



Brussels, 18 June 2015

To

Heads of State and Government of the European Union
Prime Minister Laimdota Straujuma
President Donald Tusk
President Jean-Claude Juncker
First Vice President Frans Timmermans
Vice Presidents Valdis Dombrovskis and Jyrki Katainen
Commissioners Marianne Thyssen and Pierre Moscovici
President Martin Schulz

CSRs 2015 - the EU 2020 Strategy is further off-track to deliver an inclusive, sustainable, social and equal Europe

Dear Heads of State and Government of the European Union, Prime Minister Laimdota Straujuma, President Donald Tusk, President Jean-Claude Juncker, First Vice President Frans Timmermans, Vice Presidents Valdis Dombrovskis and Jyrki Katainen, Commissioners Marianne Thyssen and Pierre Moscovici, President Martin Schulz,

We as members of the **EU Alliance for a democratic, social and sustainable European Semester** are writing to you to voice concerns of EU citizens and their organisations at national and local levels.

With the endorsement of the 2015 Country-Specific Recommendations (CSRs), the EU fails to deliver an inclusive recovery strategy. Immediate action is needed to bring the Europe 2020 back on track with all its initial goals. In particular we urge you to embrace a comprehensive approach to promote economic growth that contributes to social justice and sustainable development. Combating poverty, creating quality jobs, ensuring adequate and sustainable social protection, including quality social support services, investing in early childhood education and care, enhancing equality for women and men at every stage of life, as well as ensuring environmental sustainability are all as important as boosting economic recovery.

However, the 2015 CSRs are driven by macroeconomic priorities resulting in inconsistent policy recommendations and an overly dominant focus on fiscal consolidation and competitiveness. Neither do the 2015 CSRs make a closer link between economic growth and the promotion of fundamental rights. EU is founded on the value of respect for human rights and is bound by its Treaties to protect the fundamental rights of all persons. This should be clearly reflected in the European Semester, clarifying the EU's commitment to ensure that Member States respect fundamental social rights when pursuing economic reforms.

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. The supposedly 'fair' structural reforms are failing to recognise that growth is not the only way to build an EU that is socially inclusive, democratic and green. They are in fact, contrary to a rights-based approach and result in decreasing public investments, increased inequalities, all of which damage social cohesion.

Steps are urgently needed to restore the balance between social and environmental objectives and to democratize and increase participation in 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.

Therefore, the Semester Alliance calls on you as key decision-makers to ensure 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 into practice 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, and even the so-called 'poverty recommendations' predominantly focus on narrow approaches to activation and education and fail to directly address poverty as a priority, i.e. investing in integrated approaches which address access to quality services and social protection as well as quality jobs.

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. It's hard to imagine a more retrograde step in the year of crunch climate change talks in Paris.

CSRs that refer to reforming pension systems fail to acknowledge the gender pension gap which currently stands at 39% in the EU. The overwhelming focus continues to be on limiting the impact of ageing on public finances by cutting further 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, in particular their ability to remain active, to age in good health and to contribute to Europe's future growth, as well as increasing poverty and hardship. Such measures along with a de-regulatory approach to labour markets are also 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.

The Semester Alliance asks the European Council to ensure that the Europe 2020 mid-term review, now postponed to 2016, will put the strategy back on track and that the CSRs are consistent with these objectives.

The meaningful involvement of civil-society and trade union stakeholder in a regular structured dialogue, 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.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Constanze Adolf', written in a cursive style.

Constanze Adolf, Green Budget Europe
on behalf of the Directors of the EU Alliance for a democratic, social and sustainable European Semester which includes 17 organisations listed below.

The Semester Alliance



The *EU Alliance for a democratic, social and sustainable European Semester* or (*Semester Alliance*) is a broad coalition bringing together 17 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 (GBE)
- Platform for International Cooperation on Undocumented Migrants (PICUM)

Supported by:

- European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC)
- Social Platform

The Alliance – A voice to be heard and followed

<http://semesteralliance.net>

[#semesteralliance](https://twitter.com/semesteralliance)

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!

Key messages for 2015 Country Specific Recommendations

1. Social and Sustainable Macroeconomic Policies

- Prioritise macroeconomic policies that support social, equality and environmental goals
- Invest in inclusive and sustainable growth
- Promote inclusive and sustainable tax policy

2. Fighting poverty and social exclusion

- Strengthen social investment and ensure universal access social protection systems across the life cycle
- Increase the ambition and scope of the targets, promoting a strategic approach
- Ensure affordable access to quality services – particularly Housing and addressing Homelessness, Health and Long-term Care
- Invest in children and youth, with integrated strategies for all at-risk groups

3. Quality Employment

- Ensure sustainable, quality employment across the life cycle
- Strengthen personalised, integrated Active Inclusion approaches not Activation alone

4. Promoting Inclusive Education

- Support comprehensive education and lifelong learning systems
- Increase Social Investment in early childhood and specialist support for ESL
- Ensure that vocational training responds to the labour market and the needs of each individual

5. Promoting Gender Equality

- Reduce the gender pay gap, with long-term national strategies and addressing gender segregation in education and work
- Close the gender pensions' gap, including promotion of work-life balance and shared parenting models
- Take specific measures to counter multiple discrimination of migrant women

6. Investing in resource efficiency and tackling climate change

- Shift the tax burden from labour to other tax bases, for example environmentally harmful activities, ensuring an ex-ante social and gender impact assessment on all proposals of sustainable and inclusive tax/subsidy and investment reform
- Reduce tax exemptions and environmentally harmful subsidies on fossil fuels
- Invest in decentralised energy production, renewable fuels and increased energy efficiency in housing and other buildings

7. Participative Governance

- Develop EU Guidelines, with Member States, to ensure debate in parliaments and meaningful structured dialogue with all relevant stakeholders at national and EU level
- Increase financial/logistical support for stakeholder engagement in the whole National Reform Programmes process as well as structured dialogue on the CSRs
- Consider requiring that Civil society stakeholders' contributions be annexed to the NRP report
- Ensure that stakeholder engagement in the NRP and European Semester is monitored by the European Commission (through the bilateral exchanges and the NRPs), with specific sections in their progress/implementation reports and recommendations to the Annual Growth Survey