

“Shared social responsibility. Securing trust and sustainable social cohesion in a context of transition”

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Ladies and gentlemen, honourable Members of the European Parliament, dear friends and colleagues,

I am very honoured to have the opportunity to present the **European Platform against Poverty and Exclusion** to this audience.

But before doing so, let me make a brief digression on the context of this meeting.

The joint project between the European Commission and the Council of Europe, that is at the origin of this conference, was conceived and developed last year, during the **European Year 2010 for combating poverty and exclusion**. And, in many respects, the project belongs to the heritage of that extraordinary experience.

In fact, **‘Shared responsibility and participation’** is one of the four main objectives and guiding principles listed in Article 2 of the legal instruments establishing the European Year 2010.

The text clearly explains what “Shared responsibility and participation” stands for:

- It means increasing public ownership of social inclusion policies and actions, emphasizing both collective and individual responsibility in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, as well as the importance of promoting and supporting voluntary activities.

- It also means promoting the involvement of public and private actors, inter alia, through proactive partnerships. It means fostering awareness and commitment and creating opportunities for contributions by all citizens, in particular people with direct or indirect experience of poverty.

I remember that the formulation of this objective was the subject of lengthy discussions during the negotiation in the Council and in the Parliament. For some, the reference to responsibility was intended to underline the collective responsibility of the society; for others, the emphasis had to be put on the responsibility of the institutions; others considered that also people who are in a situation of poverty have some responsibility for exiting from their conditions and that rights should always be associated with responsibilities.

But eventually it was possible to find an agreeable formulation. During the discussion, it was noticed that underlining both the individual and collective responsibility was not only important for the outcome (social inclusion) but also for the process. Because a community that decides to set the eradication of poverty as a common goal and is prepared to take action to reach it, is likely to be a cohesive community. So, sharing responsibility provides the link between inclusion and cohesion.

Actually, another objective of the European Year was **‘Cohesion’**, that means promoting a more cohesive society by raising public awareness of the benefits for all of a society where poverty is eradicated, fair distribution is enabled and no one is marginalised.

So, it is no coincidence that the European Platform against poverty and social exclusion is under titled “A European framework for social inclusion and social cohesion”.

[End of my digression]

I will turn now to the **Platform against Poverty** which is another important legacy of the European Year 2010.

As you certainly know, the Platform is **one of the seven flagship initiatives** that the Commission has proposed to underpin the Europe 2020 strategy. It is intended to support the achievement of the **EU target for the reduction of poverty and exclusion**: reducing by at least 20 million the number of people who are in a situation of poverty or exclusion in the next ten years.

We know very well that social policies are largely within the responsibility of Member States. So, how will the Platform help? And first of all, what is the Platform?

Maybe it is easier to clarify what the Platform is not.

It is not a new set of objectives – we already have the objectives of the Treaty, the Europe 2020 objectives and the common objectives defined within the Social OMC. But it provides the tools to reach those objectives.

It is not a new structure, but it does enhance and create new links among existing structures, to foster delivery.

It is not a new process, but it helps rationalising, coordinating and reinforcing existing processes.

The Platform is an action-oriented framework. It maps all EU actions and processes that will contribute to the achievement of the Europe 2020 goals for social inclusion and social cohesion. All together, these actions are an illustration of the Europe 2020 approach to poverty reduction.

What are the key elements of this approach?

1. First, **social inclusion and social cohesion are not only a matter for social policies.**

They require action across the whole policy spectrum. Economic, employment and education policies are key to winning the fight against poverty and exclusion, but there are many other policies which have an important role to play, from internal market, to health and consumer

policies, energy, environment, research, antidiscrimination, information technologies, regional policies.

Actually it would be difficult to single out a policy area that is not relevant in this context. In this respect, the Platform aims at making the most of the integrated approach of Europe 2020. In fact, the actions of the Platform cannot be seen in isolation, but rather they have clear linkages to all the other flagship initiatives.

2. Second, **there is a vital need to find innovative responses to old and new social challenges**. This must be understood in a very broad sense. The economic crisis and its legacy in terms of public finances give unprecedented urgency to the reform and modernisation agenda, and to the need to find new ways and new means to address social challenges and ensure intergenerational solidarity.

We will need to involve new actors in the provision of social welfare, and to rely more and more on public-private partnerships. This is why the Platform emphasises the role of the social economy, of social business, and of civil society at large. And it also gives prominence to the role of regional and local actors, and to multi-level governance.

We will need to promote new products and new solutions to address the increasing and diverse demands of social welfare. The application of new technologies offers huge potential. Think of the provision of health care services on line... But often it is only about thinking of creative solutions to match demand and supply. These can come from civil society or from the market, but we should not forget that markets are also policy driven.

And we will need to ensure that public schemes become more cost-effective and more respondent to social needs. So we will also need to have new methods to design and reform welfare programmes. This is why the Platform announces a major initiative in the field of social experimentation, on which we are currently working.

3. Third, **cooperation and solidarity at EU level are essential.**

Over time, the EU has developed powerful tools to support its social goals, which are clearly spelled out in the Lisbon Treaty: a high level of social protection, the fight against social exclusion, social and territorial cohesion....

Community funds – now EU funds – have been essential to promote regional development and social cohesion. Their potential to achieve social inclusion and social cohesion objectives and to promote social innovation can and should be better exploited. Ongoing work on the multiannual financial framework aims at creating strong links between structural funds and ESF and the Europe 2020 headline targets. Using EU funds to consolidate EU solidarity will be vital for the achievement of the poverty target.

Another important tool of social Europe has been the coordination among Member States in the field of social policies, or social Open Method of Coordination. The Social OMC has enabled us to establish common objectives, to identify common challenges, to promote knowledge-based policies, to promote mutual learning. Europe 2020 and the Platform will help to reinforce this coordination and to make it more delivery oriented.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I hope that this rapid overview of the content of the European Platform against poverty and exclusion has shown that there are many convergences between the European Commission and the Council of Europe when it comes to identifying challenges and priorities to build cohesive societies. And that it also helps understanding the different but complementary roles of the two institutions. On this basis, let me conclude by saying that we are very glad that we can “share responsibility” and work in partnership, as it has been the case for this project.