



EUROPEAN COMMISSION
Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities DG
Directorate-General

Commission Conference

Responding to new social realities

Developing an EU Agenda for Opportunities, Access and Solidarity

Brussels, 5-6 May 2008

Venue: Charlemagne Building, rue de la Loi 170

Draft (29.04.08)

This Conference aims to contribute to the preparation of the Commission Communication on a new agenda for “Access, Opportunities and Solidarity” planned for mid-2008.

One of the starting points of the Conference is the Social Agenda¹ adopted in 2005 which set out the EU’s roadmap for modernising the European social model: “A social Europe in the global economy: jobs and opportunities for all”. The Social Agenda forms part of the integrated European approach towards growth and employment known as the Lisbon Strategy.

The Lisbon Strategy has helped to speed up reform and raise the EU’s performance, with 17 million new jobs created since 2000. Millions of Europeans have seized the opportunities offered by the single market to live, study, work or retire in another Member State. The EU has put in place a robust framework of workplace rights. But there is no room for complacency.

16% of Europeans, including 19 million children, remain at risk of poverty. Women’s pay continues to lag behind men by 15%. And new challenges have emerged. Rapid technological change is widening the gap between the skilled and unskilled. Socio-economic factors are the cause of major health inequalities. Social protection and health systems have to adapt to demographic change and the needs of the EU’s ageing population. The difficulties that young people face, including access to jobs and affordable housing, have raised fears that today’s generation of young Europeans may not enjoy the same standard of living as their parents.

Against this background, the Commission launched an EU-wide “Social Reality Stocktaking” exercise in 2007². The consultation aimed to take stock of the changes underway in European societies. A broad range of views on current social trends, as well as on the implications of changing social relationships has emerged. Building on the initial results of the consultation, the Commission adopted a Communication on Opportunities, Access and Solidarity in November 2007³ which sets out an initial range of possible responses to the challenges faced by the European Union.

The Conference will provide a platform to stakeholders – Member States, representatives from the European Institutions, social partners, civil society representatives, and experts - to discuss current social trends and to contribute to the development of an EU agenda based on “Opportunities, Access and Solidarity”.

¹ http://ec.europa.eu/employment_social/social_policy_agenda/social_pol_ag_fr.html

² http://ec.europa.eu/citizens_agenda/social_reality_stocktaking/docs/background_document_en.pdf

³ http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/site/en/com/2007/com2007_0726en01.pdf

5 May 2008

**09.00-10.00 Registration of participants
Welcome coffee**

Chair: Nikolaus G. VAN DER PAS, Director General
DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities
European Commission

10.00-11.30 Opening of the Conference

10.00-10.15 Opening address and Welcome

Vladimír ŠPIDLA
Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities

10.15-11.30 Key Speeches

François BILTGEN, Minister for Employment and Social Affairs,
Luxemburg
*Reconciling opportunities, access and solidarity in today's European
societies*

Ben PAGE, Ipsos MORI Social Research Institute
Citizens' expectations

**11.30-13.00 Session 1: Towards a new social vision: building up on the results
of the Social Reality Stocktaking exercise**

11.30-13.00 Round Table: A changing social reality

Moderator: Roger LIDDLE

Participants:

Csaba ÖRY, Member of the European Parliament
Jan OLSSON, Member of the European Economic and Social
Committee
Anne-Marie BROCAS, Director, Directorate for Research, Studies,
Evaluation and Statistics, France
Emmanuel JULIEN, Deputy Director, European and International Social
Affairs, MEDEF
Maria JEPSEN, Director of Research Department, ETUI-REHS

13.00-14.30 Lunch

14.30-17.00 Parallel Working Groups

Working group 1: New policy responses to changing challenges

Chair: Anton HEMERIJCK, Secretary of the Scientific Council for Government Policy, the Netherlands

Speakers:

Bruno PALIER, CNRS - Centre for Political Research at Sciences Po (CEVIPOF), France

Re-orientation of European social policies and specificities of welfare reforms in European societies as a response to changing challenges

Bea CANTILLON, Director of the Centre for Social Policy, University of Antwerp

Moving towards a better understanding and measuring of well-being and social progress

Working group 2: A changing configuration of roles and responsibilities

Chair: Jane JENSON, Professor of Political Science
University of Montreal, Canada

Speaker:

Helen JOHNSTON, Senior Social Policy Analyst, National Economic and Social Council, Ireland

Social pacts: new form of governance to deal with changing roles and responsibilities. The Irish example

Discussants:

Maria Helena ANDRE, Deputy General Secretary of the European Trade Union Confederation, Belgium

Jörgen RONNEST, Director for International Affairs, Danish Employers Confederation, Denmark

Fintan FARRELL, Director of the European Anti-Poverty Network, Ireland

Working group 3: The role of the EU in delivering opportunities, access and solidarity

Chair: Maria LADO, Director-General of the Directorate for European Integration and International Affairs, Ministry of Employment and Labour, Hungary

Speakers:

Jonathan ZEITLIN, Director of the Centre for World Affairs and the Global Economy (WAGE); Co-Director, European Union Centre, United States

How to improve social policy coordination in the EU

Catherine BARNARD, Trinity College, Cambridge, United Kingdom
New forms of regulation

17.00-17.30 Coffee break

17.30-18.00 Initial feedback from the working groups

18.00 Closure of the first day

20.00 Dinner

6 May 2008

09.00-10.30 Continuation of the working groups

10.30-11.00 Coffee break

11.00-12.30 Presentation of the conclusions of the working groups by the chairs in plenary session and discussion

Chair: Nikolaus G. VAN DER PAS, Director General
DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities
European Commission

Concluding remarks:

Dusan SIDJANSKI, President of the European Cultural Centre,
Professor emeritus at Geneva University, Switzerland

12.30-14.00 Buffet lunch

14.00-16.00 Session 3: Towards a shared social vision for the 21st century

14.00-15.30 Round table: *A shifting social paradigm in Europe*

Moderator: Nikolaus G. VAN DER PAS, Director General
DG Employment, Social Affairs and Equal Opportunities

Participants:

Vladimir ŠPIDLA, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and
Equal Opportunities
Romana TOMC, State Secretary, Ministry of Labour, Family and Social
Affairs, Slovenia
Jan ANDERSSON, Chair of the Employment and Social Affairs
Committee
John MONKS, General Secretary of ETUC (European Trade Union
Confederation), Belgium
Conny REUTER, President of the European Social Platform
Philippe DE BUCK, General Secretary of BusinessEurope, Belgium
Martin HIRSCH, High Commissioner for Active Solidarities against
Poverty, France

15.30-16.00 Closing of the conference

José Manuel BARROSO, President of the European Commission

16.00 End of the Conference