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Taking forward the EU Social Inclusion Process

Panel on "The Way Forward"

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Thank you very much for the invitation to the panel discussion, and above all for the interesting report, the enormous analysis and the helpful annexes.

I am speaking here as a member of the Committee EMPL, I am not speaking for the Committee.

Before I'll stress the key-recommendations and so the 7. chapter I want to explain my two main problems with the report.

At page 26 is written, that some critics said that the authors had over-estimated the extent to which the EU social processes had penetrated even national ministries of social welfare. In fact I think that the authors have over-estimated the real role of social processes in the development of the EU. I don't agree with the too positive presentation of the Lisbon process, the Kok-report and the Presidency Conclusions of March 2005. In my view, since 2000 the Lisbon goals were reduced to the economic goals. Giving priority to growth and employment does not mean giving priority to combating poverty and social exclusion. Under the existing political conditions the priority of growth and employment means the reproduction of poverty and social exclusion.

The analysis of the processes and the documents shows that the priority is given to strengthening the global competitiveness of the European Union and so to the rising role of market forces in the life of the society.

Referring to the three basic ideas of the social policy at page 15 I want to mention that the motto of the Social Agenda covering the period up to 2010 should be "A social Europe in the world: Self-determined life in dignity for everybody". At its heart, such a strategy should promote the idea of a positive interaction between human rights, social, ecological and economic policies. Social inclusion policy should be pursued with a complex approach focusing on the most excluded people.

Of course, I support all proposals for improving living conditions of children in poverty, but I totally disagree with an economical argumentation for that as it happens at page 23. There we can learn, that "investment in children is crucial for the optimisation of human capital". No, I want investment for children because they should have a happy childhood and the access to a self-determined life in dignity.

There is a very interesting formulation at page 167 “active social policy can contribute both to economic goals and to the reaffirmed social inclusion objectives”. First the economic goals, then the social inclusion objectives. The individual is absent.

My critical remarks don't refuse the recommendations, given in chapter 7; I support the recommendations. But they explain proposals for changes and additions.

I think that the cooperation in Social Policy should not only mean setting off common objectives, with Member States free to determine how they are achieved. The European Union must guarantee basic rights to people living on its territory. The realisation, combating poverty and social exclusion cannot be only the matter of the Member States but must be a matter of the Europeans Union.

I support the idea of a more systematic analysis of specific risk positions of migrants and minorities but I think that there should be an additional integrated indicator comparing the summarized risk positions of migrants and minorities with that of the origin population.

Further, I miss ecological standards. Do excluded and poor people live under ecologically more dangerous conditions? This question is connected with the question about working and housing conditions.

And I miss questions about the access to necessary goods. 50 or 60 per cent of the average of incomes or the median income does not automatically mean that people must have the access to all necessary goods and services.

I propose an international conference for the discussion about the needs for a self-determined human life in dignity.

In that connection I think that the remarks about housing conditions are not complete. If you could get a decent flat, but it is far from social infrastructure you need more time and money to go there. But if you do not have the necessary time and money you cannot use this infrastructure. You will be reduced in your mobility and in your possibility to participate in social and political life.

Mobility and participation are important conditions for a life in dignity. They are under-estimated.

At the end I want to mention the problem of debts. I know not only few people who became poor because of rising debts. Many debts are connected with efforts to create an existence.

Thank you for your attention.