



The EU Alliance for a democratic, social and sustainable European Semester

2014-06-25

Semester Alliance sees CSRs as insufficient to address inclusive growth

25/06/2014 - The Semester Alliance, a broad European coalition bringing together environmental, social and equality NGOs and trade unions, releases its initial assessment of the European Commission's proposals on Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs) in view of the European Heads of States meeting on 26-27 June. Whilst welcoming some progress on more inclusive and sustainable CSRs, it is still seriously undermined by macroeconomic priorities focusing almost exclusively on austerity and competitiveness. The Semester Alliance also highlights the importance of increasing involvement of civil-society stakeholders, still seriously lacking in the CSR process.

“This year’s Commission proposals on CSRs claim to focus on “strengthening the conditions for sustainable growth and employment in a post-crisis economy.” But they seriously fall short of addressing the poverty crisis experienced daily by 124,2 million people. This is not to say that there has not been progress in some areas with CSRs addressing housing markets, the sustainability of pension systems, and tax reform: particularly tax evasion and avoidance. But in the end most CSRs still focus on budget and fiscal consolidation, rather than public investment,” said Barbara Helfferich, Chair of the Semester Alliance and Director of the European Anti-Poverty Network.

The Semester Alliance would have expected a stronger focus on tackling unemployment and the continuing social impact on poverty and exclusion as well as key excluded target groups, particularly those prioritized in the Social Investment Package. Whilst the focus on increasing adequacy and coverage of minimum income and social protection in some countries is welcomed, a more detailed analysis shows that this is often tied to activation with punitive conditionality threatening those who do not access work, rather than integrated active inclusion.

The increase in employment CSRs focused on those furthest from the labour market is also welcomed but contrasted by the increased focus on reviewing wage-setting and indexing mechanisms to produce downward pressure in order to increase competitiveness, which will only increase in-work poverty, and undermine sustainable growth based on higher living standards.

Whilst the almost universal CSRs for youth linked to the youth guarantee is welcomed, the focus on employment and education alone is unlikely to be sufficient to tackle problems of youth exclusion from basic rights, services and participation.

The small signs of social investment are mainly targeted on education, and are undermined by parallel cost-cutting measures in essential social protection, employment services, health and long-term care.

Although more environmental/resource efficiency CSRs are proposed, it is insufficient to ensure progress.

In terms of gender equality, despite an increase of gender-related CSRs - particularly related to child-care - the CSRs fail to address the gender equality gap, particularly in relation to pay and pensions.

This European Council is another milestone on the EU's agenda, as EU Heads of States and Prime Ministers will not only discuss the European Commission's 2014 CSRs proposals but also the EU's priorities for the next five years, proposed by Herman Van Rompuy, President of the European Council, paving the way for the Mid-Term Review of the Europe 2020 Strategy. The involvement of civil-society

and trade union stakeholders in the process is urgently needed to safeguard democracy and ensure progress towards a social and sustainable European Union.

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NOTES TO THE EDITOR:

The Alliance's key documents

- ? [Semester Alliance's Initial Assessment of the European Commission's proposals on CSRs](#) (June 2014)
- ? [Semester Alliance's analysis of the 2014 Semester](#) (April 2014)

The Semester Alliance

The *EU Alliance for a democratic, social and sustainable European Semester* (EU Semester Alliance) is a broad coalition bringing together 14 major European civil-society organisations and trade unions, representing thousands of member organisations on the ground at European, national and local levels in the European Union.

The Semester Alliance aims to support progress towards a more democratic, social and sustainable Europe 2020 Strategy, through strengthening civil dialogue engagement in the European Semester at national and EU levels.

The Semester Alliance members

The Alliance members include:

- ? Age Platform Europe
- ? Caritas Europa
- ? CECODHAS Housing Europe
- ? Eurochild
- ? Eurodiaconia
- ? European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN)
- ? European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD)

- ? European Environmental Bureau (EEB)
- ? European Federation of Food Banks (FEBA)
- ? European Federation of National Organisations working with the Homeless (FEANTSA)
- ? European Public Service Union (EPSU)
- ? European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)
- ? European Women's Lobby (EWL)
- ? Green Budget Europe
- ? Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM)

Supported by:

- ? Social Platform
- ? European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)

The National Pilots:

- ? Bulgaria
- ? Denmark
- ? Ireland

The Alliance – A voice to be heard and followed

<http://semesteralliance.net>

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Enabling civil-society to participate in the shaping of EU policies and to contribute to progress on the Targets of the Europe 2020 Strategy concerns us all!



