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Advancing social justice in Europe and worldwide

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SOLIDAR Weekly Round Up 15-03-2013

Editorial: A values-based Europe?

Conny Reuter, Secretary General

Last Monday the Orban government again changed Hungary's constitution and reduced the powers of the constitutional court. The country appears to be on a dangerous path, turning its back on the shared values that bind together the Member States of the European Union, as laid down in its Treaty.

The President of the European Parliament Martin Schulz has responded by inviting the European Council to act and to consider – as the Treaty foresees – sanctions against this Member State.

This is an opportunity for the Council to send a clear signal at a time when democracy is under threat in a Member State. This is a moment when it is worth recalling the lessons of history: in the last century we saw how appeasement on this crucial issue encouraged the enemies of democracy. The European Union has to protect all its citizens, in particular the most vulnerable and those under threat.

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Social Affairs

The Social Investment Package: sowing the seeds of change?

The Commission's [Social Investment Package](#) highlights how essential social investment and social protection are for the cohesion of our societies as well as for the sustainable development of our economies. Armed with a lot of facts and figures about the growing inequalities in Europe, about increased poverty, about people who can realise opportunities and others who are not given any, it stresses the destructive consequences of austerity measures, social underspending and of attempts to placate the markets by all means. With this in mind, SOLIDAR participated in a [conference](#) organised by the European Social Observatory (OSE) and the Flanders-Europe Liaison Agency (VL EVA) and also had discussions with members of the Social Platform this week.

Both occasions were used to express SOLIDAR's support for shifting the approach towards social policies from cost to investment. We also welcome the Commission's intention to better monitor Member States' delivery of the Europe 2020 targets and to support Member States in designing more integrated policies and reference budgets. But will these soft instruments be enough to make Member States deliver, when they are bound to the objectives of the Stability and Growth Pact and the Euro Plus Pact at the same time? What do figures count in comparison to the well organised interests of the beneficiaries of the crisis? What does the reality of those suffering from the crisis matter where decision-making is dominated by old power relations looking at short-term profits?

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Migration

SOLIDAR calls for rights-based approach to migration

SOLIDAR calls on the EU and its member states to implement a rights-based approach to migration as well as to

coherently address the development related push factors to migration, notably lack of decent work, unemployment and poverty. The majority of migrants constitute a vulnerable group of workers that is mainly driven by these development related push factors, and which faces an “exploitation trap” in countries of destination. As 2013 is the European Year of citizens, SOLIDAR and its Italian member CGIL will launch on 20 March a campaign for a European Citizenship Initiative urging to the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of Migrant Workers and their families (ICRMW). To date, no EU Member State has ratified the convention which would guarantee basic labour, social and human rights for all migrant workers, regardless of their visa status.

The prevalent EU policy emphasis on border security and migration management thus fails to tackle the real problem and related risks for migrants. This is further indicated by the lack of a rights-based and coherent EU response to the arrival of 50000 Migrants in Europe following the “Arab Spring” in early 2011 and the related humanitarian issues of migrants gone missing in their journey or after their arrival. Similarly, the EU border agency FRONTEX’ [annual work programme](#), presented in the European Parliament on 7 March, aims to facilitate the entry into force of the EUROSUR directive (1 October 2013), which currently criminalises irregular migrants by emphasising the fight against organised crime and irregular migration. SOLIDAR and a coalition of NGOs expressed these concerns in a [joint letter](#) in September 2012. For a true rights-based approach to migration, the cornerstone of all EU Migration and Development policies have to be the development related push factors for migration, human rights and decent work and social inclusion and social protection for migrants. Migrant rights are human rights!

International Cooperation

Humanitarian assistance from SOLIDAR members to the Syrian people

The conflict in Syria began on 15 March 2011 with public demonstrations as part of the wider Arab spring, and developed into a nationwide uprising, and then a full-scale civil war. Protesters have demanded the end to nearly five decades of Ba’ath Party Rule, as well as the resignation of the president Bashar Al Assad. Syrian government characterizes the insurgency as “armed terrorist groups”.

According to various sources, including the United Nations, more than 60,000 people have been killed so far, of which about half were civilians, and homes and infrastructure destroyed. A total of 5 million people – 1 in 4 Syrians – are estimated to be in need of humanitarian assistance both outside and inside the country. According to the UN, between 1.5 and 2 million Syrians have been displaced within the country. In its [updated analysis](#), SOLIDAR recognises the seriousness of the situation and SOLIDAR members express their engagement to provide humanitarian assistance in the region.

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Education

EUCIS-LLL calls for structural support of civil society organisations

This week the European Civil Society Platform on Lifelong Learning (EUCIS-LLL) has published a [press release](#) calling for the recognition of civil society organisations as service providers by the European Commission, DG Education and Culture. In the next funding scheme for 2014-2020 Erasmus For All (or YES Europe, the name suggested by the European Parliament) the operating grants are being replaced by a project-based funding, despite the fact that a number of other

Commission funding proposals are for the allocation of operating grants for civil society organisations.

The organisations actively working in the field of education and training are direct partners in pursuing aims of general EU interest in reaching out to millions of people and supporting EU policy and objectives in the field. Therefore, to maintain and strengthen the partnership approach EUCIS-LLL calls on the Council of the European Union to confirm the position of the European Parliament and the European Economic and Social Committee supporting the reintroduction of operating grants in Erasmus for All/YES Europe Programme.

Network News

German member **AWO** published a [press release](#) and a [memorandum](#) on the allocation of refugees in the EU.

Italian member **ISCOS** presents the new [China News](#).

Spanish member **Solidaridad Internacional** is looking for a [regional representative](#) and a women's rights [regional coordinator](#) in the Middle East.

Read this week's [report](#) from Italian member **ARCI**.

Participate in the [on line course](#) on educational strategies and best practices from Spanish member **MPDL**.

Partners News

InterAction, **ICVA** and **VOICE** [question](#) the UN approach to humanitarian aid in Somalia.

ILO calls to participate in a [photo contest](#) picturing Migrant Domestic Workers in Europe.

The new **ILO** [newsletter](#) on Decent Work is out.

Read the **Social Platform** [weekly news](#).

Agenda

26-29 March: [World Social Forum](#), Tunis

SOLIDAR is a European network of 59 NGOs active in over 90 countries working to advance social justice in Europe and worldwide. SOLIDAR voices the concerns of its member organisations to the EU and international institutions across the policy sectors social affairs, international cooperation and lifelong learning. For more info www.solidar.org

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