

# FOURTH WORLD EUROPEAN COMMITTEE

## *Intergroup Fighting Against Poverty and Exclusion*

<p><b>Minutes of the Fourth World European Committee Intergroup meeting, Wednesday 11 May 2005, 17:30-18:30, room S.3, SDM building, European Parliament, Strasbourg</b></p>
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**Members Present:** Mr Panayiotis Demetriou (CY, EPP-ED), Mr Proinsias De Rossa (IRL, PES), Mr Iñigo Mendez de Vigo (E, EPP-ED).

**Parliamentary Assistants Present:** Ms Rita Higgs (ass. Mr De Rossa), Mr Nicolas Lecompte (ass. Erna Hennicot-Schoepges, L, EPP-ED), Ms Krisztina Szàraz (ass. Edit Bauer, SK, EPP-ED), Mr Tobias Teuscher (ass. Anna Záborská, SK, EPP-ED), Ms Anneméria Toth (ass. László Surján, HU, EPP-ED).

**Other participants:** Mr Nathanaël Caillaux (ATD Fourth World), Ms Claire Champeix (EAPN), Mr David Fieldsend (Care for Europe), Mr Henri Lourdelle (ETUC), Mr Bert Luyts (ATD Fourth World Belgium), Ms Gunda Maciotti (ATD Fourth World).

**Apologies:** Mr Kader Arif (F, PES), Mr Philip Bushill-Matthews (UK, EPP-ED), Ms Marie-Hélène Descamps (F, EPP-ED), Ms Marian Harkin (IRL, ALDE), Ms Sylvia-Yvonne Kaufmann (D, GUE/NGL), Mr Albert Jan Maat (NL, EPP-ED), Ms Véronique Mathieu (F, EPP-ED), Mr Jan Masiel (PL, NI), Ms Ana Mato Adrover (E, EPP-ED), Ms Linda McAvan (UK, PES), Mr Janusz Onyszkiewicz (PL, ALDE), Ms Martine Roure (F, PES), Mr Peter Skinner (UK, PES), Ms Marianne Thyssen (B, EPP-ED), Mr Phillip Whitehead (UK, PES).

**Secretariat:** Ms Sarah Kenningham (ATD Fourth World).

### **The meeting was chaired by Iñigo Mendez de Vigo.**

1. The **minutes** of the previous meeting, held on 23 February 2005, and the **agenda** of the current meeting were adopted.

### **2. Latest news on the work of the Intergroup**

Sarah Kenningham reported that the **Open Letter sent by the Fourth World European Committee to Heads of State and Government** asking them to keep the fight against poverty and social exclusion at the heart of the Lisbon Strategy had been replied to by the Belgian, Spanish, French and Irish Governments, by Mr Josep Borrell, President of the European Parliament, and by several MEPs.

She also explained that the **amendment to the European Parliament resolution on revision of the Lisbon Strategy** had been passed thanks to the Intergroup's action. This amendment invited the European Council to strengthen their policies to fight against poverty and social exclusion.

Mr Mendez de Vigo explained the **role Intergroup had played** in getting this amendment passed. First, the Bureau had met and decided to table an amendment to the text of the resolution which, even though it made reference to the fight against poverty and social exclusion, was not very forceful and did not call for any real commitment. The amendment was proposed by Martine Roure and sent to all the Intergroup members for their support. This was a method which had successfully been used by the Intergroup in the past, as it bypassed the political groups.

**The amendment greatly improved the text and received more votes than the resolution itself.**

Mr Mendez de Vigo encouraged the members of the Intergroup to keep up the good work.

Despite this victory, he felt that the **results of the Spring Summit had been very poor**, as the Heads of State and

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Government had practically ignored the fight against exclusion and the objective to eradicate poverty. It was therefore essential to continue to fight and apply pressure to ensure that, in the future, these concerns were put on the agenda of the European Council.

Mr Mendez de Vigore reminded members of the «**early warning system**» that had been set up. This was similar to the system in the European Constitution to monitor the principle of subsidiarity, and was to allow MEPs in the Intergroup to alert the Secretariat about issues or documents debated in parliamentary committees where it would be useful to incorporate the Intergroup's concerns.

### 3. on the Role of Employment in the Fight Against Poverty

Bert Luyts (permanent volunteer with **ATD Fourth World Belgium** and member of a working group on «Work, Unemployment and Social Security») presented the results of four years of work by the group (see report: «*Work and the Right to Participate*», which can be downloaded from: [http://www.atd-quartmonde.org/europe/be/be\\_fr/grtravail.html](http://www.atd-quartmonde.org/europe/be/be_fr/grtravail.html))

Mr Luyts first explained that it was important to understand that **very poor people are not all without work, but that many of them have precarious or badly paid jobs**, and they work difficult hours, often under terms of employment that offer very little job security. However, many people living in poverty hope for a job because it can be a **source of pride** and they can then follow training courses, work experience schemes and integration programmes. But many of these programmes do not offer the necessary support for those people facing the greatest difficulties, and because many of these programmes are result-driven, trainers and their assistants are reluctant to spend time on those with less ability.

He insisted that poor workers attach **great importance to the quality of work** and so there is no question of forcing them to take just any job on the pretext that there is nothing else available, and because the level of employment must reach 70% by 2010 as set out in the Lisbon Strategy.

He proposed several ways to **avoid obliging the poorest people to accept insecure jobs that do not offer any real prospects of a better life**. First, new policies should be put in place to **create new jobs**, for example in neighbourhood services, where there were jobs to be filled. These did not require any real qualifications and allowed training and self-improvement. If no new jobs were created, Mr Luyts was afraid that incentives, training and support measures could have the effect of increasing competition between unemployed people, without improving their prospects.

It was also necessary to recognise that people who live in poverty want to make themselves useful, even if they do not manage to get regular employment. The **right to volunteer should be encouraged**, but should not of course be made compulsory or part of some integration process.

Finally, **support and active follow-up** were necessary, and for those who had been out of work longest this should run for a relatively long period, taking account of all the various difficulties, i.e. not just finding a job but also health, debt, housing, etc. The hopes and aspirations of the individuals should also be taken into consideration and the same support and follow-up should remain available even once a job had been found.

Mr Luyts concluded by saying that **employment was not an end in itself**. He also insisted on the **right to be part of society**, since having a paid job or another useful activity allowed people and their families to live decently, to improve themselves, to have access to all the basic rights, and to exercise their civic responsibilities.

Henri Lourdelle (representative of the **European Trade Union Confederation** working on problems of social policy and the fight against poverty and for social inclusion) emphasised that trade unions, contrary to popular belief, were not just concerned with those in work or those who risk losing their jobs, but also with those who cannot get jobs and who have difficulties. He was in complete agreement with Mr Luyts.

He considered that **work can be a means to get out of exclusion and poverty** but that work was **not an end in itself**.

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The **ETUC refused to replace the «welfare state» with the «workfare state»** which seemed to be the tendency in certain countries.

This meant that the problems of employment should be tackled further upstream, in other words by providing the necessary education and training, housing, right to health care, and social protection. Only then was it possible to think about what could be done so that employment could become a means to fight poverty and to escape from social exclusion.

For that, the **quality of work was particularly important**. In fact, there were countries where unemployment levels were very low but, at the same time, they had a very high number of poor workers. Quality jobs were jobs that took account of the career path of each employee, so support measures were necessary.

**Jobs that pay reasonably well and allow a dignified life are the ones that give security**. Otherwise this security can be found through the support given by certain social systems, which enables people to find another job quickly (i.e. the Danish system).

The ETUC wanted not only a certain quality of work, but also **a link between European employment strategy and industrial policy** because, at European level, there was currently no common industrial policy and each Member State worked independently. This kind of industrial policy did not need to be based simply on profitability but should be capable of taking account of individual skills and development prospects.

Mr Lourdelle underlined the fact that the ETUC was very keen to see a **balanced Lisbon Strategy** and that none of the pillars of this Strategy could be sacrificed. Since 1957, it had always been believed that economic development would, as a natural consequence, bring public well-being but this has clearly not proved to be the case. **Today, we risk making the same mistake, concentrating exclusively on employment and competition, and allowing cohesion, the environment and sustainable development to happen in due course rather than making them fundamental components**.

The **ETUC insisted on the idea of quality of work and social security**; otherwise there was a risk that people would be given a job of some kind but that their actual demands and needs would not be addressed, so that at the end of the day, it would be necessary to start all over again.

Claire Champeix (representative of the **European Anti-Poverty Network** responsible for the Employment Task Force) started by thanking the Intergroup for circulating EAPN's amendments to the structural funds regulations because this second distribution had attracted interest from the MEPs.

On the question of employment, Ms Champeix reminded everyone that EAPN has been monitoring questions related to employment since the setting up of the **European Employment Strategy** in 1997.

She went on to emphasise how much the report from ATD Fourth World in Belgium that had been presented by Bert Luyts, included, in spite of national differences, the concerns widely expressed by the various networks of EAPN, in Portugal, in Ireland, and in the new Member States. The whole of Europe was facing the same problems.

For EAPN, employment was an essential element in the fight against poverty and social exclusion, but it was not an end in itself. **Without quality employment, social cohesion could not improve**. Employment policies should therefore be judged on whether they encouraged social cohesion and re-integration, and they should also take into account the objective of social inclusion across the board, both at European level and at national level.

In 2003, the **Employment Guidelines** had given some grounds for satisfaction. In fact, at the beginning of these guidelines were three general, interdependent and equally important objectives: **full employment, productivity and quality of work, and social cohesion**. These objectives were to be put into practice through other policy guidelines. In addition, there were various opportunities in terms of NGO participation in the process.

Nevertheless, there were many concerns, notably the development and enforcement of the **ideological approach whereby employment was an end in itself and automatically brought about social inclusion**. There was also concern about **incentive measures** through which, rather than being offered support, **increased pressure was being exerted upon individuals** that was sometimes not justified and stigmatised the long-term unemployed, without extra jobs being created at the same time.

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In addition, during this whole period the problem of the **working poor** has become worse. This has been confirmed in a Eurostat publication.

EAPN has also been disappointed by the **lack of opportunities for civil society to participate in discussions on employment**. NGOs are waiting to participate officially, both at EU and at national level, which would give them the opportunity to make a significant contribution.

Ms Champeix explained that **EAPN's concerns had been confirmed by the integrated policy guidelines**. In fact, the whole aim of **mainstreaming the issue of social inclusion in all policy areas** seemed to have been called into question because, even though policy guidelines took the issue into account, it was **no longer a horizontal objective**. It was simply one objective among many and that made a big difference.

Nor was any progress being made on the participation of civil society; and the change in title (from «national employment programme» to «employment priority») could be seen as a **backward step for the Community method**, with a less important role for the EU institutions that demanded less of the Member States and **allowed them to set a limited number of objectives and to centre their plans and priorities around national concerns**.

EAPN had closely examined Ana Mato Adrover's report on the Employment Guidelines and had proposed various amendments, some of which had been tabled by MEPs. The compromise amendments then proposed by the rapporteur had appreciably improved the report.

The **employment policy guidelines** had not yet been adopted. It was necessary therefore to keep up the pressure to have them improved and to **keep the link between inclusion and employment**.

Ms Champeix reminded everyone to follow closely the Commission's promised initiative under the **Social Agenda** on access to the job market for people in poverty and on minimum wage systems, because this would preserve the link between employment and inclusion.

Finally, she said that the EAPN was counting on the MEPs to **support the NGOs in their call for more open involvement in issues affecting employment**.

Proinsias De Rossa thanked the participants for their interesting contributions.

He was struck by the fact that everything that had been learned from European projects and programmes on tackling poverty was still true today, that the main problems were still the same as they were some years ago. He felt that it was **time to find a way to move forward and put into effect the ideas that already existed**.

He regretted the fact that employment remained almost exclusively a national responsibility. It was possible to exert pressure for more co-ordination but that was not enough. What would be helpful would be to have a **better link between national parliaments and MEPs**, as organisations such as ATD Fourth World and EAPN tried to encourage, and also to create a **link between the Employment and Social Affairs Committee and other Committees** in the European Parliament, to encourage exchange of ideas.

That would bring about some progress, but as long as the open method of co-ordination remained in force, there would be weak policies on employment. Ways must be found of reinforcing them.

Mr De Rossa believed that the **current political climate made progress on inclusion difficult**. For many people, the concept of «quality of work» was very vague and if the Commission did not do some serious work on that point, then the Parliament would have to do it themselves.

While talking about quality of work, it should be made clear that they were talking about the **quality of working conditions so as to ensure that the intellectual capacity, physical condition, domestic environment, etc. of people in difficulty be taken into consideration**. They should also continue to explain that there was **no simple answer to the issue of re-integrating the long-term unemployed**. There had to be a variety of programmes working on these problems, which could not just be left to voluntary efforts on their own.

Mr Lourdel reminded everyone that things were currently **moving backwards as regards employment**. In fact, in the European Parliament Intergroup created in 1980, at the request of Joseph Wresinski, founder of the International Movement ATD Fourth World

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integrated guidelines, there was **no longer a reference to indicators**. Indicators were essential when discussing economic development and the stability pact, but were less necessary in discussions on employment. There was inconsistency and regression. This was an essential element because **if progress or regression were not measured, then there would always be general discussions on the quality of employment, but nothing of real significance**.

### 4. Business

Tobias Teuscher passed on the **apologies of Anna Záborská to the Intergroup members** as she could not participate in the meeting for personal reasons.

He added that Ms Záborská wished to thank the International Movement ATD Fourth World for their work in running the Intergroup secretariat as it offered a common platform for MEPs to bring together different knowledge and experiences in a very interesting manner. Mr Teuscher expressed the fear that Ms Záborská held concerning an **inquiry launched by the Commission into tax breaks given to social enterprises in Germany**, on the premise that these offered them a competitive advantage. There is a risk that the social economy could lose these tax breaks which would ultimately affect its capacity to offer employment possibilities for the poorest people and others taking part in insertion programmes. Finally, Ms Záborská wished to express her satisfaction with the **remarks of Grand Duke Henri of Luxembourg** (who had spoken earlier that afternoon in the plenary) when he reminded the Parliament that that **solidarity could not be measured via the GDP of the Member States** and so different tools and indicators had to be put in place to measure progress in the fight against poverty.

Mr Mendez de Vigo thanked the speakers and participants before closing and announced that the next meeting would focus on the **link between poverty and fundamental rights**.

**Next Intergroup meeting in Strasbourg on 28 September 2005**