

### EESC Opinion Supports the European Foundation Statute

#### Outline

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The European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) adopted an exploratory opinion in early July calling for a new European Social Action Programme (ESAP).

The EESC emphasises that, in light of current global circumstances of great financial uncertainty, higher food prices and energy costs, the European Union must continue to build a more participatory and dynamic Social Europe. To this effect, social dialogue is a key pillar in developing EU social policy, along with civil dialogue to gain full involvement of citizens and organised civil society. Among the measures to be taken the text recalls the importance to adopt the various European Statutes with a social and economic dimension, including the European Foundation Statute.

The Committee's paper stressed that the EU needs to keep up with changes in the economic sphere and develop well targeted social policies accordingly. A new ESAP should be fully in line with the objectives of the Lisbon Strategy: supporting jobs, growth, social cohesion and sustainability. It should therefore specifically address policy areas such as quality of life, fundamental social rights, empowering people, social solidarity, societal entrepreneurship, promotion of core social standards in EU external relations, especially in the area of trade. All instruments and tools available should be used. While the Community method should be maintained, it must be supplemented by other "new methods". Financial resources in the existing budget can be reallocated to support the programme. The budgetary reform after 2013 must focus on social cohesion.

Specifically the Committee lists a set of principles to guide a new European Social Action Programme including:

- The need to integrate the ESAP within the framework of the Lisbon Reform Treaty that gives the EU new social objectives: "full employment and social progress, combating exclusion and discrimination, promoting social justice and protection, equality between men and women, solidarity between generations and the protection of the child"
- Taking a long-term perspective beyond 2010: a new ESAP should take into account the future of children and the whole young generation in Europe.
- Promoting the general well-being of the people of Europe by recognising the interdependence of economic competitiveness, and social justice and solidarity. To achieve this goal, an EU-level approach could be complemented by public and private initiatives for the gathering of sustainable financial resources for an inclusive social welfare
- Supporting socially responsible enterprise and fair competition in the internal market, in addition to creating quality jobs and the accompanying knowledge society
- Adopting European Statutes for *foundations*, associations, mutuels and small enterprise in an effort to foster entrepreneurship and improve economic and social performance
- Integrating the concept of social policy into other policy domains: competition policies, taxation, macroeconomic policy etc.
- Investing in human and social capital to stimulate sustainable development using innovative investment schemes with the help of EU funding
- Promoting the EU's social model and policy in EU external relations by incorporating its values and principles in an effort to achieve more equitable and balanced globalisation.

The Committee recommends that to implement an effective Social Action Programme, the EU adopts a multi-level governance approach with involvement from social partners and civil society organisations at different levels. This will give all stakeholders greater "ownership" and input in the process of jointly furthering the EU's social programme. As for concrete measures, citizens' needs, concerns and aspirations need to be identified. A permanent debate with all those involved will facilitate mutual understanding and allow stakeholders to address future challenges and strategic choices on social policy with a common approach.

The following key policy areas are identified by the EESC as focus points for a new ESAP:

- Ensuring a sustainable life course – providing access to social security, education, services etc. to improve life quality

- Guaranteeing fundamental social rights
- Empowering people – lifelong learning, developing capacities for the youth, rights-based integration policies for immigrants, refugees and minorities
- Developing a society open to all – proposing actions aimed at eradicating poverty, fighting for gender equality, responding to the needs of elder and people with disability, improving services of general interest
- Creating employment and work of high quality and making mobility an opportunity for all.
- Promoting entrepreneurship in a societal context – social enterprises promoting effective integration in society and work, corporate social responsibility, etc.
- Anticipating and monitoring structural change – dealing with change within a partnership between enterprise and all concerned actors through participation and consultation of workers and their representatives to find appropriate solutions
- Emphasising the external dimension of the ESAP – e.g. promoting international agreements on CSR; promoting the characteristics of the European Social Model in the external policies of the EU; international governance systems for new technological and environmental choices and for new international finance rules; Developing and managing immigration policy in cooperation with the countries of origin

### **Action Point**

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The European Economic and Social Committee's Opinion on a new European Social Action Programme is available for download at [http://eescopinions.eesc.europa.eu/EESCopinionDocument.aspx?identifier=ces\soc\soc295\ces1209-2008\\_ac.doc&language=EN](http://eescopinions.eesc.europa.eu/EESCopinionDocument.aspx?identifier=ces\soc\soc295\ces1209-2008_ac.doc&language=EN) (.doc, 190kb)

EFC members interested in obtaining further details are invited to contact the EFC secretariat at [eu@efc.be](mailto:eu@efc.be).