

Brussels, 10 March 2009

Refer: European Council 13/14 March 2008

To: EU Prime Ministers and Heads of State

Dear Prime Minister,

Raised Hopes:

In 2006 the Spring Council conclusions re-iterated the conclusions from 2005. *"That Growth and Employment are at the service of social cohesion....steps have to be taken to make a decisive impact on the reduction of poverty and social exclusion by 2010."* Last year the Spring Council conclusions said that, *"the common social objectives of the Member States to be taken into account within the Lisbon Agenda"*.

These Spring Council conclusions raised hopes for EAPN and its members that the objective *"to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty by 2010"* and the ambition to achieve *"greater social cohesion"* would become a focus for the actions of the powerful political institutions of the EU and the Member States. The opinion being prepared in the European Parliament on the Employment Guidelines proposes significant amendments to strengthen the social dimension of the Lisbon agenda and gives further cause for hope.

Preparation for the Spring Council 2008

In so far as it is possible to know, the preparation for the Spring Council 2008 (discussions on revision of the Integrated Guidelines, messages from the Commission etc) seem not to have responded to the strong messages from previous Council conclusions or the considerations of the European Parliament. The hope that the Member States will strengthen their cooperation to address growing inequalities and reverse the negative trends in relations to poverty in the EU seems unfounded.

Questions to be answered at the forthcoming Spring Council

Given the immense efforts made by the members of EAPN, by other social NGOs and all those concerned to achieve a Social Europe, given that the Lisbon Treaty with its new objectives of *"combating social exclusion and discrimination"* and *"promoting social justice and protection"*, its new horizontal social article and its *"protocol on Services of General Interest"* has also raised expectations for a more social Europe and given that it is difficult to see the connection between successive Spring Council conclusions and the follow up actions, we would like the forthcoming Spring Council to address the following questions:

- How precisely do you propose to strengthen the social dimension of the Lisbon strategy?
- Given the reality of growing levels of inequality and that 78 million people are living in, or at risk of poverty, what precise actions are proposed to meet the commitment *"to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty"*?
- Given that 3 times more people in work (18.9 million) are in, or at risk of poverty, than those who are unemployed (6.9 million), what measures are proposed to address in work poverty?
- Given the focus on energy at this Spring Council, what measures are proposed to ensure that rising energy prices do not threaten social cohesion and social inclusion?

EAPN's work on the Lisbon Agenda

EAPN has followed closely the Lisbon Strategy including the Open Method of Coordination on Social Protection and Social Inclusion.

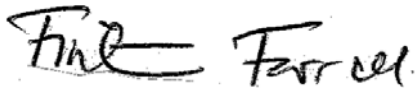
To know further EAPN's detailed assessment of the latest developments in these strategies please follow the link to:

- [*Strengthening the social dimension of the Lisbon Strategy. Proposals from EAPN*](#)
- [*Light Year – Hard Work – EAPN assessment on the implementation of the Strategic reports on Social Protection and Social inclusion \(2006-2008\)*](#)
- [*Social Inclusion Scoreboard – EAPN response to the National Implementation Reports 2007*](#)
- [*Growth and Jobs but not inclusion! – EAPN response to the Annual Progress Report*](#)

EAPN cooperates closely with other NGOs and Trade Unions in our work to follow the Lisbon Strategy and EAPN associates itself to the letters sent in advance of the Spring Council by [the Social Platform](#) and the [joint letter](#) signed by the European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC), the European Environmental Bureau (EEB) and the Social Platform.

The Spring Council is the key political moment which brings together all of our concerns and in this regard EAPN hopes to find answers to the questions outlined above in the conclusions of your Council.

Yours sincerely



Fintan Farrell

cc

Mr Barroso, President, European Commission,

Mr Pöttering, President, European Parliament

Mr Spidla, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Gender Equality

Mr Jan Andersson, Chair of the Committee on Employment and Social Affairs, European Parliament