



To the  
Presidency of the European Union  
Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel  
Willy-Brandt-Straße 1  
10557 Berlin

Brussels, 7 March 2007

**Spring European Council 2007:**

***“I hear the message well but my faith alone is weak.”***  
**European churches and diaconal organisations ask EU Member States  
to deliver on their promises to combat poverty and social exclusion.**

Dear Chancellor Merkel,

In 2005 we addressed the European Spring Council and asked for *“a balanced and mutually supportive interaction between the economic, social and environmental policies of the Lisbon Strategy”*. We were glad to see that the Council at this time shared the concerns of churches and diaconal organisations.

The EPSCO Council key messages from 22 February point out again *“that the objectives of strengthening competitiveness, increasing employment and improving social cohesion are equally important, interlinked and mutually supportive”* and that the common social objectives of the Member States should be taken into account within the Lisbon Strategy *“in order to make a decisive impact on social exclusion and poverty”*. We strongly support the EPSCO recommendation to give priority to fighting child poverty and giving children equal opportunities and to promote active inclusion policies.

**A “Plan D” for the Lisbon Strategy:**

**Delivery**

*“Die Botschaft hör’ ich wohl, allein mir fehlt der Glaube.” - “I hear the message well but my faith alone is weak” (J.W. Goethe.)* European Churches and diaconal organisations are disappointed at the lack of progress in the fields of social protection and social inclusion. Child poverty is one example where political declarations have made little impact. In March 2006, the European Council asked the Member States *“to take necessary measures to rapidly and significantly reduce child poverty, giving all children equal opportunities, regardless of their social background”* (Par. 72). But the evaluation of the National Action Plans on Social Inclusion and the analysis of the Joint Social Protection and Social Inclusion Report 2007 clearly show that in a number of Member States this commitment did not have any relevant impact on national policies. A concrete example: Despite the commitments of Member States to the International

Convention on the Rights of the Child, undocumented children, or children with no permanent residence, or in asylum procedures, are often excluded from schooling.

### **Democracy**

Improving democratic participation in EU processes is important for the future of Europe as the EU tries to regain its peoples' trust. We would therefore ask the EU Member States to make the Lisbon Agenda more transparent and allow a better participation in the process, for example by increasing the involvement of the national parliaments. We encourage the EU Member States to increase the participation of civil society in the development and implementation of its policies. Synergy effects do not only exist in "public-private partnerships", but also in the active involvement of civil society via non-profit organisations like churches and diaconal organisations.

We welcome the intentions of the German Presidency for a close cooperation with civil society, which may set a good example. We appreciate the initiative of the German presidency for a European Alliance for Families and we are ready to participate in the implementation of this initiative.

### **re-Distribution**

Churches and diaconal organisations are concerned about the growing gap between the rich and the poor in European societies, the segmentation of the labour markets with more and more precarious employment situations and the growing marginalisation of specific groups like less skilled people or people with disabilities, ethnic minorities and people with a migration background.

The practice of solidarity is not only an essential element of Christian faith, but also a precondition for a socially cohesive society for all and as such is an important pillar of the European social model. We would therefore ask you once again to strengthen the social dimension in the implementation of the Lisbon Strategy by including concrete guidelines on social inclusion.

### **Dignity**

We welcome the EU's concern in strengthening people's capacities and promoting "lifelong learning", but the understanding of "human capital" is much too narrow, if people are regarded only as productive factors. Work and social inclusion are fundamental rights of the people in the European Union. The right to work, to realise one's own potential is an element of human dignity.

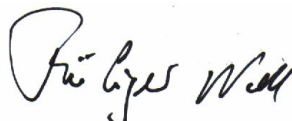
50 years after the commitment of the Member States "*to ensure the economic and social progress of their countries by common action*" (Treaty establishing the European Economic Community), we ask the Member States to commit themselves to concrete "common actions" combating poverty and social exclusion and to deliver on their promises.

We thank you for this opportunity to address our concerns to you for your consideration.

We remain, yours sincerely,



Heidi Paakjaer Martinussen  
Secretary General  
Eurodiaconia



Rev. Rüdiger Noll  
Director  
Church and Society Commission  
of the Conference of European Churches

**The Church and Society Commission (CSC)** is one of the commissions of the Conference of European Churches (CEC). The CSC links CEC's some 125 member churches from all over Europe and its associated organisations with the European Union's institutions, the Council of Europe, the OSCE, NATO and the UN (on European matters). Its task is to help the churches study church and society questions from a theological social-ethical perspective, especially those with a European dimension, and to represent common positions of the member churches in their relations with political institutions working in Europe.

**Eurodiaconia** is a federation of 43 members - churches, non-statutory welfare organisations and NGOs in Europe - operating at national and international level. Our members are rooted in Christian faith within the traditions of the Reformation as well as in the Anglican and Orthodox traditions. We network diaconal and social work of institutions and church communities and co-operate with civil society partners. Our Mission: We link our members to serve for solidarity and justice. Our strategic aims are to ensure quality of life for all in a social Europe, to link institutions of diaconia, social initiatives and churches in Europe, to be and to enhance a network of competence.

European churches and diaconal organisations provide a wide range of social, healthcare and educational services all over Europe for young and old, physically and mentally disabled and engage more than half a million professionals and volunteers in their hospitals, institutions and projects. Eurodiaconia and the Church and Society Commission of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) have a joint Social Policy working group.

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European Commission  
European Parliament