

EU/CoE: Shared social responsibility, confidence in the future

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On 28 February and 1 March 2011 in Brussels, the Council of Europe (CoE) in partnership with the European Commission organised a conference. The objective of this conference was to prioritise reflection in Europe on questions of responsibility in forging the future of designs for democracy, social justice, poverty alleviation, sustainability and communal living. A "European Charter for Shared Social Responsibility" was drafted by an ad hoc Council of Europe group and submitted to the conference for discussion, before its final version during the first day of work on these issues.

The conference on "Shared Social Responsibility: Rebuilding Confidence and Ensuring Social Cohesion in a Context of Transition" tackled the following themes: (1) transformation in Europe: social cohesion and shared responsibility, key factors for creating a vision and rebuilding confidence in the future; (2) the need to develop a concept of social responsibility: prospects and obstacles; (3) mobilising citizens and actors through and for shared responsibility; (4) the challenges involved in placing shared responsibility at the heart of the political agenda; (5) organising together to reach the well-being objective for all.

Thorbjorn Jagland, the secretary general of the Council of Europe, declared: "Europe has one common identity, the one enshrined in the European Convention of Human Rights, which remains a fundamental cornerstone of Europe, forming a democracy, developing our societies". He highlighted the importance of joint efforts between the Council of Europe and the EU and reaffirmed the fact that democracy and the protection of human rights are the basis of social justice, economic prosperity and sustainable peace.

José Manuel Barroso declared that "solidarity between all and responsibility by all are two fundamental and indissociable principles of the EU". He provided an overview of the situation and drew on statistics to help create this picture but the picture he created of the near future did not look that enticing and may appear to undermine hope in social progress. He also highlighted the fear of transmitting social precariousness from one generation to the other. President Barroso stressed that "Europe has to adapt to new economic and geo-strategic situations. I believe in Europe. It is the Europe of the EU that I believe in and it is also the Europe of the Council of Europe. Europe, which places human dignity at the heart of our efforts and our citizens at the heart of its struggle", concluded José Manuel Barroso. (G.B./transl.fl)