

AMSTERDAM DECLARATION ON THE SOCIAL QUALITY OF EUROPE



A decent respect for the fundamental dignity of all citizens requires us to affirm that we do not want to see growing numbers of beggars, tramps and homeless in the cities in Europe. Nor do we like a Europe with large numbers of unemployed, growing numbers of poor people and more citizens with limited access to health care and social services. These and many other negative indicators reveal the present inadequacy of Europe in providing social quality for its citizens.

We want, in contrast, a society for European citizens that is economically successful, but at the same time just and participative. This would be a Europe with social quality. Citizens would be able and required to participate in the social and economic life of their communities under conditions which enhance their well-being, their individual potential and the welfare of their communities. In order to be enabled to participate, citizens need to have access to an accepted level of economic security and social inclusion, to live in cohesive communities and to be empowered to develop their utmost skills. In other words, social quality depends on the extent of economic, social and political citizenship enjoyed by the people of Europe. In a globalized economy, competitiveness should go hand in hand with the promotion of social cohesion and the realisation of each European citizen's full potential.

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Social quality requires the following basic conditions:

- ☆ security and protection from violence and ecological threats;
- ☆ decent housing, heating, clothing and food for all;
- ☆ access to health care and other social services for all in need of them;
- ☆ the opportunity to organise one's personal life in conformity with one's own preferences, including the possibility to constitute a common household, to raise one's own children as well as to have sufficient time to be together with family and friends;
- ☆ sufficient work for all, work being not only employment in the labour market but also other non-paid activities upon which society depends. All workers should have an income that allows them to fully participate in society;
- ☆ a decent income for all who cannot work or who by reason of age or ill health are not required to work;
- ☆ the opportunity for all young, elderly disabled, ethnic minorities and immigrant persons to fully integrate into the society and communities they live in;
- ☆ access to social protection systems which enable citizens to keep up with, in solidarity, the standard of living in case of social contingencies. These social protection systems should focus first on the prevention of social risks, and only then address their restitution and, finally, their financial compensation;
- ☆ a lifelong access to education and training opportunities for all;
- ☆ an equitable tax system;
- ☆ in relation to all the above mentioned aspects, the prohibition of discrimination on the basis of gender, age, marital status, sexual orientation, race, religion, political or other beliefs and nationality.

These aspects of social quality must be realised through the recognition of enforceable fundamental rights that are legally binding for all legislators, administrations and judiciaries. These rights find their limits where the corresponding rights of others begin.

Social quality in Europe requires that European citizens can rely upon a clear and effective distribution of competencies between the Union, the Member States, the Regions and Local Authorities.

- ☆ *European citizens have a right to know who is politically answerable so that, where required, they can question inappropriate policies;*
- ☆ *Strengthening the democratic quality of political decision-making at all levels goes hand in hand with guaranteeing in this process the input of the respective societal organisations and movements concerned;*
- ☆ *A globalized economy requires full awareness in Europe of its global social responsibility for the weakest.*

The European Union is urged:

- ☆ *to make all major European policies subject to a social cohesion impact study;*
- ☆ *to set up a programme that emphasises the cost of not having a Social Europe and creates uniform statistical series on social aspects relating to the whole of the European Union;*
- ☆ *to express clear benchmarks by 2010 social objective and figures the EU legal documents (including recommendations) that have been adopted so far with respect to social aspects and to report regularly on the degree to which these benchmarks have been reached;*
- ☆ *to set a new agenda for the promotion of social quality in Europe, one which engages policy makers, scientists and citizens.*

In our capacity as responsible European citizens we therefore solemnly declare that the European Union should urgently give priority to its social quality; otherwise it will not be the Union we support. Social quality may be the result of a variety of approaches, reflecting the diversity of the nations and peoples of our European Union. Supporting, guaranteeing and maintaining social quality shall, however, be a constituent element in the making of Europe. The European Union is therefore urged to demonstrate its determination to complement, at Union level, the European social model of its Member States and to protect and adjust it to meet the challenges of the next millennium. Social quality and the European model which underpins it are essential to the creation of an inclusive Europe, a Europe for all citizens.

Amsterdam, 10 June 1997

