



Manifesto2009

Strengthening Social Europe in a post-2010 Lisbon strategy

This paper outlines a number of persistent shortcomings of Social Europe and proposes a set of priorities for the design of a post-2010 Lisbon strategy. They aim at ensuring more social cohesion and social justice, political stability, consolidation of democracy in Central and Eastern Europe, and economic dynamism.

Fully developing and utilizing Europe's human resources

Full, productive and high quality employment is a key objective of the EU. While many new jobs have been created in recent years, there continues to be significant un- and underemployment. In the EU-27 in 2006, total unemployment stood at an average of 8 %, and youth joblessness at 17 %. The large majority of Member countries have yet to reach EU's overall employment rate target of 70 %. There has been an expansion of informal employment and atypical forms of work, including involuntary part-time, temporary work and fixed-term contracts, frequently generating low pay, insecurity and precarious working conditions. Too many students don't finish school. Many young people face difficulties making the transition from school to work. Initial vocational training and adult training is inadequate, especially for less skilled workers.

Europe must upgrade its human resources base, both in quantitative and qualitative terms. Access to a job and to decent work for all should be viewed as an essential human right, and recognized as a critical source of productivity, GDP growth and international competitiveness. To meet increasing demand for worker qualification and avoid skills mismatch, one must raise the level of investment into general and vocational education (including by internet) and active labour market policies, improve working conditions and work organisation, and reverse the trend towards precariousness. Every worker must have access to life-long learning. Rapidly increasing stress at work needs to be contained to safeguard worker health and efficiency.

Protecting the rights of workers and consumers

Respecting worker rights compatible with international labour standards has been a hallmark of the European Social Model. In reality, major deficits remain to be overcome, even with regard to fundamental worker rights enshrined in the ILO Declaration of 1998. The right to equal pay for work of equal value is violated where regular employees and agency workers doing the same kind of job get different rates of pay. Trade unions and employer organisations have been weakened and average collective bargaining coverage has significantly shrunk, raising the question whether the core rights of Freedom of association and the Right to collective bargaining are fully maintained. Social security provisions have been scaled down in many EU Member States. Particularly in Central and Eastern Europe, provisions for employment and social protection are frequently not observed or not implemented. There is no common incomes policy at the Community level. An effective minimum wage is not everywhere in place, giving rise to social

dumping. Consumers are often at the mercy of high prices in monopolistic markets, and do not have sufficient information to increase their purchasing power.

The EU has to take a new initiative to adopt and implement minimum labour and social rights and minimum standards of social and consumer protection. This will not be accomplishable without rebuilding and strengthening workers', employers' organisations, European Works Councils, and revitalising bi-partite and tri-partite social dialogue. Consumer protection will also have to be improved, and consumer organizations should participate in the social dialogue. The social partners should have the right of consultation with regard to monetary and fiscal policies at the European level. Next to monetary stability, the European Central Bank should include economic growth and full employment among the objectives for its policy.

Combating Poverty and Inequality

Poverty in Europe persists. In many EU Member States it has been rising. An average of 16 % of the population is at risk of being poor. Seven per cent of the labour force is affected by poverty at work. Their earnings are insufficient to live on and need to be publically subsidized. One can also observe serious problems with regard to the quality of employment: expansion of clandestine work without labour protection, and expansion of various forms of atypical work, such as involuntary part time work, temporary contracts, precarious work, stressful work and pseudo-independent work.

Europe needs to make a common effort to overcome inequality that is economically unwarranted. Social peace and social cohesion are at stake. First of all, it is necessary to improve the social protection for workers in new forms employment, such as telework, which is often independent and precarious in nature. Such workers need at least a complementary safety net that permits them to have an adequate standard of living. Excessive differentials in the primary income distribution must be rectified through a European strategy on income tax as well as through more cooperation and exchange of information between national tax authorities. Destructive tax competition between enterprises should be contained by way of European-wide regulation of corporate taxes. Equality of treatment must be reinforced, and discrimination in all its forms eliminated. Gender disparities in the labour market must be addressed through family friendly private and public employment policy including day care provisions for children and the elderly, parental leave, full-time schooling and working time flexibility in response to family needs.

Working Towards a Common European Immigration Policy

A significant proportion of the EU population is now of foreign origin. With the recent enlargement of the Union, migration streams have been swelling from the new to the old Member States. Migration pressures have mounted from outside the EU. The volume of irregular immigration and human trafficking for forced labour has been mounting.

A generally agreed migration policy could help to alleviate problems and risks associated with the impact of the demographic transformation in Europe including the shrinking and ageing of the population at large and the working population. Benefits for productivity and innovation can be gained from greater work force diversity. This will happen when young and old workers and workers of various ethnic groups and multiple national origins work together and share their experience.

Europe needs to come up with a comprehensive legal framework and a common policy for immigration that accommodate the interests of both the sending and the recipient countries and fosters co-development. The integration of migrants and their families into EU societies should be promoted, among other things through training for language proficiency and vocational skills. Discrimination and exploitation of migrants, both legal and illegal ones, must be outlawed and controlled, and lacking social protection eliminated. Domestic workers must be shielded from the undercutting of wage and work standards resulting from the employment of foreign labour.

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