

# socialplatform

## Social NGOs Tests for the Finnish Presidency of the EU

July-December 2006

*These tests condense what the Finnish Presidency can do to help the EU move along the road to a more social Europe respectful of fundamental rights. The Social Platform will evaluate the Presidency's record in each area at the end of its term. This document was developed in collaboration with members of the Social Platform and adopted by the Management Committee on the 29 June 2006.*

► TEST 1 on democracy -

Has the Finnish Presidency contributed to reinforce democracy at the EU level by operating in a transparent way and actively involving civil society?

*To succeed on Test 1, Social Platform's members call on the Finnish Presidency to:*

- Make as a priority the follow up of the commitment to bring greater transparency and to develop new means of giving **more publicity, to Council's deliberation**<sup>1</sup> and to involve NGOs in this process especially when it comes to target audiences (disabled people, people living in poverty, immigrants and ethnic minorities, women, youth<sup>2</sup> etc...);
- Call on the Commission to make a proposal on the **statute of European association**;
- Invite the Social Platform to take part in **the informal Employment and Social Affairs Council** (Helsinki, 6-7 July);
- Support via the Finnish members, the **consultation of NGOs** by the Employment Committee (**EMCO**), the Social Protection Committee (**SPC**) and the Economic Policy Committee (**EPC**) to improve the mainstreaming of social goals;
- Ensure adequate and **meaningful participation of social NGOs**, including national social NGOs, in relevant Presidency meetings and conferences, including in the planning of these events;
- Respect the **principles of gender parity and equality** in all its activities and especially in conferences.

► TEST 2 on the future of Europe<sup>3</sup> -

Has the Finnish Presidency contributed to establishing an open, structured and visible discussion process on the Constitution, clearly aimed at achieving an agreement and including debates on the social dimension of the future text?

*To succeed on Test 2, Social Platform's members call on the Finnish Presidency to:*

- Support the European Parliament proposal of **six common themes to be discussed all over Europe and in particular the theme on the future of the "European Social Model"**. In addition Social NGOs suggest that a clear analysis of these themes be carried out and published. This means assessing each theme as regards the present treaties and as regards the constitutional treaty. This systematic approach to explaining how the six themes are linked to the treaties will help people to formulate their views and contributions to improve the existing texts;
- **Increase the visibility and the clarity of the process** by creating a single website (based on the model developed for the Convention on the future of Europe) with clear explanations on how the debate will be structured, how people can contribute and how inputs will be used;
- Ensure that **pro-active measures** are taken so that **people who are the most remote from the decision making processes**, in particular those experiencing poverty, exclusion and inequalities, are given the means, including financial support, to enable them to actively contribute to discussions on the future of Europe including discussions relating to Plan D.

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<sup>1</sup> See conclusions of the Brussels European Council (15/16 June 2006) para 24: "The incoming Presidency is invited, together with the General Secretariat of the Council to develop new means of giving more publicity to public deliberations, in particular through the Council's web site and mailing list, an easily accessible and constantly updated list of forthcoming debates, appropriate background material, as well as direct communication to target audiences."

<sup>2</sup> Many Members of the Social Platform have experience in developing means to involve particular groups in European decisions making process.

<sup>3</sup> See also Social Platform resolution on the period of reflection: "The way out of the constitutional crisis? More participatory democracy and a stronger social dimension"

► TEST 3 on the social dimension of the Union's action -

Has the Finnish Presidency contributed to find a better balance between social rights and market freedoms?

*To succeed on Test 3, Social Platform's members call on the Finnish Presidency to:*

- Ensure that the negotiations around the **Services Directive** continue to recognise **the specificity of social services and their exclusion from the scope of the directive**;
- Actively support further discussions regarding needs for **European-level action in relation to services of general interest including social and health services of general interest**, with the full participation of civil society;
- Open a wide consultation on how to **make impact assessment a more effective tool** to promote social and environmental objectives in all EU policies<sup>4</sup>;
- Encourage active engagement of all relevant stakeholders in the debate on the further actions needed to follow up on the Commission's Communication on **'Active inclusion of those furthest from the labour market' (Minimum Income)** so as to ensure a more equitable system of decent income for a dignified life for all.

► TEST 4 on the fight against poverty and social exclusion -

Has the Finnish Presidency helped balance the "growth and jobs" strategy with a strong emphasis on social protection and social inclusion?

*To succeed on Test 4, Social Platform's members call on the Finnish Presidency to:*

- Ensure that the **national reform programmes are effectively linked to policies for social inclusion and social protection**, including a clear elaboration of how the "feeding in and feeding out" with the OMC on Social Protection and Social Inclusion is to be achieved and that the overall process remains focused on the objective to "make a decisive impact on the reduction of poverty and social exclusion by 2010";
- Ensure **active stakeholder involvement in the definition of common principles on 'flexicurity'** and to follow up on the commitment made to make a cost benefit analysis of the impact of this approach for persons furthest from the labour market;
- Give political leadership to ensure that the streamlined **OMC on Social Protection and Social Inclusion** addresses the 'implementation gap' that was identified in the Joint Reports on Social Protection and Social Inclusion while ensuring that positive results are achieved in the priority areas identified in the EPSCO Council in March 2005 and in the last two Joint Reports;
- Ensure that the **Round Table on poverty and social exclusion** (Tampere 16-17 October) contributes to strengthening the social inclusion strategy and raising its visibility to build momentum to ensure that by 2010 - the European Year against Poverty - real progress will be achieved;
- Open a discussion with civil society organisations on the **Communication on adult learning** to be adopted by the Commission and make the link between adult learning and social cohesion, reduction of poverty and citizenship.

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<sup>4</sup> See conclusions of the Brussels European Council (15/16 June 2006) Para 21: "(The European Council) stresses the importance of the social dimension of the Union's action. It welcomes the European Commission's intention to take stock of social realities in the EU and invited the Commission to issue an interim report before the European Council of March 2007; the Commission, the Council and the Parliament should pay due attention to the social impact of European legislation, including a gender perspective, as set out in the Pact for Gender Equality, within the integrated impact assessment".

► TEST 5 on equality and fight against discrimination -

Has the Finnish Presidency taken a leading and visible role to ensure progress on achieving equality for all?

*To succeed on Test 5, Social Platform's members call on the Finnish Presidency to:*

- Support the **development of further legislation in the field of anti-discrimination** covering all areas of life for all the grounds included in Article 13. This could include for example a disability specific directive in the same way as the "race directive" for the ground of ethnic;
- Use its influence to encourage Member States to **work closely with national NGOs** in the establishment of national coordinating bodies for the **European Year of Equal Opportunities for All** (2007) and organise transparent coordination of the planning at EU level which includes consultation with NGOs;
- To progress the stalled **Framework Decision on Racism and Xenophobia** and to extend it to homophobic, anti-Semitic, islamophobic and other types of offences motivated by phobia or hatred.

► TEST 6 on gender -

Has the Finnish Presidency made progress on achieving gender equality?

*To succeed on Test 6, Social Platform's members call on the Finnish Presidency to:*

- Ensure the adoption by the Council of the Regulation setting up the future **European Gender Institute** with an ambitious mandate and appropriate resources;
- Push ahead with the implementation of the **Gender Equality Pact**;
- Develop **gender sensitive EU anti-trafficking efforts** that focus on the support and assistance to victims of trafficking for sexual exploitation, and on prevention strategies that reduce the demand;
- Develop **concrete policy proposals** resulting from the Presidency conference on 'Men and Gender Equality - towards progressive policies' (Helsinki, 5-6 October 2006) to be passed on to the German Presidency;
- Initiate a real debate with all relevant stakeholders including civil society organisations on the way Article 4 of the **Directive on Gender Equality in access to goods and services** is used in some Member States by the insurance industry to justify continued differences of treatment between women and men in insurance products such as private pension schemes.

► TEST 7 on fundamental rights -

Has the Finnish Presidency furthered the EU's role in promoting fundamental rights in the European Union?

*To succeed on Test 7, Social Platform's members call on the Finnish Presidency to:*

- Take forward the discussion on the fundamental rights agency and ensure the **involvement of civil society organisations** in the negotiations of the regulation to establish the agency;
- Add an item on the agenda of the Justice and Home Affairs Council to discuss the Communication on Children's rights (to be launched in July);
- Involve NGOs in the debates on how to **better mainstream human rights into all EU policy areas** and increase the coherence of human rights policy with regards to both the EU's internal policies and external relations.

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