

# Amsterdam Declaration on Social Quality

Amsterdam, June 10, 1997

Respect for the fundamental human dignity of all citizens requires us to declare that we do not want to see growing numbers of beggars, tramps and homeless in the cities of Europe. Nor can we countenance a Europe with large numbers of unemployed, growing numbers of poor people and those who have only limited access to health care and social services. These and many other negative indicators demonstrate the current inadequacy of Europe to provide social quality for all its citizens.



We want, in contrast, a European society that is economically successful, but which, at the same time, promotes social justice and participation for its citizens. This would be a Europe in which social quality is paramount. Its citizens would be able and required to participate in the social and economic life of their communities and to do so under conditions which enhance their well-being, their individual potential and the welfare

of their communities. To be able to participate, citizens must have access to an acceptable level of economic security and of social inclusion, live in cohesive communities, and be empowered to develop their full potential. In other words, social quality depends on the extent to which economic, social and political citizenship is enjoyed by all residents of Europe. In a globalized economy competitiveness should go hand in hand with the promotion of social cohesion and the realisation of the full potential of each European citizen. 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 who are in need of them;
- the opportunity to organise one's personal life in conformity with one's preferences, including the possibility to set up a common household and to raise children as well as to spend sufficient time with family and friends;
- sufficient work for all, including not only employment in the labour market but also other non-paid activities upon which society depends;
- an income for all workers that allows them to fully participate in society;
- a decent income for all who cannot work or who, because of age or ill health, cannot be required to work;
- the opportunity for all young, older, and disabled people, people belonging to an ethnic minority, and immigrants to fully integrate into the society and local communities they live in;

- access to social protection systems which enable citizens to maintain, in solidarity, their 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 cure and, finally, their financial compensation;
- a lifelong access to education and training opportunities for all;
- an equitable tax system;
- the elimination of discrimination on the basis of nationality, age, gender, race, religion, political or other beliefs, marital status, and sexual orientation.

These aspects of social quality must be realised through the recognition of enforceable fundamental rights that are legally binding for all legislators, administrators, and judges. These rights find their limits where 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, and Local Authorities.

European citizens have a right to know who is politically responsible so that, if required, they can question inappropriate policies.

Strengthening the democratic quality of political decision-making at all levels requires that, in this process, the input of the societal organisations and movements concerned is guaranteed.

A globalized economy requires that Europe be fully aware of its social responsibility for the weakest on a global scale.

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 that creates uniform statistical series on the social aspects of the European Union as a whole;
- to draft clear measurable benchmarks for each social objective that figures in 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 targets 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.