



2 July 2015

Key messages to the Luxembourg Presidency of the EU

Dear Ambassador, Dear Minister Schmit,

On behalf of Eurodiaconia and its members, I would like to wish you and your colleagues every success in the context of Luxembourg's recently assumed Council Presidency. The coming months will be of great importance in shaping the road ahead, and Eurodiaconia welcomes the chance to support the Luxembourg Presidency, in particular with regards to strengthening social Europe through reassessing the Europe2020 strategy and promoting the social economy.

Eurodiaconia is a dynamic, Europe-wide community of organisations founded in the Christian faith and working in the tradition of diaconal service, who are committed to a Europe of solidarity, equality and justice. We represent more than 40 members working in over 30 European countries, including churches, not-for-profit welfare organisations and NGOs. Based on our members' experiences, we would like to draw your attention to the following recommendations:

1. Reinforce inclusive growth in all European Union policies

Eurodiaconia regrets that despite increasing social inequalities, unemployment and poverty across Europe, the EU and its Member States are moving away from the inclusive growth objective of Europe 2020 across the policy spectrum. For example, the 2015 Annual Growth Survey and Country Specific Recommendations continue to prioritise economic growth and reforms pushing the fight against poverty and social exclusion further down the EU agenda. We therefore ask the Presidency to:

- Reinforce the social dimension of the European Semester by promoting a broader and more socially balanced set of priorities in the 2016 Annual Growth Survey.
- Urge the European Commission to carry out social impact assessments of economic CSRs and structural reforms to ensure that these do not undermine the Europe 2020 goal of inclusive growth, the poverty target and increase the number of individuals facing poverty and social exclusion.

2. Improve stakeholder engagement in the European Semester

Eurodiaconia welcomes the concept of stakeholders' engagement within the European Semester, but its implementation has been poor. Members who have tried to be involved in the process have

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Eurodiaconia receives funding under the European Union Programme for Employment and Social Innovation "EaSI" (2014-2020).



been left disappointed by the lack of genuine dialogue. Rather than being consulted in advance of the drafting of key policy documents, they are often informed about their content in hindsight. We therefore ask the Presidency to promote the following:

- Revision of the timetable of the Semester cycle, in order to allow more time for feedback on key policy documents, provide more space for genuine dialogue with civil society stakeholders, and broaden the scope of ownership of the European Semester process.

3. Promote a social economy

Eurodiaconia fully embraces the Presidency's view of the social economy as a key instrument to deal with social, economic and employment-related challenges within the EU in an integrated way. Creating favourable conditions for the development and sustainability of social enterprise initiatives is necessary to realise their full potential for social inclusion and growth. In this context, the development of favourable financial frameworks for both public and private-source finance is of particular importance. Furthermore, Eurodiaconia believes that the specific nature of not-for-profit enterprises performing activities with a genuine social goal should be taken into account. We therefore ask the Presidency to:

- Engage all EU institutions in reinforcing their support towards social enterprises as a key way to achieve both economic and social progress. Whilst non-financial aspects such as capacity-building are important, the introduction of improved financial frameworks which promote the development and sustainability of social enterprise initiatives is essential.
- Promote the specific earmarking of EU funds both across and within Member States to ensure they have a stronger impact on social enterprise initiatives. This way, local initiatives – which constitute the most common sphere of action for social enterprises – could benefit from the full potential of relevant EU funding instruments.

4. Re-boost a Social Investment approach

The European Commission released the Social Investment Package in February 2013 to guide EU countries in the implementation of a social investment approach, characterized by integrated packages of benefits and services which provide adequate social protection throughout the life-cycle. By focusing on preventing rather than repairing gaps in the social protection system, a social investment approach does not only have a positive impact on the well-being of vulnerable individuals, but it can also result in long-term savings and boost the growth of national economies. We therefore ask the Presidency to:



- Promote a social investment approach in all social and related policies and programmes. This should include the Investment Plan and European Fund for Strategic Investments which must include a clear social dimension, promoting investment into measures which develop strong and integrated social protection systems and social services, in line with the 2013 Social Investment Package and the 2008 Recommendation on Active Inclusion

I hope that you will give the issues highlighted in this letter careful consideration and emphasise their importance in the relevant Council configurations.

Yours sincerely,

Heather Roy
Secretary General, Eurodiaconia