

# PRESS RELEASE



EUROPEAN ANTI-POVERTY NETWORK ■ RESEAU EUROPEEN DES ASSOCIATIONS DE LUTTE CONTRE LA PAUVRETE ET L'EXCLUSION SOCIALE  
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## **Social rights cannot be just scrapped!**

**Current economic governance proposals will only result in increased poverty and inequality and put at risk the commitment of people to the EU project.**

**EAPN calls on EPSCO Council meeting on 7 March to defend EU project and prevent social degradation, restoring balance to EU economic governance.**

*“The EU is giving out contradictory messages – how can it say, on the one hand – it wants to put people at the centre of the new strategy, wants inclusive growth and make a decisive impact on poverty when it is forcing countries to make cuts in basic services, benefits and wages?”*, said Ludo Horemans, President of EAPN.

Yesterday, EAPN sent a letter to the members of the Employment and Social Affairs Ministers’ Council (EPSCO), meeting next Monday 7 March to discuss their response to new developments on Europe 2020, including the new European Semester, proposals for economic governance and the European Flagship against Poverty and Social Exclusion.

In its letter, EAPN highlights its concern of the return to a “growth only” strategy, undermining the commitments made to a coherent economic, environmental and social approach for Europe 2020. By asking Member States to reduce in public deficits to meet the demands of the Stability and Growth Pact, cut public expenditure and hold down wages, the EU is pressurizing them to weaken their welfare States and increase poverty and inequality.<sup>1</sup>

*“Social rights cannot be just scrapped while we focus on growth at any price! We want to see a commitment to defend the most vulnerable and to invest in social infrastructures, rights and in people”*, added Ludo Horemans.

In its letter, EAPN also argues that the social dimension of Europe 2020 will further be put at risk if integrated national strategies for social protection and social inclusion are dropped, as proposed by the European Commission.

*“The Commission wants everything to be done through the National Reform Programmes – but with the current debates on the draft NRPs we can see the risks only too well, as the dominant focus is on macro-economic growth and poverty is only talked about as a “bottleneck to growth”* says Sian Jones, EAPN’s Policy Coordinator.

*“The Social OMC and broader national strategies to fight poverty and social exclusion are vital to defend social rights, and should be used to feed into the NRP. These should be dynamic strategies developed through national platforms involving stakeholders*

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<sup>1</sup> EAPN (Feb 2011) Is the European Project Moving backwards: The social impact of the crisis and the recovery policies in 2010. See link further down.

*including NGOs and people experiencing poverty who know what the problems are and can contribute to solutions that work”, adds Sian Jones.*

Moreover, EU citizens’ confidence in Europe has already reduced 8 points to 43% last year. The current approach risks a further retreat.

#### **EAPN’s Key Messages in Letter to EPSCO Council (7 March)**

- Restore Inclusive Growth as an equal priority with strong recommendations defending the core values of the EU project -
- Back comprehensive national strategies on social protection and social inclusion, based on active stakeholder engagement, to feed into the National Reform Programmes.

#### **Useful information**

- [EAPN’s letter to Social Ministers](#) (EPSCO)
- EAPN’s Report: [Is the European Project moving backwards? - The social impact of the crisis and the recovery packages.](#)
- EAPN’s response to the Draft Employment Report: [Fighting poverty is not only about unemployment rates!](#)

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