# Report from the Networking Meeting and Conference on the Social Dimension of the Latvian EU Presidency

**December 8-9 2014 | Riga, Latvia**

**KEY MESSAGES**

- **Social investment is an economic priority**. The EU must stop viewing social issues as a cost, but rather see them as an investment, with long-term economic benefits. The EU cannot be truly competitive – one of the Latvian Presidency's priorities – without social investment.
- **Use EU funds to achieve the aims of the Europe 2020 Strategy**. The EU is still failing to meet the targets of the Strategy on poverty and social inclusion, employment and education. Funds including the European Energy Efficiency Fund can also be applied to help reach these goals.
- **All services across the EU should comply with the principle of minimum requirement**: affordability, accessibility, quality, universality, availability and accountability.
- **Financial support to local and national NGOs is vital for EU involvement**. Local and national NGOs have expertise that would contribute to European solutions; financial contributions from the EU to ensure membership of European umbrella organisations would enable participation in this process.

**MORE INFORMATION**

Press release, Dec 8: Strong social commitments needed from upcoming Latvian EU Presidency

Press release, Dec 9: NGOs call on Latvian Presidency to invest in human capital

Follow us on Twitter @social_platform and read our tweets from the networking visit under the hashtag #socialeu2015lv

Photos from the event are available on Flickr

## 1. Opening Speakers

**Networking Meeting, December 8**

**Pierre Baussand** (Director, Social Platform) welcomed participants to the meeting and highlighted the excellent opportunity it presented for networking and influencing the Latvian EU Presidency's priorities.

**Helen Joseph** (Communications & Media Officer, Social Platform) delivered a presentation on the work of Social Platform - see Annex below.

**Andris Gobins** (President, European Movement Latvia; member of the European Economic and Social Committee) made an introductory intervention about Latvia as 'a country with strong contrasts', illustrating its history of independence; rich and poor; Europeanisation; emigration and crisis. Latvians possess a strong belief in the power of social movement for change, as seen when two million people organised themselves to sing for independence. Statistics show that although some living costs are getting lower, the perception of Latvians is that it is more expensive. It is the fastest growing economy in Europe, but the question remains whether citizens themselves benefit. While only six percent of the population trust in political parties, more trust in the EU institutions. Mr Gobins encouraged the participants to join the **NGO Forum in Riga on March 2-3**.

*Social Platform is the largest civil society alliance fighting for social justice and participatory democracy in Europe. Consisting of 49 pan-European networks of NGOs, we campaign to ensure that EU policies are developed in partnership with the people they affect, respecting fundamental rights, promoting solidarity and improving lives.*

**Conference, December 9**

**Diana Pauna** (Pro-Rector, Stockholm School of Economics in Riga) welcomed us to the premises. The conference was organised in partnership with the Centre for Sustainable Business. She addressed the need for sustainable development through education.

**Pierre Baussand** (Director, Social Platform) welcomed the Latvian Minister for Welfare and pointed out that, while the Presidency believes that the way out of the crisis is through growth that will lead to employment, we believe that the best way is through investment in human capital and enabling access to services, including education; this would bring the labour market closer to people, not the other way around.

**Uldis Augulis** (Minister for Welfare, Latvia) opened by explaining that NGOs have had the chance to input the Presidency priorities, and some NGOs have been granted funding for events during the Presidency. The next EPSCO will be about EU competitiveness, growth and the digital agenda. This includes employment and social policy, inclusive and sustainable participation in the labour market and risk groups' access to employment. Social Platform has been invited as a speaker for one of the Presidency's expert conferences on inclusive labour markets. Other priorities the Minister mentioned were the youth guarantee, the gender pension pay gap and institutional care.

## 2. Key Messages

Prepared by Latvian and European NGOs at a Networking meeting on December 8, Riga

### 1. Access to Services of General Interest: the case for prioritising the improvement of access to services during the Latvian Presidency

*Access to services is not identified as a priority by the Latvian Presidency. Despite this, the Latvian Presidency will be leading meetings of EU ministers on legislation in this area; for example, the horizontal equality directive that Social Platform is calling for, and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership that poses a threat to access to services.*

- Increase political commitment and funding to services: address inequality in terms of access to quality and affordable services to meet people's needs and respect people's rights.
- Use European Structural and Investment Funds (ESIF) for transition from institutional to community-based care:
    - Reflect this by organising a workshop in the framework of the Presidency conference on 15 June on how new Operational Programmes across the EU are implementing deinstitutionalisation.
- All services across the EU should comply with the principle of minimum requirement: affordability, accessibility, quality, universality, availability and accountability.
- It is the role of the state to ensure that these principles are implemented, regardless the source of funding. The accountability of the state must be ensured:
    - Implement the EU Framework for European Quality Social Services.
    - Reflect on how Member States could sustain funding after Structural Funds run out.
- Improve quality of service management: make sure services are enabling and encouraging social inclusion of service users.
- Cut red tape

### 2. Social inclusion and the fight against poverty: Europe 2020 – how the Latvian Presidency can take forward social targets beyond employment

*The Latvian Presidency's priority is focusing on employment. While Social Platform agrees that this is important as it is a target of the soon to be reviewed Europe 2020 strategy, it is also important to look at the other two social targets: poverty & social inclusion, and education.*

- Push for the implementation of the European Commission's 2013 Recommendation on Investing in Children, particularly through investment in good social services, i.e. early childhood education and care, and adequate income support, such as child benefits and allowances.
- Access to services (urban/rural divide): Public authorities need to ensure that services are available throughout the whole territory of a country, including rural and remote regions and for difficult target groups.
- Incorporate energy poverty as an essential aspect of EU initiatives in the field of energy, and improve the provision of social housing as essential means for a dignified life.
- Ensure that the June EPSCO conclusions on the gender pension gap address the inadequacy of income of older women beyond employment status or working careers.
- Promote the potential of the European Social Fund for the fight against poverty and social exclusion, and make sure that NGOs and associations receive detailed information about funding opportunities.

## 3. Involvement of civil society in policy making: recommendations to the Latvian government on how to engage in meaningful civil dialogue

*One of the Latvian Presidency priorities for the Council will be on dialogue with social partners (e.g. Business Europe). Social Platform believes civil dialogue (e.g. NGOs) is equally important to improve the decision making process and ensure excluded people are given a voice.*

- Ensure funding for NGOs – e.g. financial support enabling national NGOs to hold membership ofEU-level umbrella organisations in order to stay connected and have the possibility to influence and be a part of the EU.
- Involve NGOs in decision making processes in a timely manner so that they can contribute and input on all levels : local, regional, national, and EU.
- Specify that the European Social Fund in Latvia should also be used for encouraging social inclusion, gender equality and transnational activities.
- Keep in place and implement existing cooperation agreements between Latvian governmental ministries and civil society organisations.
- Prioritise civil dialogue during and beyond the Latvian Presidency (i.e. do not only priorities a social dialogue with social partners); invite all Social Platform members in Latvia to Presidency activities (Social Platform can provide contact details of conference participants.)

## 3. Panel Debate

**Silvija Simfa** (Member of the Latvian Parliament, Secretary of Parliamentarian Social Affairs and Work Committee) asked what support power structures can provide to the civil society structures. The Parliament will continue its work on employment issues, focusing on young people, cooperation with employment agencies and safety and health care protection at work. It also works to support entrepreneurship. Furthermore, she encouraged Social Platform to send a letter to the Parliament encouraging it to follow-up on the discussions of our meeting.

**Peteris Krigers** (Chairman of the Free Trade Union Confederation of Latvia) mentioned that the Trade Unions had expectations when Latvia entered the EU but that they have not seen their expectations realised; they are therefore continuing their social dialogue with the Latvian government regarding issues of working conditions, salary, etc., as usual. He encouraged NGOs to be active on calling on Latvia to ratify the European Social Charter.

**Kristine Naseniece** (Director of the EU Coordination Department, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Latvia) called on civil society to reconnect with the Presidency with our key recommendations on how to mainstream social aspects in all EU policies. She referred to Karl Polanyi, an economic historian and social philosopher who argued for embedded links between economic and social aspects. She asked how we can identify that we are out of the crisis; the Annual Growth Report shows an unemployment rate of more than 11 percent, including figures on inequality. People tend to either become involved in social movements – as seen in Spain and Greece – or they live with the status quo without contesting it. The economic crisis has been largely due to budget policy aspirations, deficit and bank rescue policies that have emptied the state's pockets. The democratic crisis is hinged on instability of the labour market, inequality and a lack of original solutions. The economic and democratic crisis has led to a social crisis, and the solution must come from the integration of social aspects in all policies, and the involvement of employers and employees. The EU Presidency will follow President Junker's investment plan for more employment and inclusion in the labour market.

**Arnis Sauka** (Director of the Centre for Sustainable Business) concluded by stating that studies show social responsibility is beneficial for businesses, e.g. by including youth, older people and people with disabilities. The government has a responsibility to legislate for employees and employer to enforce equal rights.

**Pierre Baussand** (Director of Social Platform) encouraged the Latvian Presidency to regard the conference as the opening of a meaningful dialogue between Latvian civil society organisations and decision makers that should continue throughout the Presidency, and beyond.

* * *

socialplatform

**The Platform of European Social NGOs**

The Social Dimension of the Latvian EU Presidency | Riga, December 8 2014

socialplatform

# Who we are

- Largest civil society alliance fighting for social justice and participatory democracy in Europe.
- 49 pan-European networks of NGOs.
- Campaign to ensure that EU policies:
  - are developed in partnership with those they affect
  - respect human rights
  - promote solidarity
  - improve lives

socialplatform

# Mission

- Social progress through advocacy and awareness-raising.

# Vision

- A socially just and cohesive Europe.

# Values

- Rights-based approach: human dignity, equality for all, diversity, solidarity, freedom, social justice, sustainability, transparency and participatory democracy.

socialplatform

# Our members



socialplatform

# Strategic Objectives 2014-2020




socialplatform

**Socio-economic justice: eliminate all forms of socio-economic inequalities,** including inequalities in wealth redistribution, in the provision of social and health services and services of general interest - such as housing, education, health, transportation - to close the growing gap in European societies.

**Equality for all: act for the eradication of discrimination and for the realisation of equality between women and men, in all areas of life,** including all grounds of discrimination - social, economic and residency status.

**Decent work and quality employment:** active inclusion strategies articulated around the need for adequate minimum income; for equality in relation to access, pay, pension, training and career progression; access to services; access to quality jobs; and reconciliation between private and professional lives.

socialplatform

**Strong social protection and welfare systems:** promoting inclusive, effective and efficient social protection and welfare systems and their centrality to maintaining and securing the European Social Model.

**Participation in decision making: ensure that civil society organisations are involved in decision making processes at EU level**, including through partnership between civil society organisations and public authorities in different policy areas.

**People centered services for the common good: ensure universal access to quality, affordable and accessible public and social services**, thereby ensuring a strong social dimension of the internal market.

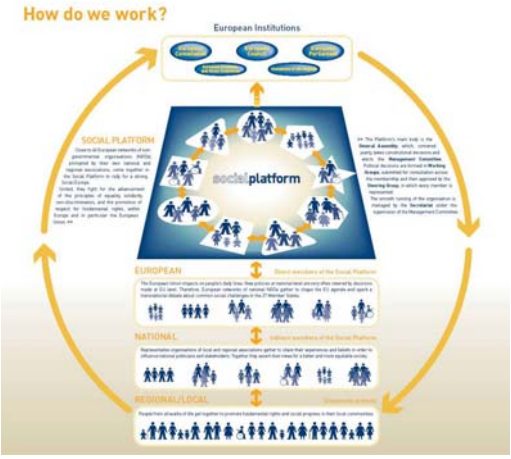
socialplatform

# How we work

- Building cooperation among members through the exchange of expertise and capacity building.
- Supporting members in developing joint campaigns on specific issues.
- Supporting members' campaigns on common issues.
- Ensuring access to decision makers for members on common policy areas.
- Leading advocacy on strategic common issues through influencing EU policies and legislation.

socialplatform

# Horizontal process




socialplatform

# Our internal structure

socialplatform

**General Assembly:** Takes constitutional decisions and elects Management Committee

**Management Committee:** Management of the platform

**Steering Group:** Reviews platform's progress and agrees on positions developed in Task Forces

**Task Forces:** Develop political positions and campaigns

**Secretariat:** Carries out annual work programme, and supports and informs members

socialplatform

# EU Institutions

**European Parliament**

- Cooperation and meetings with numerous committees: Employment & Social Affairs (EMPL), Civil Liberties, Justice & Home Affairs (LIBE), International Trade (INTA), Internal Market & Consumer Protection (IMCO).

**European Commission**

- Bi-annual meetings with our members and Commissioners and the Director-General of DG EMPL, and on-going relations with other DGs.

**European Council and Council of the European Union**

- Previously had annual meetings with President Herman Van Rompuy – hope to continue tradition with President Donald Tusk.
- Bi-annual informal EPSCO Councils, and regular exchanges with the Employment Committee (EMCO) and Social Protection Committee (SPC).

socialplatform

# Contact information

Square de Meeûs 18
B-1050 Brussels
Belgium
**T** +32 2 511 37 14

platform@socialplatform.org
www.socialplatform.org

**facebook.com/ socialplatform**

**@social_platform**