spirit of the Cotonou agreement by not demanding an indiscriminate opening of ACP country markets to European imports and investment.

**...and in which citizens have the possibility to become active in the shaping of the future.**