

Questions for Commissioners

SOLIDAR Guidelines for Ensuring the Next Commission Puts People First



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Responsible Editor: Conny Reuter

SOLIDAR is a European network of 53 NGOs working to advance social justice in Europe and worldwide.

SOLIDAR lobbies the EU and international institutions in three primary areas: social affairs, international cooperation and education.

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Photo from Soweto

Photo of Social worker with lady

FOREWORD

In mid-January 2010, MEPs will have hearings with all the Commissioners-designate. Importantly, the approval of MEPs – acting by qualified majority – is required before a Commissioner can be confirmed. This is why it is crucial that MEPs scrutinise the candidates to determine whether their positions and policies will ensure that Europe will move away from a profit-driven market ideology to one where people, social cohesion and the planet are put first.

The policy orientation of the next College of Commissioners is also key to the European Union facing up to the challenges of the economic and financial crisis that we are in. Currently in Europe, there are 80 million people living in or at risk of poverty, amongst which 19 million are classified as working poor. And globally, the International Labour Organisation estimates that some 200 million workers could be pushed into extreme poverty, mostly in developing and emerging economies where there are few or no social safety nets, with the result that the number of working poor worldwide may rise up to 1.4 billion.

To assist MEPs in this process, SOLIDAR - as a European network of NGOs working for more social justice in the fields of social affairs, international cooperation and education - has put together a series of questions per relevant Commissioner to identify their ambitions and approach, as well as an easy-to-use checklist to make a note of your evaluation.

Let us work together to change Europe. We need a new European Commission that puts the people and planet first.

Together, we are a force for change!



Conny Reuter
Secretary General

SECTION I: QUESTIONS FOR COMMISSIONERS

SOCIAL AFFAIRS

Michel Barnier, Internal Market and Services

Social Services

Social services are a core element of all European social protection systems. They contribute to social inclusion and social cohesion, and to the implementation of the fundamental rights of individuals. The special nature of social services is that they bring about the realisation of social rights of individuals and groups, and social policy objectives of society as a whole. The special nature of the users of social services is that they are often people who are dependent, need support and guidance, are ill, or are living in poverty. The special nature of both the services and the users therefore need to be recognised. Social, health, employment and education services contribute to social policy objectives, form core elements of social protection schemes and are in the general interest of societies.

- What does the Commissioner-designate believe is the appropriate legal framework at European level to guarantee accessible, affordable and quality social, health and education services which meet people's expectations and needs? A sectoral directive on SSGI? A framework directive on SGI, possibly in addition to a sectoral directive on SSGI?
- As for quality services, should the quality framework to be developed be binding for public authorities in Member States? Should it set out only common principles and guidelines or also contain concrete technical quality standards?
- How does the Commissioner-designate want to ensure that fair competition in social markets is based on quality?
- Does he agree with the statement that in case of conflict between Community rules on competition, public procurement and internal market and the realisation of objectives of general interest that the latter should prevail?
- Which concrete steps should be taken and in which form should the legal and quality frameworks take into account, for example, the following specific characteristics of SSGI and their users: services adapted to needs, integrated service delivery, provided by qualified staff on a continuous basis, embedded in local service infrastructure and communities allowing for NGO providers to offer services on their own initiative, responding to new needs?

Laszlo Andor, Employment Social Affairs and Inclusion

Social Services

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Decent work and quality jobs

Since 2005, decent work has been recognised as a key pre-condition for the eradication of poverty, and its achievement now features under the first Millennium Development Goal. Apart from creating quality jobs, the decent work agenda focuses on social protection. According to the International Labour Organisation (ILO), less than 2% of GDP is necessary to provide a basic set of social security benefits to all the world's poor. The question then is not can we afford to do it, but rather can we afford not to. The EU has committed itself to 'promoting decent work for all' (title of 2006 Commission Communication on decent work) in the world through implementing the concept in all internal and external policies. But to this day, EU trade policies are destroying jobs, EU migration policies perpetuate exploitation, and EU debt policies promote the free market over the redistribution of wealth.

- Which concrete steps does the Commissioner-designate intend to undertake to promote decent work for all in Europe's internal and external policies? How does he intend to promote this objective that implies the enforcement of measures to guarantee adequate living wages, comprehensive coverage by social protection and individual and collective labour rights at work?
- Which policies at European level does the Commissioner-designate see could strengthen and broaden social protection coverage by ensuring access to social security, pensions, unemployment benefits, maternity protection and quality health care to all? Does he see a role for the European institutions, in particular the European Commission, in promoting the inclusion of workers in the informal economy and undocumented migrants in European societies?

Eradicating Poverty and Social Exclusion

8% of Europeans are classified as working poor – that is to say, individuals and families who maintain regular employment but remain in relative poverty due to low levels of pay. The poverty figures will only increase as a consequence of the financial and economic crises unless adequate policy frameworks which support protecting public wealth and robust social infrastructures are put in place at both European and national level. Labour law should be about efficiently protecting individual and collective rights and promoting fundamental values. Active labour market policies are needed to combat social exclusion and not create further segregated labour markets. A set of measures that actively address inequalities in the labour market, eliminating discrimination in recruitment procedures, ensuring access to promotion and training are needed. In coordination with social protection systems, labour law should support active policies bringing people in precarious situations and far from the labour market back into employment.

The Open Method of Coordination (OMC) on social protection and social inclusion has brought about concrete and positive effects and was instrumental to put the issues of poverty and social exclusion higher on the political agenda at European level and in many Member States. The OMC provides an adequate framework to exchange experiences and good practices to work towards policy coordination and, where useful, policy convergence based on common objectives, targets and indicator-based reporting systems. It can in particular promote the involvement of all stakeholders in the process of implementing action plans to fight against poverty and social exclusion.

- EU policies - including the current Lisbon Strategy to be continued under the Europe 2020 Strategy - need to be reoriented and aimed at achieving socially inclusive and cohesive societies. This commitment should be underlined by setting policy targets for poverty reduction for 2015 and 2020 at all political levels, in particular to eradicate extreme forms of poverty and break the cycle of intergenerational transmission. What policy priorities will the Commissioner-designate implement at European level to effectively reduce poverty and social exclusion? Which concrete steps at European level does he intend to prioritise, e.g. common targets, specific indicators, recommendations to Member States?
- The internal and external dimensions of the fight against poverty and social exclusion cannot be uncoupled. The European dimension of the fight against poverty and social exclusion cannot be dissociated from global challenges linked to migration, climate change, decent work and implementation of International Labour Organisation (ILO) core labour standards. Which practical steps does the Commissioner-designate propose to better articulate this interdependence across all European policies?
- Does the Commissioner-designate support a reinforced, more effective and visible OMC in the field of social protection and social inclusion i.e. an OMC with common objectives and targets? What does the Commissioner-designate intend to do to guarantee highly participatory processes when defining policy priorities (policy design and policy evaluation)?

Viviane Reding, Vice-president, Justice Fundamental Rights and Citizenship

Citizenship and Volunteering

Citizens of Europe need to be engaged in decision making processes at European, national and local level that have an impact on their living and working conditions. Civil society organisations can empower vulnerable groups and socially and economically disadvantaged people to formulate, together with decision makers, new and comprehensive policies, monitor and evaluate existing ones and propose changes to existing legislation. Democracy also depends on the contribution of the millions of citizens who, through their time and effort, add to the public good. The volunteer who supports a single parent, someone working in a youth club, the activist who campaigns for the cancellation of third world debt, everybody is an intrinsic part of our society and a vital factor in creating a sense of social inclusion and belonging. The engagement of individuals for the public good is encouraged, organised and supported by organisations and associations set up by citizens to make our world a better place. Engaging with NGO service providers that bring together these individuals provides a direct link to the everyday reality of citizens within Europe and empowers the millions of volunteers in Europe to contribute to fighting poverty and social exclusion.

- Which activities does the Commissioner-designate plan to reinforce or build up trust in the EU amongst EU citizens regarding a strong social dimension of Europe, with the EU being a promoter of solidarity, equality, non-discrimination, diversity, mutual respect, pluralism and justice?
- There is a need to promote the engagement of citizens and strengthen civil dialogue to bridge the gap between Europe and its people by establishing legal and policy frameworks that promote and recognise the involvement of volunteers. Does the Commissioner designate intend to undertake steps towards such recognition during the European Year 2011 for Volunteering?
- Is the Commissioner-designate ready to support DG Communication in developing a dialogue with citizens?

INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Andris Piebalgs, Development

Development Aid

Given that 2009 saw many EU Member States cutting their aid budgets and that many of them have been increasingly referencing non-ODA resources such as export credits, investment guarantees, technology transfer (May 2009 GEARC Conclusions) in their discussions of aiding developing countries, an approach supported by the Commission in its "Whole of Union" approach (17 September 2009 Commission Communication); there is a real danger that not only will Member States not deliver on their ODA commitments but that they will include a range of non-poverty reducing instruments as a part of their aid package.

- How will the Commissioner-designate ensure that the EU, including the EC and Member States, delivers on its aid commitments?
- Will the Commissioner-designate ensure that in 2010, during the mid-term review of the MDGs, that the EU publishes binding, multi-annual timetables of its aid commitments?
- Will the Commissioner-designate defend the role of aid in promoting development, and ensure that any non-ODA instruments and resources are fully assessed for their impact, and kept separate and additional to ODA resources?

Policy coherence for development:

The Lisbon Treaty legally commits the EU to ensuring that greater policy coherence for development is achieved in EU policies, with the specification that EU development policies are guided by a focus on poverty eradication. In its September 2009 Communication, the EC turns its attention away from the harmful policies currently constricting the capacity of developing countries to eradicate poverty and instead focuses on potential synergies between development and non-development policies.

- How will the Commissioner-designate ensure that the spotlight is turned on the harmful effects of a range of EU policies on developing countries (e.g. trade, migration, agriculture, taxation etc.)?
- Is the Commissioner-designate willing to come up with proposals which will strengthen both intra-Parliamentary and inter-Institutional mechanisms for achieving PCD?
- Will the Commissioner-designate support the utilisation of mechanisms providing developing countries and their citizens with the right to redress in areas where EU policies knowingly undermine their development prospects?
- How will the Commissioner-designate ensure that above all EU policies uphold human rights, including the right to decent work for all men and women?

Social protection

The April 2009 G20 Communique recognises the significance of strengthening social protection systems in developing countries, as well as implementing the ILO's Global Jobs Pact of which social protection is a major part, highlighting the importance of systems which shield workers and vulnerable groups from the shocks of the food, finance and fuel crisis experienced in recent times. The 21 June 2007 GEARC Conclusions on Promoting Employment through EU Development Cooperation propose a Communication on social protection and development cooperation.

- Does the Commissioner-designate intend to ensure such a Communication outlining the EC's strategy towards promoting social protection for all is developed?

- Does the Commissioner-designate intend to promote the development of a global social floor as proposed by the ILO through the EU's development policies and to ensure it is not undermined through other policies such as trade and taxation?

Rumiana Jeleva, International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response

In this new Commission, the roles of Humanitarian and Development Commissioners have been split, adding further to the challenge of ensuring that humanitarian interventions are coherent with the EU's development strategy. Furthermore, the new role of the EEAS will add a further layer of complexity.

- How will the Commissioner-designate ensure that coherence, coordination and cooperation between herself, the Development Commissioner and the High Representative guide EU's policies in ensuring humanitarian interventions are feeding into the mid and long term development policies and are guided by the need to protect the most vulnerable and not by the EU's external policy interests?

In recent years, a number of armed conflicts have had at their root a scramble for control over natural resources. A number of EU companies have been involved in interventions which have in fact worsened this crisis. The links between trade in diamonds and the conflict in Sierra Leone, copper and cobalt and the conflict in the DRC, and diamonds in Angola are well-documented.

- How does the Commissioner-designate intend to ensure that European companies are prevented from fuelling such conflicts through their demands for resource inputs?
- What is the Commissioner-designate's view on the necessity of ensuring that EU companies involved in such conflicts are legally held responsible for their role?

Karel De Gucht, Trade

Policy coherence for development

The Lisbon Treaty legally commits the EU to ensuring that greater policy coherence for development is achieved in EU policies, with the specification that EU development policies are guided by a focus on poverty eradication.

- How will the Commissioner-designate ensure that EU trade policies are coherent with poverty eradication objectives?
- How will the Commissioner-designate ensure that EU companies, which now enjoy privileged access to EU trade negotiators, are not unduly influencing EU trade policies and that civil society and trade unions gain equal access and have their concerns listened to in the policy-making process?
- Is the Commissioner-designate willing to listen to the concerns of ACP countries in the context of the EPA negotiations and ensure that some of the most damaging aspects of these negotiations, such as the demands for access to service markets, the introduction of the Most Favoured Nation clause and the rapid liberalisation foreseen are re-negotiated before the signing of full EPAs?

Policy space and industrialisation

In particular, the EU's Global Europe Strategy and EPA negotiations have come under severe criticism for their insistence on opening up developing country markets to EU companies which will hamper their capacity for industrial development.

- Given the important role played by industrialisation in creating dynamic growth which increases value-adding, technology transfer and innovation and the pre-requisite for which is policy space, does the Commissioner-designate believe that current EU trade policies have

incorporated the lessons of Europe's own economic history for ensuring equitable growth and development in developing countries?

Decent work

- Does the Commissioner-designate believe that each FTA the EU negotiates requires an ex-ante impact assessment on employment in order to assess the parameters for such negotiations, respecting the EU's commitments to promote decent work through all its policies including trade?
- Similarly, in its negotiations with partner countries how does the Commissioner-designate intend to work together with international institutions such as the ILO to ensure that governments which enjoy preferential market access through the EU's GSP+ system are in fact upholding their commitments to human and labour rights?

Algirdas Šemeta, Taxation and Customs Union, Audit and Anti-Fraud

The role of tax and the necessity to ensure an end to capital flight has increasingly come under the spotlight, both in the G20 process and in the resolutions of the European Parliament on tax matters.

- How will the Commissioner-designate promote the need for both increased company and government transparency on the question of tax paid by corporations in developing countries?
- How will the Commissioner-designate work with the Member States to ensure that tax havens, which currently refuse to automatically share information with other jurisdictions are brought into a legally binding global agreement?

Olli Rehn, Economic and Monetary Affairs

The financial crisis has led to a massive increase in the resources of the International Monetary Fund, which in turn has been lending money to countries both within and outside of the EU. Many of those loans have involved European Commission financing and a number of the agreements have resulted in a significant reduction of public sector jobs and wages, loss and reduction of social protection entitlements and public services such as health and education.

- How does the Commissioner-designate intend to ensure that social rights in countries facing grave economic situations are upheld and that citizens are not punished for a crisis they did not cause?
- Does the Commissioner-designate view the requirements of the Growth and Stability pact, which a number of older EU Member States are in breach of, as too restrictive for newer EU members?
- Will the Commissioner-designate work towards ensuring that harmful loan conditionalities are eradicated in IMF loans and fiscal space is provided for countries which need it?

EDUCATION AND LIFE-LONG LEARNING

Androulla Vassiliou, Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth

Education and Life-long learning

In order to provide vulnerable groups with new future opportunities, education is of vital importance. There is a strong interrelation between poverty, social exclusion and low levels of education. All levels of education, training and lifelong learning are important tools in the fight against poverty and discrimination, and to build democracy and social cohesion. Increased migration from third countries and intra-EU mobility flows present challenges for both migrants and their school-aged children as well as for education policies and systems. Debates and policies on education and training should prioritise the promotion of social inclusion and social cohesion, and in this context, pay special attention to migrant children. Every child in the European Union, including undocumented children has the right to go to school.

- Will the Commissioner-designate undertake concrete action to address, together with Member States, the challenge of reducing institutional barriers that can have a negative impact on access or educational attainment of migrant children in order to ensure equity in education?
- Will the Commissioner-designate link debates and policies on education and training to the promotion of social inclusion and social cohesion? How does the Commissioner-designate intend to recognise and promote the crucial role played by civil society organisations in providing services for vulnerable persons and groups, also supporting a smooth functioning of education systems in view of attaining general interest objectives?
- Does the Commissioner-designate support a reinforced, more effective and visible OMC in the fields of education and training, i.e. an OMC with common objectives and targets as well as strong participatory processes of defining policy priorities (policy design and policy evaluation)?
- What special measures does the Commissioner-designate envisage to encourage young people into the labour market under decent working conditions?

SECTION II: CHECKLIST

CHECKLIST EUROPEAN COMMISSION 2009 – 2014

How satisfied are you with the candidate's response on the topic of:	++	+	+ --	--	---
Michel Barnier, Internal Market and Services					
Guaranteeing a legal EU framework to accessible, affordable and quality social, health and education services for all					
Ensuring that competition in social markets is based on quality					
Laszlo Andor, Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion					
Guaranteeing a legal EU framework to accessible, affordable and quality social, health and education services for all					
Ensuring that competition in social markets is based on quality					
Concrete steps to promote decent work for all in Europe's internal and external policies					
Activities to strengthen and broaden social protection coverage for all					
Policy priorities to reduce poverty and social exclusion					
Interdependence of internal and external dimensions of the fight against poverty and social exclusion					
Support for an OMC in the field of social protection and social inclusion					
Viviane Reding, Vice-President, Justice, Fundamental Rights and Citizenship					
Activities to build up trust in the EU amongst EU citizens regarding a strong social dimension of Europe					
Steps to promote and recognise the involvement of volunteers					
Developing a dialogue with citizens with DG Comms					
Andris Piebalgs, Development					
Ensuring the EU delivers on its aid commitments					
Ensuring the EU publishes binding, multi-annual timetables of its aid commitments					
Defend the role of aid in promoting development					
Ensuring focus on the harmful effects of EU policies on developing countries					
Making proposals to strengthen both intra-Parliamentary and inter-Institutional mechanisms for achieving PCD					
Supporting the utilisation of mechanisms providing developing countries and their citizens with the right to redress in areas where EU policies knowingly undermine their development prospects					
Ensuring that EU policies uphold human rights, including the right to decent work for all men and women					
Ensuring an EC Communication on promoting social protection					
Promoting the development of a global social floor					
Rumiana Jeleva, International Cooperation, Humanitarian Aid and Crisis Response					
Ensuring that coherence, coordination and cooperation between herself, the Development Commissioner and the High Representative					

How satisfied are you with the candidate's response on the topic of:	++	+	+ --	--	-- --
Ensuring that European companies are prevented from fuelling such conflicts through their demands for resource inputs					
Ensuring that EU companies involved in such conflicts are legally held responsible for their role					
Karel De Gucht, Trade					
Ensuring that EU trade policies are coherent with poverty eradication objectives					
Ensuring that EU companies are not unduly influencing EU trade policies					
Willing to listen to the concerns of ACP countries in the context of the EPA negotiations					
Ensuring that current EU trade policies have incorporated the lessons of Europe's own economic history for ensuring equitable growth and development in developing countries					
Ensuring that each FTA the EU negotiates requires an ex-ante impact assessment on employment					
Ensuring that governments which enjoy preferential market access through the EU's GSP+ system are in fact upholding their commitments to human and labour rights					
Algirdas Šemeta, Taxation and Customs Union, Audit and Anti-Fraud					
Promoting the need for both increased company and government transparency on the question of tax paid by corporations in developing countries					
Ensuring that tax havens are brought into a legally binding global agreement					
Olli Rehn, Economic and Monetary Affairs					
Ensuring that social rights in countries facing grave economic situations are upheld					
Requirements of the Growth and Stability pact are too restrictive for newer EU members					
Ensuring that harmful loan conditionalities are eradicated in IMF loans and fiscal space is provided for countries which need it					
Androulla Vassiliou, Education, Culture, Multilingualism and Youth					
Undertaking concrete action to ensure migrant children in order to ensure equity in education					
Linking debates and policies on education and training to the promotion of social inclusion and social cohesion					
Supporting a reinforced, more effective and visible OMC in the fields of education and training					
Special measures to encourage young people into the labour market					