

The Lisbon Civic Forum: GROWTH AND JOBS

Statement of Purpose

The Lisbon Civic Forum (LCF) for growth and Jobs was founded in Lisbon in February 2005 by a small group of distinguished scholars and professionals from several old as well as new EU member states. It aims to provide a platform for the exchange of ideas and opinions between academics, policymakers, diplomats, journalists and practitioners. It will also serve as a forum for an intense dialogue with civil societies in Europe.

The activities of the Forum will concentrate on the social and economic success of the European Union in terms of creating jobs, fostering economic growth and best practices in government, society and business. These objectives comprise the central elements of the Lisbon Strategy in which the European Union has expressed its great ambition "to become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economic region in the world". The Lisbon Strategy and the multiple, interdependent conditions and hidden impediments to its realization will be central topics of the Lisbon Civic Forum agenda.

New ways of thinking, innovative and problem-solving approaches to cooperation and a higher level of social creativity and solidarity are needed to cope with the main social, economic and institutional challenges that Europe faces in the context of globalization and the transformation of societies and economies. Such approaches will be developed by the interdisciplinary and international expert groups of the LCF. The LCF will also extend to and include experts from candidate countries as well as from other countries with an EU perspective.

The members of the diverse groups will continually work together on Lisbon Strategy issues. They will meet at least four times a year in workshops and larger conferences to present and discuss their ideas, recommendations and the results of their work. The outcomes of these activities will be disseminated through the mass

media and presented to national policymakers and to members and staff of the European Commission. Publications of articulated ideas will be available in conference volumes and academic journals. In order to reach a larger public and to intensify dialogue, the LCF will join existing networks and create a related website for discussions. The focus of the work of the expert groups is to monitor the process of European development consistent with the Lisbon Strategy. These should offer new social and ecological models in the context of corporate social responsibility to enrich the political debates with constructive and evidence-based recommendations.

The Forum is an independent, politically non-partisan and European-wide institution, which shall be financially supported by national, private and public sector institutions and by funds from the EU. All Forum activities will be coordinated at a headquarters in a major European city yet to be selected.

Europe is both the agent and the subject of unprecedented rapid and fundamental social, economic, environmental and institutional transformation. This formidable and robust change undermines conventional wisdom and knowledge, endangers economic development, and jeopardizes job security. At the same time, it provides unprecedented opportunities for larger chains of cross-border cooperation and social innovation involving new players to meet the new challenges.

The main strengths of the EU lie in:

(i) the single, internal market across the Union and the common currency in large parts of the Union.

The transition towards knowledge-based societies, which advances as rapidly as the process of globalization, requires large investments in education, research and development activities. Neither national firms of normal size nor even smaller countries will be able to make such large investments. Only larger regions will be able to make such great changes successfully. The argument of size, therefore, especially with regard to the number of customers in an internal market, will affect the capabilities of regions to compete in global markets.

Only recently, because of its various enlargements, has the EU emerged with the necessary population size and the necessary production and market capacities to compete with other globally oriented economic regions at the international level. Due to its new size, the EU offers greater opportunities to businesses in its member countries to act and succeed as “global players” on international markets. Unlike other “global players”, the EU has currently an advantage of enhanced macroeconomic stability whereas the Euro gradually but consequently is increasing its role as an international currency.

(ii) the diversity of economic structures on national and regional levels.

The existence of diversity is an essential precondition for growth and for the augmentation of welfare and job creation in capitalist economies. This applies to firms, nations and large economic regions. Diversity builds the basis for the successful division of labour and for the introduction of innovations in society and the economy. Therefore, nurturing diversity is fundamental to change and progress in all fields of human life. The distinctive regional diversity of the EU is one of its main advantages, offering the best opportunities for the creation of regional clusters as the driving force behind economic development.

(iii) intensive cooperation and solidarity, offering new social and ecological responses to globalization.

Since the beginning of the process of European integration, economic cooperation has been a remarkable success. Nations, regions and civil societies have developed a stable, albeit less vigorous, culture of cooperation. This new culture of complex cooperation and interdependence constitutes a major strength of the EU.

On the one hand, cooperation becomes an increasingly important element of competitiveness in modern economies that are going through a transformation process towards knowledge-based societies. The selective element of competition is now increasingly replaced by cooperation in networking on all economic levels, particularly at the regional level. In this respect, the establishment of mutually beneficial and, at the same time, flexible networks of regions give Europe the chance to generate economic growth and to compensate for nation- and region-specific weaknesses.

On the other hand, cross-border cooperation among regions, cultures, and professional circles as well as civil societies still has not been fully explored. Differences in political and institutional cultures and bureaucratic regulations are often the most ardent adversaries of flexibility, openness, innovation, networking and the capability to adapt to change. National and cultural habits of looking inward and institutional-bureaucratic rigidity and secrecy are often the real cause behind economic slow-down and inefficiency. The roots of economic problems and growing unemployment can also be found in non-economic spheres outside the narrowly defined job market.

Solidarity, characterised by the idea of clustering and networking and based on a regional system of cooperative competition will soon lose its traditional connotation of mere financial redistribution from richer to poorer parts of the Union. Instead, solidarity can be considered the “venture capital” for future investments that will induce regional growth and prosperity. Triggered by these regional dynamics, the EU as a whole may achieve the goals of the Lisbon Strategy and become the most

competitive region in the world. Towards this goal, the Lisbon Civic Forum has a role to play by looking at the rapid changes and new constellations in innovative ways from multi-disciplinary, multi-cultural perspectives.