



**NORDENS FACKLIGA SAMORGANISATION
POHJOLAN AMMATILLINEN YHTEISJÄRJESTÖ
COUNCIL OF NORDIC TRADE UNIONS**

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On behalf of the Council of Nordic Trade Unions I will hereby send the comments of the Council of Nordic Trade Unions on the EU 2020 Strategy.

Sincerely yours,

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Helsinki, 14 January 2010

Comments on the Commission's Working Document "Consultation on the Future EU 2020 Strategy"

Ten years have passed since the Lisbon strategy for growth and employment in Europe was launched at the Lisbon European Council Summit. The challenges that confronted Europe at the time the Lisbon strategy was adopted are as urgent today as they were a decade ago. To those challenges we must add the difficulties we have to meet as a result of the economic crisis that surely will dominate the work during the next decade, such as the rising rates of unemployment that are mentioned in the Commission's paper. But we must also face the pressing environmental crisis that must be addressed properly and urgent.

The key idea underpinning the Lisbon strategy was to have a balanced strategy where welfare policies, environmental policies and well functioning labour markets for goods and services are seen as mutually reinforcing in creating growth and new jobs. The countries that most consequently have put this into practise have also done best in attaining the targets set out in the strategy.

Unfortunately, the Commission paper is not upholding this basic balance in the strategy that is necessary for getting good results, but also for successfully anchoring the strategy among citizens and civil society. The attention given to climate change and a knowledge society is very promising, but when it comes to the social dimension, including gender equality and employment policies, the document is clearly insufficient. Commission president Barroso's words to the European Parliament that "we need a new, much stronger focus on the social dimension in Europe, at all levels of government" are clearly not reflected in the Commission document.

Creating value by basing growth on knowledge

We are very pleased to see that there is a strong call for better education to increase productivity, support vulnerable groups and help fight inequality and poverty. The aim for 2020 in this area; to achieve a European Knowledge Area, is good. We firmly believe that development of the knowledge society is the key to success. Good basic education for all is not only a democratic right but also essential for a social transformation in society to take place without increased marginalization of individuals and at high social cost. The aspects of knowledge are important and we must not underestimate the high value of improvement. Europe can't nor should compete in terms of low pay and bad working conditions, but rather by offering sophisticated goods and services.

Empowering people in inclusive societies

We share the view that many pre-crisis jobs that have been destroyed will not return and the urgent need to invest in people by empowering to prevent them to fall out of the system. The Commission's working document recognizes the need for a framework to organise transitions and to support people, but how and in what way this framework should be outlined, remains unclear.

We fully agree with the importance of lifelong learning and believe that the future strategy must contain clear and ambitious targets to achieve this. This requires, in our view, the necessity to build a fair labour market which includes more and better jobs along with a new social policy program. We have some doubts regarding some of the wording in the Commission's paper concerning labour mobility and self-employment. We do not oppose to neither of those alternatives but we believe that a certain degree of security for workers must be guaranteed before we can for example support promotions "to ensure that people can take up new opportunities by moving to where their skills are most needed" and to support "a positive attitude towards risk-taking" with reference to self employment.

The paper mentions that these new opportunities must go hand in hand with security through modern and financially sustainable social and welfare systems, we would like to see a more concrete vision of how this is going to be obtained. We would like to see a strengthening of the welfare system along with active labour market policies. This means not only improving the quality of jobs and promoting the involvement in constructive social dialogues but also defending and developing social systems which guarantees transitional rights for workers such as social security benefits, right to training, protection of pension entitlement, etc. The lack of a social dimension and a clear vision for a welfare

policy is a vast weakness in the Commission's paper. The fact the Commission document is omitting to mention the employment strategy of the European Union is worrying. Unlike other parts of the Lisbon strategy, the employment strategy is based in treaty based. The Nordic trade union movement believes that the employment strategy should be a cornerstone in the EU growth strategy also after 2010.

Creating a competitive, connected and greener economy

We are very optimistic to the Commission's approach towards the growth of a greener economy. The goals are ambitious and the methods well outlined. Further, we firmly believe that the European Union should carefully consider if the climate issue could have an all-embracing role in the future strategy as it captures all the other areas – environmental aspects, employment and social security. If climate policies are to gain the necessary confidence of European wage earners they must be combined with active policies for welfare.

We believe that many of the ideas put forward in the Commission's paper are important aspects to a future strategy for growth. Unfortunately there is one area that has been totally left out from the document – that is the aspects of gender equality. A Europe characterized by gender equality is desirable for political reasons and essential for economic reasons. It is only through actual equality policies, such as ambitious provisions for childcare, individual taxation and a generous parental leave scheme, that Europe can attain higher employment figures for women, which is a precondition to battle demographical issues like, enabling our future economy to be solid and our welfare systems to survive, as the population ages.

Making it happen

To ensure that the future strategy is successful and that the ambitions expressed are fulfilled, it is important that the leaders of the European Union adopt clear targets, formulated in specific figures instead of vague key objectives. These targets should apply to the European Union as a whole, and should subsequently be supplemented with national targets. The adopted targets will have to be followed up, using benchmarking to clarify the ranking of the individual member states both in relation to each other and to the overall targets.

The National Reform Plans, NRP, have probably been the best instrument for putting the ambitions expressed in the Lisbon strategy into practice, and for this reason it is essential that these action plans be maintained in the future strategy. The action plans should also, to a greater extent than previously, be a point of departure for political debate at member state level, not least in the national parliaments, and as a tool for broad consultation with the social partners and other organisations active in the areas covered by the future strategy for growth. The same applies for the annual reporting made by member states to the Commission on the implementation of the action plans.

Even though member states deal with different concrete issues in their action plans, it is important for each member state to present specific reforms in accordance to reach the

aims of the future strategy. The Council and Commission of the European Union must be explicit in this respect. If the Lisbon strategy turns into a “smörgåsbord” from which the member states can pick and choose, being attentive to some aspects while selectively neglecting others, then the fundamental idea of a joint European road map for the journey to the knowledge society and a green economy will be lost.

Kind regards,

The Council of Nordic Trade Unions

Lauri Lyly
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