

EUROPEAN COMMISSION

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*Statement by László Andor, Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion to the participants of the Symposium 'Social gaps- social bridges, European Community media as mediators', 25-26 June 2012, Kassel*

Ladies and gentlemen,

I regret not being able to participate in your symposium on "social gaps and social bridges" to present to you the inclusive growth dimension of the Europe 2020 strategy.

This written statement will therefore replace my intervention.

Europe has experienced a financial and economic crisis in the last five years. Anomalies of the financial sector caused the deepest post war recession in Europe and also gave rise to a sovereign debt crisis.

All this is having an impact on the physical and mental wellbeing of individuals and families, on children and old people, and on society as a whole.

The figures for the European Union speak for themselves. Around 24.7 million are without work across the EU — nearly two million more than a year ago.

The rates for unemployed young people — those under 25 — are even more worrying. In April this year they averaged over 22% both for the EU and for the euro area, ranging from 7.9% in Germany to 51.5% in Spain and 52.7% in Greece.

Meanwhile, almost one in every four people in the EU are at risk of poverty or social exclusion — though there is great diversity across the Union. The social consequences of the crisis are particularly severe in the more peripheral Member States and regions.

It is hardly surprising, therefore, that eight out of 10 respondents in a *Eurobarometer* survey last December felt that poverty had increased over the previous 12 months. And over one in every three expected the situation of their households would deteriorate over the next 12 months.

Indebtedness, long term unemployment and growing social exclusion lead to perceptions of unfairness and risk increasing social tensions which find often an expression in voting for extreme parties. That is why a robust and systematic solution to the financial crisis cannot be delayed further. The EU must find the way to restore the growth potential of all its Member States and regions.

It is also needed more than ever before to address the social consequences of the crisis and promote inclusive growth with less inequalities and strongly based upon anti-discrimination and solidarity.

What this means is that decision makers at the local, national and European level should make more efforts to achieve those targets which the EU has set itself for increasing employment rates to 75% and reducing the number of those at risk of poverty by 20 million by 2020.

Yet the signs are that some Member States lack the determination to set high national targets and meet them. As things stand, current commitments indicate that both the employment and poverty-reduction targets will be missed.

On 30 May 2012 the Commission issued its draft Country-Specific Recommendations as part of the Europe 2020 process. I would strongly invite you to consult those that concern the community your media is covering<sup>1</sup>.

The recommendations focus in particular on employment among young people, skills, women's participation in the labour market and the need to extend working life.

They also state that reducing poverty, social exclusion and inequality calls for a comprehensive strategy to ensure that income support is adequate, the labour market is inclusive and people have access to quality services — the main ones being healthcare, childcare and housing.

A specific attention is moreover paid to the adequacy and sustainability of our pension systems.

We need to build further a cohesive society where everyone is able to contribute fully to prosperity and benefit from it. A well-functioning and buoyant society, which invests in its human capital, is essential to sustain economic growth, to

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<sup>1</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/making-it-happen/country-specific-recommendations/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/europe2020/making-it-happen/country-specific-recommendations/index_en.htm)

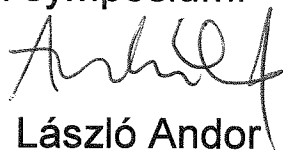
support labour market participation, and to combat social exclusion.

But this is also a sound financial investment: tackling social problems now reduces the bill for social dysfunctions that our economies and societies would otherwise have to pay at a later stage.

More than ever, a crucial role is played by civil society organisations and the community media, voicing the concerns of the most vulnerable and supporting them in their struggle for decent working and living conditions. Without them, there would be more undiscovered injustice, more hidden discrimination and more ignorance of inequality.

It is our task as politicians at all levels to listen to concerns of your audiences and to react to meet our fellow citizens' expectations. Community media plays in this regard a key role as an intermediary between the politics and the citizens, providing accurate and balanced reporting.

I wish you a successful symposium.



László Andor

Commissioner for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion