

Civil Dialogue and Social Policy in an enlarged European Union
Budapest, 23-24 June 2003

Dirk Jarré
Social Platform Vice-President
Closing Session , 24 June

N.b. Draft: check against delivery

On behalf of the Social Platform, I would like to thank our Hungarian hosts, and the European Commission, for their work in bringing together so many NGOs for this important conference. I hope that the collaboration has proved fruitful for the participants.

Some conclusions:

There is a clear need for further work to strengthen the involvement of NGOs from the acceding countries within the policy-making of the EU. This is essential if the new European Union is to be in touch with the hopes, concerns, and aspirations of **all** Europeans. We have heard, over the past two days, strong and clear voices coming from all across the accession countries, speaking about the need for policies to fight social exclusion, and to combat discrimination.

These are not new problems, and they are shared within the existing Member States. But accession is causing a re-evaluation of the priorities of the Union, and we must make sure that the enlargement of the Union does not lead to less, but more action to build a social Europe, with greater social cohesion, and freedom from all forms of discrimination.

So, what next for civil society?

- We need a stronger involvement of national social NGOs in the acceding countries in the shaping of EU policies and activities.
- National NGOs must play a full and active role within European NGO networks. Many EU NGO networks already have strong members in the acceding countries, and more still are in the process of welcoming new members. Hopefully, the last few days have helped to develop these links.
- It is important that national NGOs work within European networks which reflect their area of interest, in order to maximise the impact of their views and concerns at EU level.

- We have heard clearly that sometimes much work needs to be done to ensure strong umbrella structures at national level, before sectoral NGOs can participate at EU level. Where this is the case, we must all make sure that such new networks are established by the NGOs on the ground in the countries concerned, and are not created through an unsustainable 'top-down' process. We must also ensure that such new networks are democratic, open, representative, and exist to serve the needs of their members.
- NGOs at all levels, European, national, and local, must continue to fight to ensure that their voice is heard in the forging of a new Europe. Here, as we have heard, the proposals to guarantee the role of participatory democracy, and hence the right of NGOs to contribute to the policy-making process, are significant steps forwards.

What next for EU social policy?

Of course, this conference has not just been about the development of civil dialogue, it has also been about the future of Social Policy in an Enlarged Union. Again, I will highlight a few areas which have been raised throughout the conference.

- We need to ensure the strong and rapid implementation of existing directives on discrimination – and that we discuss how to develop new legislative measures to combat the various forms of discrimination which are not yet covered by EU laws.
- The new 'Open Method of Coordination' has huge potential to strengthen work on social policies which are not the subject of EU competence. However, so far there has been much disappointment from civil society. The disappointment is three-fold:
 - there has been little meaningful consultation of NGOs at national level
 - the plans and strategies have often contained little new action, and lots of general statements, with few specific targets
 - the level of knowledge about the existence of the plans, perhaps as a result of the two previous points, is very low
- The reforms to the Treaties of the EU could deliver improvements to the EU's ability both to connect with its citizens, and to implement policies which reflect their needs. However, much work remains to be done by civil society over the coming months to ensure that governments do not forget about our concerns as they negotiate a new Future for Europe.

We have much work ahead, but the key is to ensure that we approach it together – with strong ties between NGOs, strong dialogue with EU

socialplatform

Institutions, including the Commission, and a strong common commitment to build a social Europe for all!

Thank you.