



The Semester Alliance: CSRs 2015 - the EU is further off-track to deliver an inclusive, sustainable, social and equal Europe

19/05/2015 – The EU is failing to deliver an inclusive recovery strategy, which is urgently needed to bring the Europe 2020 Strategy back on track - in particular to combat poverty, create quality jobs, invest in early child development, equality for all, including gender equality and ensure environmental sustainability. This is the critical assessment of the Semester Alliance, a broad European coalition bringing together environmental, social and equality NGOs and trade unions, responding to the European Commission’s Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs) published on 13 May 2015.

As Europe enters its 6th year of economic and social crisis, the EU’s image is overwhelmingly identified with austerity. Steps are urgently needed to restore the balance between social and environmental objectives and economic governance, if the EU is to revive trust in its Europe 2020 promises of a smart, sustainable and inclusive recovery based on democratic accountability and engagement. The Semester Alliance reiterates the urgency of a more transparent and participatory engagement of **civil society** in the European Semester, and regrets that the CSRs continue to be focused on economic governance to the detriment of a more social and equal Europe.

Although welcoming the statement by Commissioner Thyssen on the need *‘to focus on those that have been left behind in the crisis’*, the Semester Alliance fails to see how this is being translated in the CSRs. The focus on fewer, key priorities has meant that this year only six countries have received CSRs related to poverty and social exclusion compared to 12 last year. Even the so-called ‘poverty recommendations’ predominantly focus on activation and education, and fail to directly address poverty as a priority, investing in integrated approaches which promote access to accessible, affordable and quality services, as well as adequate social protection and quality jobs.

CSRs that refer to reforming pension systems fail to acknowledge the gender pension gap which currently stands at 39% in the EU. Neither do they address the obstacles workers with broken careers face to build their pension rights – as nowadays the vast majority of workers cannot achieve a full career and will not be able to claim a full pension when they will retire. The overwhelming focus continues to be on reducing deficits by cutting public finances in key areas like pensions, healthcare and social benefits. This approach will continue to have huge negative impacts on the lives of women and men across Europe. Such measures along with a de-regulatory approach to labour markets are contrary to the creation of quality jobs which will severely impact on in-work poverty, bringing Europe further off-track to meet its 2020 Strategy objectives.

Furthermore, recommendations aimed at tackling climate change through greener taxation and increased investment in energy efficiency and renewables have almost entirely disappeared from the CSRs, to be *‘taken up via other policy processes’* whose objectives and governance are yet to be defined. This marks a step backwards, one that is particularly disappointing in the year of crunch climate change talks in Paris.

The EU Alliance for a Democratic, Social and Sustainable European Semester (or EU Semester Alliance) is a broad coalition bringing together 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 Alliance aims to support progress towards a democratic, social and sustainable Europe 2020 Strategy, through strengthening civil dialogue engagement in the European Semester at national and EU levels.

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!

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The EU Semester Alliance is coordinated by the European Anti-Poverty Network

Whilst the new CSRs claim to focus more on investment, Europe must be clear where the investment is most needed: in people, and not just markets. Although the 2015 Annual Growth Survey recognised the collapse in public investment since the crisis but, with the exception of carefully-worded recommendation for Germany, there is nothing in this year's CSRs that will begin to restore the billions of euros of lost public investment. The austerity led focus with an overemphasis on structural reform has resulted in decreasing public investments and services and in increasing inequalities all of which damage social cohesion. The Semester Alliance refutes terms such as *social fairness* which undermines a rights based approach towards a more equal Europe.

The Semester Alliance demands answers as to whether the Mid-Term Review, now postponed to 2016, will put the Europe 2020 Strategy back on track and emphasises that the CSRs should be consistent with these objectives.

The involvement of civil-society and trade union stakeholders, as well as the European and national parliaments, in the process is urgently needed to safeguard democracy and ensure progress towards a social, sustainable and equal European Union.

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The Semester Alliance



The *EU Alliance for a democratic, social and sustainable European Semester* or (*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 EU Alliance members include:

- Age Platform Europe
- Caritas Europa
- Housing Europe
- Eurochild
- Eurodiaconia
- European Anti-Poverty Network (EAPN)
- European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD)
- European Confederation of Independent Trade Unions (CESI)
- 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 Women's Lobby (EWL)
- Green Budget Europe
- Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM)

Supported by:

- European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)
- Social Platform

The National Pilots:

- Bulgaria
- Denmark
- Ireland

The Alliance – A voice to be heard and followed

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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!

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