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NOTE

from : Presidency
to : Council (Employment, Social Policy, Health and Consumer Affairs)

Subject : **VI European Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion
(Ponta Delgada (Azores), 17th October 2007)**
(Any other business item)

Delegations will find attached a note by the Portuguese Presidency on the subject of the above-mentioned Round Table.

KEY MESSAGES

DRAWN BY THE PRESIDENCY AFTER CONSULTATION WITH THE COMMISSION

VI EUROPEAN ROUND TABLE ON POVERTY AND SOCIAL EXCLUSION

(Ponta Delgada (Azores), 17th October 2007)

For the sixth time since the launch of the Lisbon Strategy, the European Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion has brought all concerned stakeholders together for two days, in Ponta Delgada (Azores). Members from the various European networks representing and supporting people experiencing poverty, local and national authorities, members of the Social Protection Committee, members of the European Parliament, Ministers from Germany, Portugal, Slovenia and France, representing the past, present and future presidencies, have joined together with the European Commission. The meeting has pointed to important conclusions and messages.

1. **Joining voices and forces from all stakeholders has been and continues to be an innovative and productive role of all the Round Tables organised to date:** Aarhus, Denmark (2002), Turin, Italy (2003), Rotterdam, the Netherlands (2004), Glasgow, the United Kingdom (2005) and Tampere, Finland (2006). The Round Table on Poverty and Social Exclusion is an important yearly opportunity to hold a shared reflection on issues of great importance to Europe and its citizens.
2. **Social cohesion is at the core of the European project.** High levels of cohesion are distinctive marks of European societies, and they are key to meet citizens' needs and aspirations by ensuring the effectiveness of full citizenship and equal opportunities for all. Poverty and exclusion are the most radical forms of denial of equal opportunities for all, since they imply the pure absence of basic conditions of access to opportunities¹ and rights.

¹ COM (2007) Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion.

3. **Europe has a long tradition of instruments for social cohesion, which has been updated over time.** Not only was the ESF established 50 years ago, with the Treaty of Rome itself, as since the mid-1970s the European Union has increasingly developed a vision of an inclusive society, with the aim of not only guaranteeing that all citizens can live in dignity, but also to ensure that they can participate fully in the society. This vision has later been reflected in different instruments and resulted namely in common objectives, agreed and monitored in the Lisbon process through the Open Method of Coordination, which should be further strengthened with the active involvement of all stakeholders at European and all relevant levels in order to foster progress towards inclusive economies and societies.
4. **The promotion of inclusion is virtuous from at least a double perspective.** It means progress in citizenship and opportunities of outsiders, a decisive factor for cohesion, and it also implies improving the human and development potential of societies, with significant positive impacts on employment and economic performance. In this sense, social inclusion is truly a powerful and multidimensional investment.
5. **The complexity of poverty and exclusion situations calls for integrated strategies with the double aim of protection and empowerment.** Albeit essential, ensuring adequate basic levels of social protection to citizens is not enough. The sustainability of inclusion and the goal of individual autonomy must be achieved by improving the capacities and employability levels of citizens. Basic standards of protection and the strengthening of individual competences must be complementary and intertwined components of correctly designed programs to fight poverty and exclusion.
6. **Integrated policies for inclusion must cover different policy fields, including economic fields, mainstreaming social inclusion².** Poverty and exclusion have causes and consequences, as well as specific features and challenges, in multiple fields. From employment to education and training, including lifelong learning, housing, health, culture and civic participation it is crucial that inclusion is pursued across and within policy areas.

² Presidency Conclusions, Lisbon European Council 23-24 March 2000 and COM (2005).

7. **Poverty and exclusion are very diverse in different regions and countries.** Meeting the specific challenges of these situations in each national, regional and local context implies the recognition and respect of different approaches and options within broader general strategic principles guiding the promotion of social inclusion across Europe.
8. **“Active inclusion” provides an adequate framework to a comprehensive and balanced strategy to fight poverty and social exclusion³.** By combining minimum resources, integration in the labour market and better access to quality social services⁴ as balanced, mutually reinforcing pillars, active inclusion incorporates the underlying intertwined principles of protection and empowerment and provides a broad general framework for action at European and national level. Also it fully incorporates respect for the diversity of situations and political options of Member-States, while helping to map priorities and needs for adequate social standards across different policy areas. The involvement of social partners in this issue through their bilateral social dialogue is of paramount importance.
9. **Special focus should be given to specific issues and priorities.** Learning from experience and from lessons already learned a number of issues must be given due attention in close articulation with the active inclusion framework. Examples of these could be:
 - **The causes and challenges of poverty and exclusion may be very different from each other.** Therefore, *specific policy design is required to deal with specific challenges* of situations such as citizens with disabilities, depressed or peripheral territories, migrants and ethnic minorities, and others.

³ COM (2007) “Modernising social protection for greater social justice and economic cohesion: taking forward active inclusion of people furthest from the labour market”

⁴ COM (2006) 177 final “Implementing the Community Lisbon programme: Social Services of General Interest in the European Union”

- **Within the need to assure a decent society for all, further attention should be given to severity of poverty.** Under the statistical threshold of poverty, and beyond the diversity of problems, conditions are also very different from the perspective of *severity*. Some citizens may be poorer or more excluded than others, due to lower income levels, multiple factor discrimination, homelessness, or specific contextual conditions (regional or local, household framework, or others). Therefore, *the challenges of severe poverty should be object of further policy efforts and integrated approaches*.
- **Inclusion alone is not always a sufficient exit door to poverty.** For instance, in-work poverty is still a significant problem in many countries. *Attention and action should be devoted to tackling the specific risks of poverty situations of citizens participating in the labour market*.
- **Breaking the reproduction cycle of poverty is essential.** Poverty situations tend to have reproductive effects over time and generations, without diminishing the importance adults and elders. Investing in the early stages of life is the best way to enhance individual opportunities when they are to a large extent being built and therefore the best way to prevent the reproduction of poverty and exclusion. *The eradication of poverty among children and young people is a key factor for the long term effects and sustainability of the fight for an inclusive society⁵*.
- **Men and women face different challenges concerning poverty and exclusion.** As in other policy fields, the situations and problems of men and women are often distinct. *A gender perspective should always be taken into account in policy design and monitoring*.

⁵ The March 2006 European Council asked Member States "to take necessary steps to rapidly and significantly reduce child poverty, giving all children equal opportunities, regardless of their social background".

10. **Involving relevant stakeholders is a key factor of success of inclusion strategies.** Involving stakeholders, among which NGO and Social Partners, in discussion, design and evaluation of policies is an essential contribution to quality intervention in the field of poverty and exclusion. The European Round Table, a key European awareness raising event in the context of the open method of coordination for social inclusion, is a good example of involvement of different stakeholders and institutional actors. The link between participation and decision-making should be enhanced at all levels.

11. **Europe needs new opportunities for social inclusion.** In order to foster debate and action in this field, we need to create adequate stages for European-wide attention to these issues. The Round Table is now an established and fruitful tradition in the European work agenda. The project of a European Year of Poverty and Social Exclusion in 2010 is most welcome. The recent proposal of a Day dedicated to the promotion of Social Europe, to take place ahead of the forthcoming European Parliament Elections, in 2009, in all Member States, is also an opportunity to give the subject the relevance and visibility it deserves, for instance by focusing each year on different topics.

12. **Progress towards a more inclusive society should be fostered at all levels.** Given the relevance and the dimension of problems still existing concerning the issues of poverty and exclusion, all forms of positive action to tackle them, namely at the national and local level, are welcome. The European role is also essential in providing adequate conceptual framework, mutual learning platforms, quality instruments to support the specific policies different Member-States choose to pursue, and monitoring progress towards European and national targets. Improving indicators and information systems as well as governance procedures such as the OMC and its link to other political spheres, namely the Revised Lisbon Strategy and the Sustainable Development Strategy is key to our joint efforts.

13. **Policies are important, results are truly decisive.** Better policies promote more and better results, in all political fields and also concerning exclusion of poverty. Nevertheless, a greater focus and priority must be put on results, which are key evaluating the success of policy programs and measures⁶. At the European level, monitoring progress towards specific inclusion objectives across Europe is an essential element of the overall goals we are striving for.

14. **Social inclusion must be politically visible and rendered due strategic centrality at the European level.** Besides specific initiatives to promote poverty and inclusion in the European agenda, we must ensure adequate strategic frameworks for these issues. Inclusion and social cohesion are important to citizens, and such a signal will also be relevant for European employment, growth and cohesion goals. The social OMC strengthened by the active inclusion strategy can be the ideal framework to support and promote centrality and to highlight the positive and relevant contribution of inclusion for the goals of human, social and economic development at the European level and for the specific objectives of the Lisbon Agenda.

15. **The strategic goal of social cohesion and an inclusive society is a shared value and practical political commitment for the future of Europe.**

⁶ Communication of the European Commission “Working together, working better: A new framework for the open coordination of social protection and inclusion policies in the European Union”, 2005.