



FOURTH WORLD EUROPEAN COMMITTEE

Intergroup Fighting Against Poverty and Exclusion

**Minutes of the Fourth World European Committee Intergroup meeting
held at the European Parliament in Strasbourg on 23 February 2005, 15:00-16:30, room N1.1A, LOW building**

Members Present: Ms Edit Bauer (SK, EPP-ED), Ms Ilda Figueiredo (P, GUE/NGL), Mr Bronislaw Geremek (PL, ALDE), Ms Erna Hennicot-Schoepges (L, EPP-ED), Ms Sylvia-Yvonne Kaufmann (D, GUE/NGL), Mr Jan Jerzy Kulakowski (PL, ALDE), Ms Jean Lambert (UK, Verts/ALE), Mr Raymond Langendries (B, EPP-ED), Mr Iñigo Mendez de Vigo Montojo (E, EPP-ED), Ms Martine Roure (F, PES), Mr László Surján (HU, EPP-ED), Ms Anna Zaborska (SK, EPP-ED).

Parliamentary Assistants Present: Ms Miriam Bodamer (ass. Jo Leinen, D, PES), Ms Pauline Chaigne (ass. Ms Roure), Mr Roger Chiajese (ass. Marie Anne Isler Béguin, F, Verts/ALE), Ms Rita Higgs (ass. Proinsias De Rossa, IRL, PES), Mr David Kardos (ass. Magda Kósáné Kovács, HU, PES), Mr Jérôme Maleski (ass. Ms Roure), Ms Sylvia Raffin (ass. Patrizia Toia, I, ALDE), Mr Tobias Teuscher (ass. Ms Zaborska).

Other Participants: Mr Nathanaël Caillaux (ATD Fourth World), Mr Paul Collowald (ATD Fourth World), Mr Fintan Farrell (EAPN), Ms Gunda Macioti (ATD Fourth World), Fr Bernard Senelle (European Parliament priest)

Apologies: Mr Giles Chichester (UK, EPP-ED), Mr Ryszard Czarnecki (PL, NI), Ms Nathalie Griesbeck (F, ALDE), Ms Marian Harkin (IRL, ALDE), Mr Georg Jarzembowski (D, EPP-ED), Ms Arlene McCarthy (UK, PES), Mr Philippe Morillon (F, ALDE), Ms Marie Panoyotopoulos-Cassiotou (GR, EPP-ED), Mr Peter Skinner (UK, PES), Ms Marianne Thyssen (B, EPP-ED), Mr Johan Van Hecke (B, ALDE).

Secretariat: Ms Sarah Kenningham (ATD Fourth World)

Martine Roure chaired the first part of the meeting.

1. The **agenda** was adopted.

2. **Nomination of the Bureau:**

Ms Roure expressed her satisfaction with the accomplishments of the Intergroup during her term as President and **thanked all those Members** that had participated in the meetings and contributed to the work of the Intergroup over this period.

Iñigo Mendez de Vigo was elected as the new **President of the Fourth World European Committee** and chaired the remainder of the meeting.

Ilda Figueiredo, Jean Lambert, Martine Roure and Bronislaw Geremek were then elected as **Vice-Presidents** of the Intergroup.

3. **Presentation of the International Movement ATD Fourth World**, responsible for the **Intergroup Secretariat** since its establishment in 1980.

Sarah Kenningham explained that ATD Fourth World is a Movement founded in France in 1957 by Father Joseph Wresinski that is now present in 29 countries world-wide, 11 of which are EU Member States.

Members of the Movement from across the world recently worked on a **new text to describe ATD Fourth World and its activities** which Ms Kenningham read aloud. (This text can be found as an annex to the minutes and more information is available on the website www.atd-fourthworld.org)

4. History of the Intergroup by Paul Collowald, member of ATD Fourth World's Delegation to the EU and former European Parliament Director-General for Information.

Mr Collowald began with the story of his first meeting with **Father Joseph Wresinski**.

In 1972, Fr. Wresinski paid a visit to Albert Coppé, Commissioner responsible for Social Affairs, just before the first enlargement of the EU. Afterwards, Mr Collowald was in the Press Room where Fr. Wresinski was questioning the journalists present whether or not they had considered that with the enlargement of the European Economic Community, "10 million people in poverty would enter into Europe" and had they thought about the way in which this "population" would be welcomed in this enlarged Europe. This message left a mark on Mr Collowald who, after having worked at the Commission, joined the services of the European Parliament and remained a loyal ally of ATD Fourth World.

In 1986, Fr. Wresinski visited the then President of the European Parliament, Pierre Pflimlin (Mr. Collowald was Director of his cabinet at the time) to explain how the Parliament, which had become a force within Europe, could help those at risk of being left behind as Europe advanced. **The Intergroup "Fourth World European Committee" began to work informally 25 years ago** with the help of the President of the first Parliament to be directly elected, Simone Veil, and is thus one of the oldest Intergroups.

Mr Collowald finished his presentation with a quote from Abraham Lincoln "In order to know what to do, we have to know where we came from and know where we are going", and after having listened to both new and old MEPs, he felt **confident in the future of the Intergroup**.

Mr Mendez de Vigo thanked Mr Collowald and also explained that one of the past victories of the Intergroup was to have a **reference to poverty and social exclusion included in the Charter of Fundamental Rights** (Article 34). Ben Fayot, when he was President of the Fourth World Committee, Ieke van den Burg and other members of the Intergroup had participated in the Convention responsible for drafting the Charter. The reference was included at the very last minute and as it was supported by Members from all the different political groups, it was not opposed.

A similar effort was made during the work of the Convention on the Future of Europe when Ms Roure and the Intergroup members played an important role in **pushing for the fight against poverty and social exclusion to be identified as an objective of the EU in the Constitution**. It is this type of pressure that has succeeded in the past and that must be maintained in the future.

5. Presentation of the Draft Work Programme

Ms Kenningham outlined the propositions made by the Secretariat for the work of the Intergroup in 2005. As experience had shown that it was difficult for the Members to attend Intergroup meetings, the proposition was accepted to have a **meeting every third session in Strasbourg** with a preparatory meeting of the Bureau in Brussels the month beforehand. The next meeting will therefore be held on in Strasbourg on **Wednesday 11 May 2005**.

For each Intergroup meeting, the Secretariat proposed that there be a **principle theme or report for discussion**, alongside other work of the Parliament in progress and updates on work of the Intergroup that had taken place between meetings. The theme proposed for the next meeting in May is the **link between poverty and access to fundamental rights**, with a view to influencing the Parliament's annual report on the situation of fundamental rights in the EU. This has always been an important report for the Intergroup as it is an **opportunity to reinforce the principle of treating extreme poverty as a violation of fundamental Human Rights**.

Mr Mendez de Vigo agreed that it was important to continue with this approach by examining and influencing reports which had the potential to **further the fight against poverty and social exclusion in terms of access to rights**.

Mr Geremek expressed the importance that he attached to the existence of the Intergroup and the admiration he has for the work of ATD Fourth World in treating extreme poverty as a violation of Human Rights. He explained that during his research he had discovered that, in some cases, **the poor had rights as early as the Middle Ages** and that the Intergroup should, in the framework of Parliament reports, remember this tradition. He insisted on the link between the fight against poverty in the EU and the Charter of Fundamental Rights which has its foundations in European values, notably that of human dignity. **Extreme poverty is also a violation of human dignity** and this must be understood when looking at the ensemble of Human Rights.

In reaction to the proposed theme for the May meeting, Ms Roure expressed concern that the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs had **not yet nominated a rapporteur for the 2004 Annual Report on the situation of fundamental rights in the EU**, and that it was not as yet on the agenda. She also added, in response to Mr Geremek's research, that the law in France still forbade the prosecution of someone for stealing food if they were starving and suggested that the Intergroup look at the legislation in other countries for similar types of provisions.

Jan Kulakowski informed the Intergroup that as a member of the Employment and Social Affairs Committee, he had the responsibility to study a **report on the fight against poverty and social exclusion in the new Member States** and would appreciate the support of the Intergroup in this. He has already solicited the assistance of an NGO called Barka from his constituency in Poznan, Poland and added that the EMPL Committee was organising an audition of Polish NGOs sometime in June to further explore the question of the fight against poverty and exclusion in Poland.

Ms Lambert insisted on the **importance of financial questions** as there was lots of work in progress on the financial perspectives, Structural Funds, and the PROGRESS programme propositions which will impact on the money available to organisations working in the social field. She expressed concern that this money was becoming more and more linked to **employment policy** and supported the proposition in the draft work programme to treat this theme later in the year. She added, however, that it would be useful for the Bureau at least to look more closely at the financial questions as it is important that there is money available because where there is money there is power.

Mr Geremek pointed out that he was a member of the **Temporary Committee on Financial Perspectives** and could pay particular attention to the social aspects of their work. He added that as the Committee looked at both budgetary means and policy challenges together, that it was an opportunity to highlight the fight against extreme poverty.

Erna Hennicot-Schoepges insisted on the **importance of culture in fighting against poverty and social exclusion** and on the need to find ways for the 20 million unemployed in Europe to have access to culture. She invited the Intergroup to meet one time in Luxembourg, under their Presidency of the European Council, at the site where a sculpture created by people living in poverty is soon to be inaugurated. This could be organised in link with ATD Fourth World Luxembourg.

Ms Roure found the idea interesting but pointed out that there may be difficulties linked to the fact that the Intergroup did not have any financing. Mr Mendez de Vigo felt that it may still be possible for one or two members of the Intergroup to visit this site as it was symbolically important. He also **encouraged the Members to enter into contact with ATD Fourth World teams in their countries** and that he had found this to be a very enriching experience in Spain.

Ms Hennicot-Schoepges also proposed that one of the Intergroup meetings be dedicated to the subject of **housing**, maybe in link with the Intergroup on Urban Housing. She explained that urban policy at the moment favours the redevelopment of dilapidated housing stock by private investment funds which leaves little place for the development of social housing. If policy continues to develop in this way then **in 10 years there will be a housing crisis**. Mr Mendez de Vigo asked her to provide more information on this subject for the next Intergroup meeting.

Mr Mendez de Vigo appealed to the Members to be attentive to the work taking place in their Committees and put in place an **"early warning system" to raise the alarm about subjects on the agenda that could be of interest**. The aim should be to identify reports etc. which Intergroup members could influence by proposing amendments, that would in turn be supported by Intergroup members within their Committees coming from the other political groups.

Ms Kenningham insisted on the need for such a system to be in place as it was difficult for the Secretariat to closely follow the work of the Committees from outside the Parliament.

6. Presentation of EAPN (European Anti-Poverty Network)

ATD Fourth World had invited EAPN to participate in the meetings of the Intergroup and its Director, Fintan Farrell, briefly presented the network.

The European Anti-Poverty Network was formed in 1990 with the **objective of putting the fight against poverty and social exclusion on the EU agenda**. Like ATD Fourth World, EAPN treats poverty as a denial of fundamental rights and favours an approach to fighting poverty that promotes access for all to these rights. EAPN believes that in order to achieve this objective, a **partnership is necessary with many different actors** coming from different political perspectives and sectors of society. It is vital that this partnership also includes **people experiencing poverty themselves**.

The membership of the network is made up of 24 European Organisations (such as ATD Fourth World, the Red Cross, Caritas, FEANTSA etc) plus one National Network from each of the Member States (currently 19) and as such, brings together many different actors involved in the fight against poverty and exclusion.

EAPN aims to be a **platform of information and exchange** for all those fighting against poverty and to **advocate on behalf of the 68 million people experiencing poverty** in the EU.

EU policy areas that are being focused on at the moment include the Social Inclusion Strategy, the Employment Strategy and the Structural Funds, in addition to wider issues affecting poverty and social exclusion (the inclusion of the cross-cutting Article 117 in Part III of the Constitution for example).

On the subject of **Structural Funds**, Mr Farrell added that a document has been produced with recommendations for amendments to the regulations (available on the EAPN website: www.eapn.org) and **highlighted the innovatory approach of Poland** to these funds in proposing a programme designed to engage with civil society.

7. Discussion on the Mid-Term Review of the Lisbon Strategy

Ms Figueiredo expressed her **dissatisfaction with the progress that the EU has made in fighting poverty and social exclusion** as there were still 68 million people living at risk of poverty. She could not understand why the Commission Communication on the mid-term review of the Lisbon Strategy did not contain a clear reference to the fight against poverty, as the **objective to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty featured in the Lisbon Summit conclusions in 2000**. Ms Figueiredo hoped that the Intergroup would take action to bring this objective to the forefront once again.

Mr Farrell expressed the concerns of social and environmental NGOs, that joined those of all who supported the European Social Model, with the shape that the Lisbon Strategy was currently taking. He was particularly worried about the **implications of dropping social cohesion as a short-term objective** that the Member States no longer had to report on at the Spring Summit. Even if social cohesion remained a long-term objective, it would be viewed as a **backwards step** that would be very difficult for people engaged in the fight against poverty and exclusion to comprehend.

Gunda Macioti added that this was a concern shared by ATD Fourth World and many other organisations involved in the dynamic surrounding the **National Action Plans for Social Inclusion (NAPs/incl)**. These organisations have been working on the ground in the Member States, **together with people living in poverty** themselves and the momentum given by these Plans had inspired a lot of hope. This **momentum and hope are being put at risk** by the Commission if they choose to put social cohesion on a back-burner in favour of a focus on growth, competitiveness, employment, industry and research. She insisted that we **must fight to ensure that the Social Inclusion Strategy remain at the centre of the Lisbon Strategy** and invited the Intergroup to think about what action it might take before the Spring Summit.

Ms Figueiredo reminded the Intergroup that there was a **resolution being prepared** on the subject that would be debated at the next plenary session in Strasbourg (7-10 March 2005). She proposed that the Intergroup request a **reference to the fight against poverty and social exclusion** in this resolution.

Mr Mendez de Vigo agreed and proposed two successive steps: **agreement of a common position** to be sent to the **President of the Commission**, followed by its adaptation into the form of an **amendment to the Parliament resolution**. Mr Mendez de Vigo called a meeting of the Bureau for the following week in Brussels to work on the Intergroup position.

Ms Roure insisted on the need to make the **negotiators from each of the political groups aware of our demands** whilst they were still in the process of drafting the resolution. As it was already difficult to agree on a common resolution, the proposal of too many amendments would make the process even more laborious.

Ms Kenningham drew attention to the **positions of different social NGOs** that were already available (ATD Fourth World, Social Platform, FEANTSA) to assist in the drafting of an Intergroup position in such a short space of time. These generally called for the maintenance of the **balanced policy "triangle"** within the Lisbon Strategy - economic, employment, social cohesion - and contained reminders of the **commitment made to make a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty** by means of the **Social Inclusion Strategy** and other instruments.

Mr Farrell added that it had been a long time since European social NGOs had been as mobilised around such a question and that **numerous actions had been launched** in order to influence the outcomes of the Spring Summit including: the "Save our Social Europe" (SOS Europe) petition, a joint Open Letter from the European Trade Union Confederation, Social Platform and European Environmental Bureau, and an EAPN Europe-wide day of action on 21 March.

Mr Mendez de Vigo thanked the participants and drew the Intergroup meeting to a close.

Next Meeting in Strasbourg: 11 May 2005, 17:30 - 18:30, Room S.3, SDM Building

**Presentation of the International Movement ATD Fourth World
November 2004**

All human beings, regardless of their place in society, are equal in dignity, which must be respected, not violated by anyone for any reason. Equal dignity is the basis for fundamental rights especially the right to freedom of expression, to live as a family, to housing, to health care, and to work. Those who live in extreme poverty are the first victims of the violation of human rights.

Keenly aware of the world's long history of human suffering and hope, Father Joseph Wresinski, born in extreme poverty himself, founded the International Movement ATD Fourth World in 1957 with families from the homeless camp of Noisy-le-Grand (France) and others who joined them. His belief that *"Every person is a chance for humanity"* is a source of inspiration for many people all over the world.

Injustice, powerlessness, shame, humiliation, and exclusion as experienced by those living in extreme poverty must not be tolerated. Our priority is to reach out to the poorest and most ignored people, be alongside them, and create links with them and between them. Ensuring that those with the hardest life are at the heart of all projects and listening to the dreams and aspirations they have for themselves and their children, we can reach a mutual understanding. When the most excluded people can contribute their knowledge and experience to society as equals, extreme poverty will be overcome.

ATD Fourth World welcomes everyone. It unites people whatever their origin, social status, culture or beliefs to fight against poverty. In building trust, solidarity and friendship, all have a place to realize their full and best potential. Working together and learning from each other, everyone is free to express themselves without being judged. The Movement develops partnerships at all levels of society.

It was founded with the conviction that people have created the conditions for extreme poverty and social exclusion. Therefore, a long-term commitment is needed to ensure that no one is left behind. Embracing such a responsibility is a source of pride for everyone.

As long as the power of money is the primary value, the world will be menaced by poverty and violence. If humanity is our primary value, the world will be transformed and we can all enjoy peace. October 17, the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, inaugurated by ATD Fourth World in 1987 and recognized by the United Nations since 1992, annually presents this on-going challenge:

"Wherever men and women are condemned to live in extreme poverty, Human Rights are violated. To come together to ensure that these rights be respected is our solemn duty."

Father Joseph Wresinski

Open Letter to the Heads of State and Government of the European Union and to the President of the European Commission regarding the revision of the Lisbon Strategy

The eradication of poverty and the fight against social exclusion must be at the core of the revised Lisbon Strategy

Created in 1980 the Fourth World European Committee, which gathers Members of the European Parliament from various political groups, is engaged in introducing in the work of the European Parliament the concerns of people living in extreme poverty in Europe.

On the occasion of the revision of the Lisbon Strategy, the Fourth World European Committee would like to reiterate that in March 2000, the European Council acknowledged that the level of poverty in Europe was “unacceptable” and committed to **“making a decisive impact on the eradication of poverty”**.

Articles I-3, II-94.3 (Chapter on “Solidarity” of the Charter of Fundamental Rights) and III-117 of the European Constitution, state very strongly the commitment of the EU to integrate the fight against poverty and social exclusion in all community policies. Today, there are still **68 million people living in poverty**.

It is obvious that the fight against poverty and social exclusion should remain an essential component of all EU policies.

From the point of view of the Committee, the revised Lisbon Strategy cannot be reduced to a strategy of economic growth and job creation. However justified, these concerns conceal the problem of poverty and have little impact on people excluded from society, who are rarely affected by programmes relating to integration in the workplace and access to the labour market.

The Inclusion Strategy, through the Open Method of Co-ordination, has shown that poverty is a multidimensional phenomenon, where difficulties, deprivation and precariousness accumulate and interlink, whether in employment, housing, health, education, culture or access to services.

It is crucial to implement policies against poverty that take into account all areas of life, and that the objective of eradicating poverty and social exclusion is taken on board in the development of all policies.

Following from the commitments made in Lisbon, the development and implementation of the EU Inclusion Strategy, with its core element of National Action Plans on Inclusion, has successfully mobilised many different actors in the fight against poverty and social exclusion. As the process becomes better known and understood, people who live in situations of poverty have also been mobilised and engaged. To ignore the objective of the eradication of poverty is to underestimate the importance of their contribution and efforts to bring this strategy closer to the reality of people who face poverty and social exclusion. The disappearance of such tools would be incomprehensible for all these people, private and public organisations and institutions who have engaged in the struggle.

In light of this, the Fourth World European Committee asks you to adjust your approach to the Lisbon Strategy by:

- 1. Reconfirming the EU’s commitment to social inclusion as a priority objective of the Lisbon Agenda.**
- 2. Strengthening the Open Method of Co-ordination on Inclusion and guaranteeing that National Action Plans are maintained, in order to co-ordinate policies fighting against poverty and social exclusion by efficient and visible programmes.**
- 3. Guaranteeing that the Spring Summit and overarching instruments such as the Strategic Annual Report of the Commission, the Lisbon Community Action Programme and the National Action Programme do not only focus on “growth and jobs” but also integrate a balanced vision of the European Social Model.**

We will follow the debates in relation to the Spring Council with great interest and we hope that you can respond positively to the views expressed in this letter.

Yours sincerely

On behalf of the Fourth World European Committee

Mr Iñigo Mendez de Vigo Montojo (EPP-ED)
President

Ms Martine Roure (PES), Mr Bronislaw Geremek (ALDE), Ms Jean Lambert (Green/ALE), Ms Ilda Figueiredo (GUE/NGL)
Vice-Presidents