



# European Region Newsletter December 2006 No 4

## MESSAGE FROM THE PRESIDENT

*by Hans van Ewijk*  
President ICSW Europe

### **Christmas and New Year: looking back and ahead**

Every year Christmas and New Year nearly coincide. Christmas to me means time for some melancholy and contemplation. New Year, if I survived New Year's Eve, is full of promise and challenge. I hope all of us will have an inspiring and reflective Christmas and a sparkling 2007. Maybe your thoughts are wandering for a moment to ICSW, to our shared belief in social justice, our efforts to raise the professional quality of services and professionals, our support to social development – and to the ICSW friends you made in all those years.

### **Looking back**

ICSW Europe had quite an active year, particularly in autumn. Last week I attended the Colloque Européen on Discrimination in Paris, organised by the French National Committee (CNAS). Dirk Jarré summarised in an excellent way the outcomes of the Colloque, relating the discrimination discourse to 'our' Social Europe model. If the quality of this meeting

foreshadows the 2008 Global ICSW Conference at Tours, we may expect a great 80th Anniversary of ICSW. A few weeks earlier I welcomed the audience at the Austrian Conference celebrating the 50th anniversary of Öksa, the Austrian National Committee. The conference looked at "Vision and Reality and Social Cohesion in Europe". ICSW member Josef Weidenholzer inspired me with his analysis of Social Europe compared with 'Social' United States. Both Öksa and CNAS are in a process of revitalisation and relate international social policy to national and local social welfare.

On the 4th of December our Committee on Social Cohesion had its first meeting and they developed plans and actions for the coming years. Unfortunately the Committee on Migration and Integration had to postpone its first meeting in Jerusalem, due to the tensions between Israel and the Hezbollah.

I am grateful to our ICSW delegates in European bodies like the Council of Europe, the Social Platform, EAPN and the European Centre in Vienna. They have been active in informing ICSW about their actions and consulting us on several issues.

But ICSW still lacks members in many countries and some of our current members have real difficulties in fulfilling their financial obligations. We have to look for new ways to keep our members and to gain new members despite the

financial barriers. The need to work together, to stand together for a social Europe, for social welfare and social development is as pressing as ever.

### Looking ahead

This year I had three meetings with the presidents of EASSW, FESET, IFSW, FICE and AIEJI, representing about 300 faculties of social work, ten thousands of social workers and social educators and our ICSW network. Together we cover nearly all European countries and all six organisations have a drive to give a voice to professionals and social services, to stand for social quality and to promote social justice. A joint conference is foreseen in 2009. I expect that we will strengthen this cooperation in the years to come.

Another positive result has been achieved by our global president Solveig Askjem, Denys Correll and the Norway government and ICSW committee in supporting the Black Sea group of civil society platforms, among which are networks from Russia, Bulgaria, Rumania, Greece and Turkey. They have created a Black Sea group and we hope they will join ICSW Europe collectively. We would be delighted if they do so.

One more encouraging development is the North-South project that is developing between ICSW members in Finland and Tanzania. We hope that this long-term co-operation will be an example for other European ICSW members and that more North-South activities will start in the years to come.

Next year we are looking forward to a busy year: the Vilnius Conference on Equal Opportunities for All, which will focus on equal opportunities for individuals, groups and nations, the expert meeting on Migration in Jerusalem, a possible conference on Social Europe in Madrid, a meeting on Single Parent Families in Paris – and other activities to expect. I hope all these activities and events will continue to inspire and drive us to stand for ICSW, its aims and activities.

Hans van Ewijk

## Expert committee meeting on social NGOs

### ICSW aims to put social issues on the public agenda

The expert committee on the role of Social NGOs met in Brussels on 4 December where experts from Austria, Finland, Germany, Netherlands and Spain discussed the central theme: how can social NGOs safeguard and reinforce the public discourse about the social dimension of Europe? ICSW and its member organisations in Europe have a role to play in this respect. How can we facilitate this role and take into account the diversity of roles and positions of NGOs in our member countries?

It is a responsibility of ICSW and its members to let the grassroots voice be heard at national and European levels. Not only the social dialogue, but also the civil dialogue should be part of the governance framework. In a period when responsibilities are changing and devolving from national to local levels, ICSW need to make sure that national strategies include a social dimension, even if the implementation of social policies takes place at local level. The responsibilities of social NGOs in this respect should be underlined and acknowledged by all players in the economic and social debate.

The field of social NGOs is wide and as yet undefined: it may include non-profit organisations, public organisations, informal groups and private organisations, and may be called by various names, for example the informal sector or civil society. The expert committee will search for good practices and present case studies from its European members. Europe is not just the European Union, although of course it forms a considerable part. The expert committee will also look at the work of the Council of Europe in this field. Their findings will be presented in a workshop during the ICSW Regional Conference in Vilnius in June 2007.

## Social Platform conference

### **ICSW – ESAN workshop on the political role of social NGOs**

Following the expert committee meeting, ICSW also participated in the Social Platform conference and presented a workshop together with the European Social Action Network. The full title of the workshop was The political role of social services providers in defining and negotiating social values. To develop a sound understanding, one has to acknowledge that social services providers are not “social” because they focus on human needs but because they present and put into practice specific political values and principles concerned with the way people are living together. They also contribute to and maintain the fabric of a democratic and cohesive society.

In other words, the majority of social services are not simply ‘multidimensional’ but also have multiple functions. The workshop discussed the need and possibility to develop a services concept that reflects on the diverse political roles and various relationships to citizens. In particular three roles of social services providers were discussed, all of which reflect their political responsibilities: Integration of services while maintaining political values; Innovating and modernising services while safeguarding social values; and Empowering people to voice their needs and concerns. The presentations from various countries and backgrounds confronted ideas and concepts and led to the demand for a redefinition of the role of social services providers – to become a watchdog with the possibilities to bark and, if necessary to bite, as it was put by a participant. The workshop, with participants from a variety of backgrounds and countries, met with a lot of interest and stimulated active participation.

As an outcome of the workshop, ICSW & ESAN presented the new social services provider, who should be a political player and thinker, demanding change if needs be and able to be ‘unreasonable’ about it. She should be value driven, pro-active both in lobbying and in taking initiative to promote social issues, able to debate profitability in economic and social inclusion terms, an interactive advocate for vulnerable groups, aggressive (‘bark & bite’) if needed, and able to empower citizens and users

to voice their own concerns in the debate at local level. The results of this workshop will also feed into the work of the ICSW expert committee mentioned above.

## Global Europe – Social Europe

### **Debate on the future of the European Social Model**

Parallel to the Social Platform Conference a policy dialogue also took place elsewhere in Brussels on 5 December, co-organised by the European Policy Centre and the Policy Network, two Brussels-based think tanks focused on developments in the European Union. High profile speakers, among whom José Manuel Barroso, Anthony Giddens and Peter Mandelson debated the need for solidarity and social cohesion in an increasingly global Europe. Former Director of the London School of Economics Anthony Giddens said Europe has reached the end of the era of the welfare state in its traditional form, and has to change to reflect the social changes Europe has undergone as a result of globalisation and demographic changes. He stated that in the past, welfare was ‘negative’, providing a safety net to protect the population from risk and scarcity. Today ‘positive welfare’ should emphasise incentives as well as benefits.

European Commission President Barroso emphasised that full employment was the greatest instrument for social cohesion and outlined the key issues that should be considered in the debate about access and opportunity in Europe: the lack of educational opportunities at all levels; the need to integrate migrants; continuing child poverty; the patchiness of child care; the strains of work; the pressure on family life; and the need to keep older people in the labour market.

Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson insisted that the EU cannot defend and advance the idea of an open Europe unless it is also a social Europe, although there is no consensus yet on the content of such a social Europe. He argued that the interconnections between economic openness, structural reform and social relations make it impossible for the EU to concentrate solely on trade and competitiveness while leaving social policy entirely to the Member

States. He insisted that the Commission must put social justice issues squarely on the EU agenda and called for more policy debate among politicians on the left in Europe about social Europe, so that it can play a more active and constructive role in constructing a modern social justice agenda for Europe.

The full report of the policy dialogue can be found on the website of the European Policy Centre: [www.epc.eu](http://www.epc.eu) (click Events Reports, then 'Global Europe – Social Europe')

## European Commission Work Programme 2007

### Solidarity

The European Commission has recently presented its work programme for 2007. Under the heading 'Solidarity' the Commission writes the following:

"Solidarity, environmental protection, sustain-able management and use of natural resources, and the health and well being of citizens go hand in hand with growth and jobs. With 2007 being the 'European Year of Equal Opportunities', Europeans will again be reminded of the social core at the heart of how Europe works."

In an annex to the work programme, the Commission provides a detailed overview of initiatives to be taken. The full work programme can be found at

[http://ec.europa.eu/atwork/programmes/docs/clwp2007\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/atwork/programmes/docs/clwp2007_en.pdf)

## Plan D - Period of reflection and communicating Europe

After the two negative referendums to the European Constitution in France and the Netherlands in 2005, the European Commission started its so-called Plan-D for democracy, dialogue and debate. The Commission tries to communicate Europe in a different way in order to make people understand what Europe stands for. Commissioners visit Member States,

seminars take place, a Eurobarometer survey on the "demand for Europe" was launched as well as "Debate Europe", an interactive website. Unfortunately neither the website nor the Commission's approach seem to be very successful yet.

Therefore the Social Platform asks for an open, structured and visible discussion process, clearly aimed at achieving agreement on the constitution and respecting the principles of participative democracy. Also, the constitutional process should take into account the needs and aspirations of people in the EU. ICSW questions the Commission's objective to communicate Europe from Brussels. Citizens experience Europe at the local level and communication about Europe should start from there.

## ICSW European Region Conference 14-16 June 2007 in Vilnius, Lithuania

### Equality for All: individuals, groups and nations

The European region of ICSW contributes to the European debate on social welfare, justice and equality and seeks to promote social welfare and active civil society participation. The European Commission proposes 2007 as the European Year of Equal Opportunities for All. This initiative is completely in line with the ICSW objectives of social justice and social equality.

ICSW therefore is pleased to announce an international conference for the European region to discuss equal opportunities for individuals, groups and nations. ICSW-European Region and Vilnius University, reacting to the EU initiative, organize this international conference in 2007. The conference targets the priorities of a just society that is based on solidarity. As a new member state of the European Union, Lithuania adds to the variety of Europe. The conference aims to increase mutual understanding in the continent by sharing the experiences of countries with diverse histories and cultures.

The policy of equal opportunities is not limited to abolition of discrimination. In addition, it

means support for equal and full participation of all. Equal opportunities cannot be granted by laws alone, when adequate economic and social conditions are missing, and when people lack community support. The conference will cover a wide range of topics: from gender equality to migration, from solidarity of the society to the roles of NGOs, within three major strands: equal opportunities for individuals, for groups and for nations. These three strands will be further explored in plenary sessions and in workshop sessions during the conference.

More information will be provided shortly on the conference page of the Vilnius University website:

[http://www.fsf.vu.lt/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=852&Itemid=1269](http://www.fsf.vu.lt/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=852&Itemid=1269)

## Publications

### European Centre Policy Briefs

The European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research in Vienna has produced a series of policy briefs on relevant issues. The full policy briefs can be found on the European Centre website [www.euro.centre.org](http://www.euro.centre.org)

*"Poverty of elderly People in EU25"*

[http://www.euro.centre.org/detail.php?xml\\_id=715](http://www.euro.centre.org/detail.php?xml_id=715), based on a project supported by the European Commission under the Community Action Programme to combat Social Exclusion.

The prevention of social exclusion and poverty of elderly people is one of the key objectives of the national policies. A well-designed set of integrated policies to reduce poverty among older people requires a concise statistical account of the current situation, and the first PB provides a concise description of poverty risks faced by the current populations of older people in the 25 member countries of the European Union. It sets out the base situation against which progress towards poverty reduction and social inclusion of the European older people will be monitored.

*"Pension Policy in EU25 and its Possible Impact on Elderly Poverty"*

[http://www.euro.centre.org/detail.php?xml\\_id=730](http://www.euro.centre.org/detail.php?xml_id=730)

This Policy Brief complements the first one. In view of recent reforms in pensions policy in EU25, it is vital that we evaluate the expected evolution of poverty among the elderly for coming decades. The second Policy Brief provides insights that will be useful to identify any policy responses that might be necessary (if feasible) in order to meet the objective of not only sustainability but also adequacy of pensions and in continuing to combat poverty among the elderly.

*" Transition from Work to Retirement in EU25"*

[http://www.euro.centre.org/detail.php?xml\\_id=811](http://www.euro.centre.org/detail.php?xml_id=811)

This Policy Brief was produced within the project "European Observatory on Social Situation", and it draws upon the empirical evidence from the EU.

Labour Force Survey with respect to the labour force participation among older workers. As policy implications, we argue the needs for a "flexible later retirement". Additional incentives are necessary to enable people not just to move between jobs in later working life but also to work part-time without losing their entitlement to benefit. Such policy incentives should encourage older workers to avoid the phenomenon of a "cliff-edge" fall from full-time work directly into retirement that many of them often face.

### **A Democratic Economic Policy Alternative to the Neo-liberal Transformation of Europe**

In today's uncertain and precarious environment, economic policy is challenged to provide a reliable framework for stable economic and social development, ecological stability and global solidarity – a challenge that has not been taken up by the EU according to the Euro Memorandum Group, a group of European economists for an Alternative Economic Policy. Their document, titled 'A Democratic Economic Policy Alternative to the Neo-liberal Transformation of Europe' calls for alternatives, such as an overall economic policy orientation which includes social welfare, and the development of general and specific social minimum standards, for overall social expenditures, education, health care etc., which should lead to a movement of upward convergence. The full text can be found at <http://www.memo-europe.uni-bremen.de/>

## **Welfare United – FC Internal Market: Fair Play**

The relations between the EU and its Member States in the field of welfare policy have changed considerably in recent years through the development of the internal market. The strengthening of the internal market and growing demands for competition affect the development of the national social protection systems of the Member States and limit their national powers.

*Welfare United-FC International Market: Fair Play* selects points of connection between the welfare policy and the internal market and analyses their impact on national policies and practices. It makes visible a new kind of relationship between the economic and the social, the relationship between the social protection and the market, and seeks a better balance between the two.

It was published by the Finnish Federation for Social Welfare and Health during the Finnish Presidency. For more information: [www.stkl.fi](http://www.stkl.fi)

## **Conferences**

### **Equality, diversity and inclusion: Challenges to the Nordic models in the global economy Oslo, February 15-16, 2007**

Celebrating its 25th anniversary, the Norwegian research institute Fafo invites to a conference in Oslo that addresses both the future of the Nordic labour and welfare regimes and the consequences of globalization on human security. The conference will illuminate and critically discuss the rapid and far-reaching transformations facing the Nordic welfare states. What challenges do these changes bring about and how can they be met to assure stability, renewal and equality. How can the Nordic countries contribute to making globalization work for all?

Information: <http://www.fafo.no/conference>

### **Governance and Local Social Policy Hamburg, March 2-3, 2007**

The conference is organized in the framework of the research project "The local restructuring of

long-term care for elderly people - cultural values, actors and conditions of action" of the German Research Foundation (DFG). The aim of the conference is to analyse and to explain local social policies and local governance structures in a comparative perspective. Theme 1: National and local social policy – a complex relationship. Theme 2: Local social policies in a comparative perspective. Theme 3: Local governance structures in a comparative perspective. Theme 4: Local governance and Social Capital Researchers who are interested in a poster session are invited to send a proposal with an abstract of no more than 500 words describing the contents of their proposal.

Proposals should be sent to: [ralf.och@uni-hamburg.de](mailto:ralf.och@uni-hamburg.de) and the deadline for the application is January 10, 2007.

## **Colophon**

The Newsletter of ICSW European Region is published quarterly. Material may be freely reproduced or cited provided the source is acknowledged. Contributions on social welfare from all sectors of the international community are welcome.

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