

**The Finnish Federation for Social Welfare and Health
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Interest Representative ID No 65967893012-89**

Consultation on the Future “EU 2020” Strategy - Comments:

GENERAL REMARKS

To read from President Barroso’s Guidelines for the next Commission and the beginning of the Consultation document that the aim is to put people at the heart of the agenda was uplifting. It was thus disheartening to find that the consultation document fails to deliver that promise.

Much as there may be good intentions behind the document, its focus is so much on the economy – a variation of Growth and Jobs – that the ultimate goal, the good of people, is fading away. Consequently, while the vision of the EU 2020 conveyed by the document is that of a prosperous community at the cutting edge of the global market, it is also a vision, in which people are seen mainly as labour force and consumers. In other words, they seem to be there to serve the economy, rather than the other way round.

It is clear that strong economy and capacity to compete in the global market are a precondition to a functioning welfare state. However, it should be equally clear that they are just tools. In the opinion of the Finnish Federation for Social Welfare and Health (STKL), in order to gain people’s trust and support, the strategy document should explicitly commit the EU to implementing the social part of the market economy it puts in practice. In strengthening the social dimension the following elements would be essential:

1. PEOPLE’S EUROPE TO BE PURSUED BY INVESTING IN SOCIAL PROTECTION

The Finnish Federation for Social Welfare and Health appreciates the importance placed on education, especially the concern about ensuring successful basic education for everybody and preventing early school leaving. However, education should not be seen only as a means to improve the employment rate, but also as a key for an individual to find their place in society and to contribute in multiple ways, including personal relationships, activities of the civil society and political engagement.

The strategy document puts a lot of emphasis on education at its highest level, combined with top quality research, innovation and creativity. This is all necessary. At the same time one should not be surprised, if this fails to touch large segments of societies. (Too) few of us see ourselves as potential top researchers or innovators.

One should not lose sight of the reality, in which poverty and inequality prevail. Even before the economic and financial crisis, the previous Growth and Jobs strategy failed to reduce them. The number of people at risk of poverty remains at the same level as in the year 2000 (78 million people; 16% of the population). In spite of economic growth, income gap and inequalities actually often increased. Such a trend leads to growing tensions within societies and alienates people from the society and its networks.

A person, whose innovative powers are consumed by a daily struggle for subsistence, is unlikely to pursue higher goals in life. It may also be too ambitious to expect them to feel a call to life-long learning and (life-long) moving around where their skills are most needed.

To release the human potential, adequate minimum income, equality and basic social security must be guaranteed. The strategy should commit to that. Investment in social protection is an investment in basic security and stability of the society. Social cohesion and welfare of people can only be achieved by investing in social protection.

2. PEOPLE'S FUNDAMENTAL RIGHTS TO BE AT THE CORE OF ALL CONSIDERATIONS

The way to a true people's Europe goes through securing their fundamental rights. A better balance is needed between the market freedoms and the fundamental rights.

The Finnish Federation for Social Welfare and Health would expect the new strategy document to reflect and explicitly recognize the emphasis put in the Lisbon agreement on people's fundamental rights. A rights-based approach should be used when drafting policies, whereby all initiatives would be assessed based on their anticipated impact on the rights of individuals. Furthermore, mechanisms should be developed for monitoring and assessing the social outcomes of the decisions made. Indicators that go beyond GDP should be developed and used in measuring the impact of actions and the wellbeing of people.

3. COMMON SOCIAL GOALS TO BE IDENTIFIED AND PURSUED JOINTLY AT THE EU-LEVEL

As regards the vision of the future EU, there is a need to reflect on its foundations; to which extent it should be built on economic considerations and how much it affects the national social policies. The impact of the internal market is inevitably felt also in the field of the national social policies, whether it was wanted or not. In addition to utilizing the OMC, ways should be found to identify common social goals and pursue them alongside with the economic targets.

4. SPECIAL ROLE OF NGOS TO BE RECOGNIZED

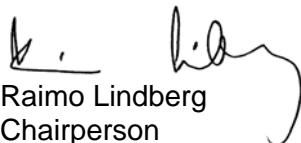
While the strategy document calls for the civil society to commit itself to the strategy, the document itself appears not to provide much in terms of facilitation of its greater engagement in decision making or recognition of its role in general. The current consultation process on the strategy document is a case in point – how serious is the Commission in hearing the civil society, considering the timeframe allocated for the consultation and submission of the final document?

The Finnish Federation for Social Welfare and Health calls for the recognition of the special role of NGOs. In many countries, they form the core of the civil society. They provide opportunities for citizens to participate and influence the policies, strengthen the social cohesion and create the social capital, thereby also enhancing political stability. Many of the services they provide enable people to exercise their fundamental rights. Their actions are defined by voluntariness, democracy, independence from the government and acting in public interests. Thus, their role is inherently different from any other actors.

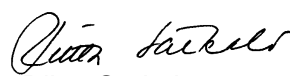
NGOs provide a unique contribution to the society. The added value created by them should be utilized, not lost. Recognition of their role means, *inter alia*, that they are genuinely being heard in the decision making processes. It also means ensuring that the legislation – including internal market rules - is drafted and implemented in a manner, which pays due attention to their multifaceted role and takes into account the special qualities that differentiate them from commercial undertakings. The strategy document should include a commitment to securing an environment and conditions that enable maximum inputs by NGOs.

The Finnish Federation for Social Welfare and Health

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