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Social Platform Tests for the Dutch Presidency

July – December 2004

The Platform of European Social NGOs (the Social Platform) is the alliance of representative European federations and networks of non-governmental organisations active in the social sector, promoting social justice and participatory democracy by voicing the concerns of its member organisations. The Social Platform and its members are committed to the advancement of the principles of equality, solidarity, non discrimination and the promotion and respect of fundamental rights for all, within Europe and in particular the European Union.

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1. Introduction

The Dutch government will take over the Presidency of the European Council from the Irish on July 1st 2004, and will remain at the EU's helm for the 6-month period up to December. As the Presidency, it will have a key role in giving impetus to legislative and political decisions, as well as in negotiating agreements between member states and institutions.

The Social Platform therefore set out in this document what it expects from the Presidency – which issues should it pay particular attention to in its agenda, what initiatives could it usefully take in different areas, and crucially, what kind of approach should it take to questions about Europe's future.

The Social Platform has devised 12 'Tests' for the Presidency, and according to the concrete demands under each Test, will evaluate the Presidency's record in each area at the end of its term.

The second half of 2004 will be a time of change and uncertainty for the EU, but also one of opportunity. A new European Parliament will be settling in by the time the Presidency begins, and on November 1, 25 new Commissioners will move into their offices. Old and new member states will still be adjusting to the day-to-day implications of the 1st May enlargement to 25 countries. Decision-making processes will become more complex as the number of MEPs expands and the European Commission takes in ten additional Commissioners. The accompanying enlargement of ideas and diversity also promises exciting new opportunities.

The long-awaited new Constitution has recently been agreed by the June European Council. This will further raise the political heat about the issue of 'Europe' in the run-up to referenda in different countries, and governments must make an effort not only to provide balanced information to their citizens but also to prevent important decisions from being held hostage by national debates. Furthermore, the full participation of the new Member States is not only shaping the future developments of the European Union but also bringing new priorities, policies and methodologies that will enrich the present EU approach.

In this context, the Dutch Presidency will be guiding important decision-making processes in a whole range of areas including the debate over the next financial framework of the EU, as well as sticky questions such as the future of the Lisbon Strategy. The Social Platform will be paying close attention to the political directions being taken in this period of such change, and the thrust of leadership from the Presidency. In particular, it urges the Presidency to promote a strong basis of fundamental rights and sustainable development principles in all policy areas.

Finally, all good Presidencies incorporate the basic tenets of good governance in their procedures, and social NGOs expect no less of the Dutch. They will be looking out for initiative on the part of the Presidency in facilitating the meaningful involvement of civil society organisations in key debates and processes.

This document was developed in collaboration with members of the Social Platform in several meetings, and adopted by the full membership on the 8th June 2004.

The 12 Tests in Brief

These tests will be evaluated against a number of indicators as outlined later in this document.

Test 1: Has the Dutch Presidency helped establish the foundation of a reinforced Lisbon strategy by placing sufficient emphasis on social goals, and enabling open debate about the future of the Strategy?

Test 2: Has the Dutch Presidency laid the ground for a strong Social Policy Agenda after 2005?

Test 3: Has the Dutch Presidency raised the profile of the social inclusion process?

Test 4: Has the Dutch Presidency ensured sufficient consideration of the situation and requirements of social services of general interest in relation to EU proposals on services?

Test 5: Has the Dutch Presidency moved forward work towards the implementation of an EU Framework on CSR?

Test 6: Has the Dutch Presidency taken the lead in developing an ambitious EU human rights policy?

Test 7: Has the Dutch Presidency actively promoted the fight against all forms of discrimination and a society based on equality for all?

Test 8: Has the Dutch Presidency taken the lead in the promotion of equality between women and men in all areas of life?

Test 9: Has the Dutch Presidency shown political leadership in taking the EU towards a new EU agenda on immigration and integration which respects fundamental rights and gives sufficient importance to furthering the integration of migrants?

Test 10: Has the Dutch Presidency displayed balanced leadership in promoting a view of an EU based on solidarity and social cohesion, in relation to the financial perspectives and future cohesion policy?

Test 11: Has the Dutch Presidency played an active role to ensure smooth progression of accession negotiations which involve civil society?

Test 12: Has the Dutch Presidency respected the principle of good governance, promoted gender parity and guaranteed the participation of civil society?

TEST 1

Has the Dutch Presidency helped establish the foundation of a reinforced Lisbon strategy by placing sufficient emphasis on social goals, and enabling open debate about the future of the Strategy?

To succeed on Test 1, Social NGOs call on the Dutch Presidency to:

- ***Ensure a clear message from the November European Council explicitly renewing its commitment to a balanced Lisbon strategy which pays equal attention to the social aspects***
- ***Organise open meetings with the full range of stakeholders regarding the future of the Lisbon Strategy, in parallel with the work of the High-level group***
- ***Ensure the November European Council asks the Commission to prepare a comparative review of Member State actions to implement the 'Partnerships for Reform' which were called for by the 2004 Spring European Council***
- ***Push for a Sustainable Development Strategy which is not just one more EU policy, but which sets out an ambitious programme to gradually mainstream the sustainable development approach into all EU policy-making***

The coming year is going to be pivotal in defining the direction of the multi-dimensional Lisbon Strategy, one of the most salient areas of EU action. Involving the full range of stakeholders in the debate over the future of the Lisbon Strategy in the run-up to its mid-term review in spring 2005 is crucial, and the Dutch Presidency should make this one of its priorities. This is particularly important given the lack of civil society representation in the High-Level Group on the Future of the Lisbon Strategy, which is led by Wim Kok, and the closed nature of the Group.

Recently we have seen that important parts of the Strategy such as social cohesion have in practice become subordinated to others, namely competitiveness and growth¹. There is a large gap between the pronounced priorities of governments, and the actual focus of their activities. This discrepancy needs to be brought into the open in a clear and transparent debate about what the Lisbon Strategy is for, what should be prioritised, and how the goals should be achieved. A move away from the predominant focus on growth is particularly important in the context of enlargement, as the success or otherwise of the enlargement of the Union must not be judged solely in terms of growth in GDP or other economic factors, but its impact on inequality and social exclusion must also be considered.

The latter half of 2004 will also see a review of the Union's Strategy for Sustainable Development, which was added to the Lisbon Strategy at Göteborg in 2001. The Strategy must reflect the fact that Sustainable Development is not solely or primarily about the environment, but is a holistic view of decision-making and of society, which includes social goals.

¹ See the Social Platform's Resolution to the 2004 Spring Summit for further analysis of this point, available at www.socialplatform.org

TEST 2

Has the Dutch Presidency laid the ground for a strong Social Policy Agenda after 2005?

To succeed on Test 2, Social NGOs ask the Dutch Presidency to:

- ***Include the Social Platform in high-level discussions about the future Social Policy Agenda with Troika Ministers and the Commissioner, preceding the Informal Employment and Social Affairs Council in July, as in previous Presidencies***
- ***Fully involve civil society in the organisation and programming of the conference on the future of the Social Policy Agenda to take place on the 8/9 November (as is the case regarding the conference on Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion)***

The period of the Dutch Presidency will include discussions regarding the future of the Social Policy Agenda beyond 2005, and is the main item on the agenda of the Informal Employment and Social Affairs Council in July. For reasons of good governance and transparency it is very important that a visible and clearly defined Social Policy Agenda is maintained into the future, not least as a reference point for citizens. The Social Platform emphasises that the social policy of the European Union must be based on fundamental rights.

TEST 3

Has the Dutch Presidency raised the profile of the social inclusion process?

To succeed on Test 3, Social NGOs expect the Dutch Presidency to:

- ***Ensure that the Round Table on Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion delivers concrete proposals for measures to reinforce the fight against poverty and social exclusion, as well as a strong political message regarding commitment to a distinct and visible EU Inclusion Strategy and the extension of the Social Exclusion Action Programme beyond 2006***
- ***Adopt a Joint Report on Social Inclusion for the 10 new Member States which strategically assesses the National Action Plans in these countries against the EU common objectives on social inclusion***
- ***Ensure that all the social inclusion objectives agreed at Nice are mainstreamed in all EU policies including Employment Policies, the reform of the Structural Funds and the Broad Economic Policy Guidelines***
- ***Ensure that agreement is reached on indicators on housing and homelessness to complement the indicators already agreed***

The eradication of poverty and social exclusion is one of the key goals of the European Union, and the Dutch Presidency has an important role to support and promote this goal, particularly through the way it capitalises on the Round Table on Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion which will take place on October 17-19. The Social Platform is pleased that the Dutch Presidency aims to make the conference a highly visible event and offers its support to make the event a success. The Presidency will also be

overseeing the presentation by the new member states of their first National Action Plans on Social Inclusion in July 2004.

In regard to social inclusion, the Social Platform also remains very concerned by the 'Making Work Pay' approach to the reform of social protection systems, which it believes is undermining the European Social Model and contributing to forming a society characterised by increasing poverty, inequality and social exclusion². The impact on vulnerable groups should thus be taken into account in all discussions on the future of social protection systems.

TEST 4

Has the Dutch Presidency ensured sufficient consideration of the situation and requirements of social services of general interest in relation to EU proposals on services?

To succeed on Test 4, Social NGOs call on the Presidency to:

- ***Give its active support to the preparation of information and expertise to input into the Communication on Social and Health Services of General Interest***
- ***Ensure that the Employment and Social Affairs Council discusses the impact on social and health services of the Directive on Services in the Internal Market***
- ***Use the conference in September on Health and the Internal Market as an opportunity to determine whether health services require specific treatment in internal market rules; support the involvement of social civil society in this event***

The White Paper on Services of General Interest (SGIs), published in May 2004, specifically asks the Commission to prepare a Communication on Social and Health Services of General Interest, in recognition of the potential impact on social services of future EU legislation on SGIs. The preparation for this Communication will be going on during the period of the Dutch Presidency. Civil society including the Social Platform are already contributing on this issue and will be happy to assist the Dutch Presidency in furthering understanding of social SGIs, including the consideration of the expectations of the users of such services.

The second half of 2004 will also see important and ongoing discussions concerning the Commission's proposal for a directive on Services in the Internal Market. It is crucial that the potential impact of the directive on social and health services is further analysed, and modifications made to the proposal to ensure that there are no negative impacts of the directive on social and health services.

² For more information see the Social Platform's briefing document prepared for the Troika meeting preceding the Informal Employment and Social Affairs Council in Galway, January 2004, available at www.socialplatform.org or click [here](#)

TEST 5

Has the Dutch Presidency moved forward work towards the implementation of an EU Framework on CSR?

To succeed on Test 5, Social NGOs call on the Dutch Presidency to:

- ***Structure the November Conference on CSR around the goal of producing an EU framework on CSR***

The Multi-Stakeholder Forum on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) will have come to a close by the beginning of the Dutch Presidency, and the Presidency will be organising a conference on this issue on 7-9 November in Maastricht. The Social Platform welcomes the interest that the Dutch Presidency is taking in this issue.

TEST 6

Has the Dutch Presidency taken the lead in developing an ambitious EU human rights policy?

To succeed on Test 6, Social NGOs expect the Dutch Presidency to:

- ***Take the political lead in clarifying the responsibility of the EU in the protection and promotion of human rights. This would mean developing a comprehensive approach on how to mainstream respect for human rights in all EU policies and activities both internally and externally***
- ***Support the independence of the new human rights agency, a close involvement of NGOs and a mandate that would cover the key functions described in the UN Paris Principles: monitoring human rights, education and awareness raising, litigation and research***
- ***Ensure that the human rights agency builds on the work of the monitoring centre on racism and xenophobia (EUMC) and ensure a continuing high political priority to this particular form of discrimination***

Following the decision of the European Council meeting of December 2003 in Brussels, discussions are now taking place on the extension of the mandate of the European Monitoring Centre on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC) into a human rights agency. The Social Platform has expressed serious concerns on the lack of transparency in the way this decision has been made³. However Social NGOs believe that the debate around this new agency creates a real opportunity for the EU to reflect on its role in ensuring the respect of human rights in all its policies and activities⁴.

³ See Platform letter on "Good Governance and the change in mandate of the European Union Monitoring Center on Racism and Xenophobia (EUMC)" The letter is available at www.socialplatform.org

⁴ See working paper of the Platform on "The new human rights agency as the 'human rights watchdog' of the EU" The paper is available at www.socialplatform.org

TEST 7

Has the Dutch Presidency actively promoted the fight against all forms of discrimination and a society based on equality for all?

To succeed on Test 7, Social NGOs call on the Dutch Presidency to:

- ***Use all possible opportunities to call on all the Member States to respect their legal obligations to fully implement the 'Article 13' directives⁵ and add an item on this issue to the agenda of one of the Employment and Social Affairs Councils***
- ***Push for an extension of the scope of application of the directive 2000/43/EC on "Implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin" to cover all the other grounds of discrimination in Article 13***
- ***Take steps to improve the living conditions of the Roma/Gypsies and Travellers and the fight against their discrimination and exclusion, in full cooperation with the Roma/Gypsy and Traveller populations. The Presidency should make sure that this lead to a veritable commitment of the side of the EU and its member states with concrete goals and verifiable steps⁶***
- ***Restart negotiations on the Framework Decision to combat racism and xenophobia (COM (2001) 664 final)***
- ***Use the Green Paper's consultation exercise to push for an ambitious EU anti-discrimination policy and demand that social NGOs be closely involved in the preparation of the anti-discrimination conference of 22nd and 23rd of November 2004***
- ***Push for the extension of the Community Action Programme to combat discrimination since its three objectives will still be relevant beyond 2006***

The implementation of the Article 13 (TEC) directives remains problematic in many EU countries. Members States will have to be reminded of their obligation to transpose these directives in their national legislation as well as of the importance of the principle of equality in achieving an inclusive society.

Another challenge for the Dutch Presidency is linked to the recent eastwards Enlargement of the EU and the increase of the Roma population in the EU by an estimated 1.6 million people. In 1999 during the Summit of Helsinki the European Council took the commitment to pay special attention to the improvement of the situation of Roma. It was also agreed that each Presidency should hold meetings in order to work towards this purpose. Unfortunately all did not fulfil this commitment and we expect the Dutch Presidency to resume the Helsinki initiative.

⁵ Council Directive 2000/78/EC establishing a general framework for equal treatment in employment and occupation and Council Directive 2000/43/EC implementing the principle of equal treatment between persons irrespective of racial or ethnic origin

⁶ The European Commission has recently commissioned a study on "Roma in an enlarged Europe" involving the European Roma Information Office and the European Roma Rights Centre. The results of this study could provide a good assessment of the situation as well as clear recommendations on how to fight the discrimination of Roma people.

On the basis of a Green Paper the Commission has recently opened a wide consultation on the future of EU anti-discrimination policies. The Dutch Presidency will be in charge at the end of November of a conference to discuss the outcome of the consultation.

TEST 8

Has the Dutch Presidency taken the lead in the promotion of equality between women and men in all areas of life?

To succeed on Test 8, Social NGOs call on the Dutch Presidency to:

- ***Initiate the creation of an EU Roadmap/Strategy for Gender Equality, which should be a strong policy instrument, based on a dual strategy of specific measures and legislation for women as well as a more effective implementation of gender equality mainstreaming***
- ***Support the establishment of a European Union Gender Equality Institute***
- ***Ask governments to ensure the adoption of the proposed directive on equal treatment in the access to and provision of goods and services, in its entirety, as proposed by the Commission***
- ***Push for specific reference to discrimination on the ground of gender identity and gender expression in the directive on gender equality***

Social NGOs attach a particular attention to equality between women and men and believe that progresses have been too slow in this area. Many initiatives have been taken but the objective of significantly improving women's lives across Europe has still not been met.

TEST 9

Has the Dutch Presidency shown political leadership in taking the EU towards a new EU agenda on immigration and integration which respects fundamental rights and gives sufficient importance to furthering the integration of migrants?

To succeed on Test 9, Social NGOs call on the Dutch Presidency to:

- ***Take an approach to integration which is holistic and based on the respect of fundamental rights in relation to the development of an EU integration policy; recognise that a balanced and rights-based approach to immigration (including illegal immigration), returns and border control is also essential for the successful integration of migrants***
- ***Use the indicators Sub-Group of the Social Protection Committee to work on the development of relevant and robust indicators to encompass the different aspects of integration***
- ***Promote the openness and tolerance of European societies in relation to migrants and migration***

Following the deadline for completion of the 'Tampere Agenda' of EU immigration and asylum policy in May, and assessment of achievements up to present, the EU is due to launch a further programme of actions in the justice and home affairs field. The Commission Communication on the results of the Tampere programme and future guidelines published this June, and the delayed 'Annual Report on Migration and Integration' which was due to be presented to the June European Council (but which will now be published in July), provide a basis for discussion and action on these issues, which will be a priority under the Dutch Presidency. The Presidency's activities will include work on the development of a common integration policy, combating illegal immigration and return policies, alongside others.

The Social Platform is concerned about developments within the Netherlands as regards integration policy, and hopes that the Presidency will not advocate extending the national approach to integration to the European level. However, one practical area in which leadership would be welcomed is in the field of data and indicators on the integration of migrants, which is lacking at present.

TEST 10

Has the Dutch Presidency displayed balanced leadership in promoting a view of an EU based on solidarity and social cohesion, in relation to the financial perspectives and future cohesion policy?

To succeed on Test 10, Social NGOs call on the Dutch Presidency to:

- ***Actively push for the Financial Perspective and draft regulations for the structural funds programming period 2007-2013 (the proposal for which will be published in July by the Commission) to reflect all the goals of the Social Inclusion Strategy;***
- ***Provide strong leadership to ensure that the EU's cohesion policy is given a high priority in the future financial framework***

The Dutch Presidency will be steering ongoing negotiations regarding the next financial perspectives, the European Union's budgetary framework. Support for the Commission's proposals for a strong cohesion policy is a necessary prerequisite for an EU which is to remain committed to solidarity rather than narrow national interests. In terms of content, the financial perspectives and cohesion policy must better reflect the social goals of the Union.

TEST 11

Has the Dutch Presidency played an active role to ensure smooth progression of accession negotiations, involving civil society?

To succeed on Test 11, Social NGOs call on the Dutch Presidency to:

- ***Make all the necessary efforts in order to ensure the speedy accession of Bulgaria and Romania, and to keep up the momentum in negotiations with Turkey***
- ***Actively support the participation of civil society in the enlargement preparations in these countries***

TEST 12

Has the Dutch Presidency respected the principle of good governance, promoted gender parity and guaranteed the participation of civil society?

To succeed on Test 12, Social NGOs call on the Dutch Presidency to:

- ***Support the principle of participatory democracy and ensure the consultation and participation of civil society in all key policies areas and events organised during the Presidency***
- ***Respect the principle of gender parity in all its activities and especially in conferences***
- ***Actively support action to facilitate access to information on EU policy making for civil society in new member states, particularly on social issues***
- ***Actively support giving European NGOs the necessary financial means to work effectively, including costs for secretariats, translations and policy meetings, in order to put civil dialogue into practice***

The quality of a Presidency is not only determined by the content of its political programme but also by the importance it attaches to key principles such as good governance, involvement of civil society and gender parity. Social NGOs believe that the promotion of a democratic and transparent culture of decision-making is crucial in achieving real progress supported by all. In this framework the particular need for support in capacity-building of social NGOs in many of the new member states, where civil society is relatively under-developed, should be recognised and emphasised.

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