

**RESOLUTION <sup>(1)</sup>****on combating poverty and social exclusion in the Eastern Partner countries**

(2013/C 338/04)

THE EURONEST PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY,

- having regard to the Joint Declaration of the Prague Eastern Partnership Summit of 7 May 2009,
- having regard to the Joint Declaration of the Warsaw Eastern Partnership Summit of 29-30 September 2011,
- having regard to the Constituent Act of the EURONEST Parliamentary Assembly of 3 May 2011,
- having regard to Articles 8 and 49 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU),
- having regard to the Treaty of Lisbon amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community, signed at Lisbon,
- having regard to the Commission Communication to Parliament and the Council of 3 December 2008 entitled 'Eastern Partnership' (COM(2008)0823),
- having regard to the Joint Communication of 25 May 2011 of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the Commission on 'A New Response to a Changing Neighbourhood',
- having regard to the Commission Communications of 5 December 2007 entitled 'A Strong European Neighbourhood Policy', of 4 December 2006 on 'Strengthening the ENP', of 12 May 2004 entitled 'European Neighbourhood Policy – Strategy Paper', and of 1 March 2003 entitled 'Wider Europe – Neighbourhood: A new framework for relations with our eastern and southern neighbours',
- having regard to the Joint Communication of 15 May 2012 of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the Commission on 'Eastern Partnership: A roadmap to the Autumn 2013 Summit',
- having regard to the Joint Communication of 15 May 2012 of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the Commission on 'Delivering on a New European Neighbourhood Policy' (JOIN(2012)14), to the accompanying joint staff working document on 'Implementation of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2011 Regional Report: Eastern partnership' and the 2011 country progress reports for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Ukraine, and the Republic of Moldova,
- having regard to the Joint Communication of 20 March 2013 of the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the European Commission entitled 'European Neighbourhood Policy: Working towards a stronger partnership',
- having regard to the ongoing bilateral negotiations for association agreements between the EU and Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and the Republic of Moldova, as well as to the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement signed between the EU and Belarus in 1995, which was, however, not ratified,
- having regard to the European Parliament's previous resolutions on the eastern dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy, as well as on Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine,

(1) As adopted at Brussels on 28 May 2013.

- having regard to the European Parliament's resolution of 7 April 2011 on the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy – Eastern Dimension <sup>(1)</sup>,
  - having regard to the European Parliament's resolution of 14 December 2011 on the review of the European Neighbourhood Policy <sup>(2)</sup>,
  - having regard to the European Parliament's resolution of 3 July 2012 on the trade aspects of the Eastern Partnership <sup>(3)</sup>,
  - having regard to the resolution of 3 April 2012 of the Euronest Parliamentary Assembly on strengthening of civil society in the Eastern Partnership countries, including the question of cooperation between government and civil society, and the question of the reforms aimed at the empowerment of civil society,
  - having regard to the United Nations Millennium Declaration of September 2000, and to the United Nations General Assembly resolution of 19 October 2010 entitled 'Keeping the Promise: Achieving the Millennium Development Goals',
  - having regard to the implementation of the 'European year for combating poverty and social exclusion' by the European Union in 2010,
  - having regard to its Rules of Procedure,
- A. whereas the term 'poverty' refers to a state of lack of income and of sufficient material resources to live in dignity, including inadequate access to basic services such as healthcare, housing, education and labour market exclusion; whereas the notion of social exclusion has a broader meaning and is often directly connected to poverty;
- B. whereas the Eastern Partnership, as a specific dimension of the European Neighbourhood Policy, was launched to support Eastern European partners in their endeavour to proceed with sustainable reforms, with a view to accelerating their political association and economic integration with the EU;
- C. whereas during the second Eastern Partnership Summit, held in Warsaw on 29-30 September 2011, the Heads of State and Government and representatives of Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine, and the representatives of the European Union renewed their commitments to the objectives and continued implementation of the Eastern Partnership;
- D. whereas the signing of the Association Agreements with the European Union, and especially of the deep and comprehensive free trade agreements (DCFTAs), would create new opportunities for entrepreneurs, international trade and market development;
- E. whereas the reconfiguration of public finances in post-Soviet countries, including Eastern Partner countries, in compliance with the principles of market economy, have resulted in dramatically reduced spending on health, education and other social programmes, leading to a sharp increase in poverty;
- F. whereas according to the Commission's 2011 country reports on Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine, several of these countries had more than 30 % of their population living below the national poverty line;
- G. whereas poverty and social exclusion have increased in Eastern Partner countries, among others, as a result of the global financial and economic crisis, and the most vulnerable groups, such as the elderly and people with disabilities, have been those most severely affected;
- H. whereas malnutrition remains largely under-recognised, under-detected and under-managed and is directly linked to the level of poverty and social exclusion in Eastern Partner countries;

<sup>(1)</sup> Texts adopted, P7\_TA(2011)0153.

<sup>(2)</sup> Texts adopted, P7\_TA(2011)0576.

<sup>(3)</sup> Texts adopted, P7\_TA(2012)0276.

- I. whereas malnutrition has long-lasting negative effects and impairs the healthy development and life-long productivity of individuals, particularly children, in whom it leads to learning and memory deficits, lower IQ and school achievement, and behavioural problems in childhood and adolescence;
- J. whereas severe poverty may lead to a serious erosion of human dignity, marginalisation, discrimination and violation of human rights in non-democratic countries;
- K. whereas child poverty may lead to both marginalisation and exclusion, and has negative implications as regards subsequent integration into the labour market and social life;
- L. whereas the population of the Eastern Partner countries is ageing, and the retirement of the 'baby boom' generation represents a major challenge for the efficiency of reforms, as well as for economic stability and growth;
- M. whereas, although each Eastern Partner has a different approach to combating poverty and social exclusion, continuous reforms must be adopted in order to keep them competitive, to create jobs and to fight poverty;
- N. whereas the Eastern Partnership should be based on further economic integration between the EU and its partners, and on supporting trade and investment liberalisation in the Eastern Partner countries, with the objective of establishing a network of deep and comprehensive free trade areas;
- O. whereas cooperation within the Eastern Partnership aims to bring about positive effects by serving as a platform for exchanging views, finding common positions on the global challenges of our times, including the economy, trade, combating poverty and social exclusion, and strengthening ties between the countries of the region and the EU, as well as among the Eastern Partner countries themselves;
- P. whereas promoting trade, access to the labour market, medical care and basic social services is indispensable for poverty reduction;
- Q. whereas social services, and in particular access to services for the care of children, the elderly and other dependants, are essential for the equal participation of women and men in the labour market, education and training;
- R. whereas more peaceful, secure, stable and non-conflicted regions would foster sustainable economic and social development of the countries concerned, eliminate obstacles to regional cooperation and create opportunities to combat poverty and social exclusion in the Eastern Partner countries;
- S. whereas the new European Neighbourhood Policy aims to support inclusive economic development so that EU neighbours can trade, invest and grow their economies in a sustainable way, while reducing social and regional inequalities and poverty, creating jobs for their population and delivering higher standards of living;

#### **A political commitment to reducing poverty**

1. encourages every Eastern Partner country to consider setting explicit and ambitious targets on poverty reduction;
2. calls on every Eastern Partner country to ensure that necessary budgetary or alternative resources are allocated to combating poverty and social exclusion, while making access to those resources easier for the relevant stakeholders; calls on the EU Member States to ensure the necessary resources are made available in the next multiannual financial framework for the period 2014-2020 to fund EU External Action, and especially the Eastern Partnership programmes;

3. encourages all Eastern Partner countries to make full use of financial instruments to support social and territorial cohesion, with a particular focus on combating urban and rural poverty;
4. underlines the need to promote gender equality and economic independence of women, with a particular emphasis on the higher risk of poverty for older women, taking into account that the gender pay gap and, consequently, the gender pension gap are still one of the main reasons why women find themselves below the poverty line at a later stage in their lives, as do single parents, women with disabilities and women from ethnic minorities;
5. stresses that the future economic competitiveness and prosperity of the Eastern Partner countries depend crucially on their ability to fully utilise their labour resources, which includes increased participation of women in the labour market;
6. stresses the importance of combating poverty among disabled people by providing them with equal access to the labour market, by removing obstacles to the full exercise of their rights, by developing services which are responsive to their needs, and by providing them with equal access to modernised medical care;
7. calls on the Eastern Partner countries to commit fully to the eradication of malnutrition, which has far-reaching consequences for health and increases the burden and cost of care for individuals and society;
8. calls on the European Union to encourage Eastern Partner countries to address child malnutrition and actively reduce levels of stunting and wasting in children under the age of five by creating public-private partnerships combined with corporate social responsibility; stresses that such approaches, as supported by the Commission Communication of 12 March 2013, entitled 'Enhancing Maternal and Child Nutrition in External Assistance: an EU policy framework', not only deliver direct societal and economic benefits but also have a long-term impact on health costs;

#### **Fighting poverty through economic development, trade and regional integration**

9. highlights the fact that trade is one of the most efficient ways to foster economic growth, as well as being a key aspect for sustainable development and for the improvement of economic and social conditions in Eastern Partner countries;
10. acknowledges the importance of economic development, of trade facilitation and of the integration of the Eastern Partner countries into the world economy in terms of combating poverty and social exclusion; points out that countries integrated into free trade have enjoyed high economic growth and an improvement in their poverty indicators;
11. encourages regional integration among Eastern Partner countries through the development of their regional market via the negotiation and implementation of regional agreements, as well as of bilateral agreements with the European Union;
12. underlines the importance of negotiations on the Association Agreements, including DCFTAs, as an essential tool for stimulating trade liberalisation and eliminating trade barriers in the Eastern Partner countries, and therefore for fighting poverty in an effective and sustainable way;
13. calls on every Eastern Partner country to include trade in its development strategies, given that it is a strong economic factor which contributes to the reduction of poverty through support for regional integration and cooperation and effective economic governance, as well as through human capital development, the promotion of core labour standards, and better market access (particularly for people in rural areas);
14. points out that the removal of trade barriers, combined with domestic reforms, would significantly contribute to sustainable economic development and to the fight against poverty and social exclusion; underlines that the power of regional integration is enhanced when cooperation goes beyond borders and is extended to deeper integration into the world economy;

15. welcomes the commitment of most Eastern Partner countries to World Trade Organization (WTO) agreements as an anchor for credible domestic trade-related policies and as an incentive for an improved regulatory and institutional trade environment;
16. calls on the European Union and the European External Action Service (EEAS) to support Eastern Partner countries in their efforts to reform and increase trade capacity with additional technical and financial assistance, and calls on the Commission to consider how these objectives can be achieved;
17. emphasises that the nature of trade policy reforms should reflect the specific conditions in each Eastern Partner country and should come as a result of national dialogue involving government, the private sector and labour and civil society representatives, and should accompany macroeconomic and institutional reforms that foster growth and promote human development;
18. supports the development of cross-sectoral approaches that enable action in several related policy fields, such as employment, education, health, youth, housing and social protection;

#### **Fighting poverty through employment, social services, education and training**

19. points out that the fight against poverty and social exclusion needs to rely on growth and employment, as well as on a modern and effective social protection policy; points out that Eurofound Quality of Life Surveys <sup>(1)</sup> have confirmed that one of the most important ways of enhancing the quality of life of a population, ensuring full integration in society, and providing for social and territorial cohesion is the provision and development of social services;
20. considers that social services encompass statutory and complementary social security schemes and universally available services provided directly to the person, aiming to enhance the quality of life of all; they play a role in prevention, social cohesion and inclusion, and deliver on fundamental rights;
21. urges the Eastern Partner countries to promote the availability of accessible, affordable, high-quality social services, and to guarantee non-discriminatory access to these services, regardless of gender, income, race or ethnic origin, religion or beliefs, disability, age, sexual orientation or employment conditions;
22. considers unemployment to be one of the main causes of poverty for the working-age population of the Eastern Partner countries, and therefore stresses that any relevant policy should focus primarily on sustainable job creation; underlines the need to provide people with adequate education, training and skills to enable them to acquire competitive jobs;
23. stresses that promoting parent employment is a key factor in tackling child poverty, as poverty is often 'inherited'; encourages the adoption of measures to provide parents with better access to training and special qualifications, to support parents in entering the labour market or re-entering after a career break, and to provide them with flexible working time and leave conditions;
24. calls on governments to support the income of households with children through tax allowances, child allowances, cash benefits, education, child care, and housing benefits for families with specific needs (multiple children, children with disabilities, single parents, foster families); calls on the EU to promote labour and social standards in its relations with partners;
25. calls for youth poverty and social exclusion to be combated by improving education services, especially in deprived areas, and modernising the infrastructure for pre-school and school education, as well as through informal learning and participation methods;

<sup>(1)</sup> Eurofound - Quality of Life Surveys <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/publications/htmlfiles/ef09108.htm>

26. calls on the EU to launch and further develop student, as well as teaching staff, exchange and vocational training programmes by increasing synergies between universities, training institutions, youth organisations and enterprises; stresses the importance of adapting skills to the labour market, thus allowing the transition to a smart, sustainable and inclusive economy; underlines the necessity to increase the capacity of young people to find a job in the field of their interest, as well as to raise their awareness on human rights, gender policy, and protection of children and disabled people;
27. points out that tackling the specific barriers faced by young women in finding a job must be central to the progressive approach to youth unemployment; calls on the Eastern Partner countries to focus on strategies that combine education and training policies with targeted employment policies for young women;
28. emphasises that further visa facilitation and mobility programmes will give young people in the Eastern Partner countries a better chance of obtaining education abroad and exchange experiences; calls on the Commission to assist Eastern Partner countries technically and financially in the approximation of higher education degrees and standards to the European Higher Education Area;
29. calls on the European Union to encourage Eastern Partner countries to provide opportunities for training, internships and apprenticeships for young people during their educational career, which will enhance their employability by increasing their working experience; calls on the governments of Eastern Partner countries to strengthen at legislative level the economic mechanisms aimed at encouraging employers to offer first jobs to graduates, as well as training and internship opportunities to pupils and students of vocational schools and higher education institutes;

#### **Fighting poverty through the facilitation of SME development**

30. stresses that the most fundamental measure in reducing youth poverty is fostering youth employment and the creation of new jobs by upgrading the quality of the business environment for SMEs; considers the development of entrepreneurship knowledge and skills to be a keystone of well designed and well implemented national strategies;
31. points out that entrepreneurship among women represents a valuable source of economic growth and job creation; calls, therefore, on the Eastern Partner countries to promote entrepreneurship among women, as well as access to finance, and greater availability of mentorship schemes, training and education programmes;
32. calls on Eastern Partner countries to remove the barriers to SME development, including distorted and unfair competition and monopolies, to combat the corruption of authorities in charge of SME registration, taxation, sanitation, cadastre, customs and other controlling bodies, and to facilitate the process of obtaining bank credit, which is often hampered by particularly high interest rates and complicated procedures;
33. underlines the fact that regional integration, which is one of the key elements for boosting trade, also provides incentives for sound policies in such areas as standards, intellectual property protection and social protection; stresses that trade capacity needs to be improved through other trade-related development assistance, including sectoral and tax policies that improve the investment climate, as well as through appropriate support for private sector development, particularly for small and medium entrepreneurship; expresses support for the development of regional markets and institutions among Eastern Partner countries, particularly via the negotiation, conclusion and implementation of bilateral and regional agreements with the EU;

#### **Pension systems**

34. considers that the modernisation of pension systems should feature high on the poverty reduction agenda of Eastern Partner countries; emphasises the need to safeguard the capacity of pensions to provide safe and adequate incomes for retired pensioners; stresses that the modernisation of pension systems should respond to the changing needs of society and the labour market;

35. points out that national policy-makers in Eastern Partner countries remain responsible for pension systems; suggests that pension systems should effectively prevent poverty and social exclusion among pensioners by providing a decent standard of living in retirement;
36. considers that pension systems must be reviewed in order to be financially sustainable and consistent with retirement schemes and tax benefits;

#### **Healthcare**

37. acknowledges that the development of healthcare systems plays a crucial role in combating poverty and social exclusion;
  38. insists on lowering the risk of health-related poverty through a high-quality health care system that is both accessible and financially sustainable, taking into account the needs and difficulties of the most disadvantaged groups and individuals;
  39. expresses concern that malnutrition is not recognised by the general public as a significant public health risk; underlines the fact that malnutrition needs to be tackled at every level, by governments, by health and social care providers, by professionals and by individuals themselves;
  40. calls on Eastern Partner countries to put in place the necessary mechanisms, policies and programmes in order to ensure that the prevention and management of malnutrition is thoroughly embedded in all clinical and care settings;
  41. calls on the Eastern Partner countries to increase efforts for the prevention of sexually transmitted diseases and to promote prevention programmes; recalls that vaccination against hepatitis B has proved very successful and has reduced the rate of chronic infection to less than 1 % among immunised children worldwide; points out that contracting HIV often results in social exclusion; urges, therefore, the governments of the countries concerned to develop active policies for the prevention and treatment of HIV, as well as information campaigns on transmission and prevention behaviour;
  42. instructs its Co-Presidents to forward this resolution to the President of the European Parliament, to the Council, the Commission, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy/Vice-President of the Commission, the EEAS, the governments and parliaments of the Member States and those of the Eastern Partner countries.
-