

Constantinos Simitis

Από: Kalypso Nicolaidis []

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Προς: VERHOFSTADT Guy

Κοινοποίηση:

Θέμα: Re: First Shadow Council Meeting 22-03-2011

Συνημμένα: march on economics.docx; ATT00001..htm

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Dear Spinelli colleagues,

With apologies I will not be able to be in Brussels on Tuesday owing to family commitments. Let me send a couple of comments however.

1) First I think you need to ask more explicitly what you wish the headlines to be. Where does the Spinelli group disagree with the (planned) council on each of the three points? On the first paragraph, for instance, '**A European Mechanism for Banks**' it is not clear on first reading where exactly we disagree with the Council since everyone is saying that. In contrast, the third point, '**A European Investment Plan**' is clearly original and bold and crucial and to me is the one proposal we should flag. Eg **It is urgent to act long term...**

2) At the same time, are things always as simple as to say 'community method' will solve all?! In the second paragraph for instance **On a Community Act for Economic Governance** the main point is simply that "if only the Commission was in the driving seat" – but is it not more important to make proposals on substance than process? Indeed, on the "Lisbon strategy" I would not be so dogmatic on this. The Open Method of Coordination has had *both* successes and failures – in addition many of the failures are not bound up with the method itself but rather to structural constraints in the member states and their capacity or willingness to implement policies. Let me indulge in a bit of evidence to back up this point if some of you are interested.

A former student of mine, Maria Mexi, wrote her thesis on the impact of the OMC on national measures in the employment and social fields and demonstrated that in Greece, Finland and Germany (her three case studies) two main sets of **domestic factors** determine OMC's success in promoting domestic reforms. These are:

- i) blocking veto actors in the domestic policy process,
- ii) degree of fit between domestic labor market, economies, and institutions with EU measures.

Sure, the OMC does not have the tools to force progress at national level, eg sanctions. Yet, it has proven its worth both at national and EU levels - namely, in supporting the development of national policies by challenging and expanding the terms of national policy debate and in defining and building consensus around a distinctive European (or EU) "social model" based on shared values and policy paradigms. OMC's effect on domestic policy-making has been more pronounced in laggard countries as policy-makers became more aware of the need to speed up welfare reforms to 'catch up with Europe'. Key concepts associated with the EES and the Social OMC have also entered or gained new prominence on the domestic policy agendas, notably "active ageing" (avoiding early retirement), lifelong learning, gender mainstreaming, flexicurity, reconciling work and family life, an inclusive labor market, social exclusion as a multi-dimensional phenomenon beyond income poverty, and an integrated partnership approach to promoting employment, inclusion, and local development.

Besides these strengths, a massive volume of information and good practices has been built up, not only through the National Reports but also through peer reviews and the different projects and Networks that have been funded. A community of interested organisations at national and transnational levels has also coalesced around the EES and the social OMC and helped to shape the policy agenda. National governments, Networks, CSOs, academics and project participants have been brought together at numerous events from 2000 to 2010.

IN SUM:

The key here is that the OMC works in domestic contexts when it is able to empower some domestic actors against others. It is a bottom-up strategy, not one where compulsory directives come from above. The EU is not a classic state so this indirect way of helping actors do what they want to do is often the most sustainable in the long run. The OMC's learning potential remains huge: after all, it can draw on policy approaches of 27 Member States and good practice from thousands of local and national actors. In the end, horizontal learning often has more staying power than vertical command. This is the spirit of pollinization that Dany so brilliantly discusses in his *What is to be Done*, if I am not mistaken!

PRESCRIPTION:

In my view, European Parliamentarians should seek to reinforce what works and reform what does not.

There is no doubt that the OMC should be reinvigorated to better play a key role in helping member states to meet their national targets and the challenges of the current decade. The latest revisions of the Lisbon strategy only partially go in the right direction. This reinforcement of the OMC could be based on:

- 1) Strengthened arrangements for **stakeholder engagement** at European, National, Regional and local levels.
- 2) Efforts to make the **OMC 'people-centred'**: this approach would mean that Member States produce formal country reports that focus on all policies, legislation, services and benefits targeted at particular population groups rather than being built around policy silos (health, education, long-term care, pensions) or concepts (active inclusion, social inclusion) – because the focus should always be on individuals not on the structures and services that are only there to serve them. Such a new approach would encourage a cross-cutting approach overcoming barriers between the various strands of the OMC (e.g. poverty and social exclusion; pensions; health and long-term care), and it might even promote policy effectiveness at national level by putting people first in general and by designing measures tailored to their needs.
- 3) Efforts to develop **easily comprehensible national/regional/local data** which show which policies work well. This would complement more general comparable EU data which should convey a sense of shared European endeavour and progress.

The European Commission is still the hub player at every one of these levels so it

is not clear what additional powers it should get (indeed it is generally very supportive of the OMC). The EP would surely have a greater role to play too in enhancing this mutual learning process. It is worth thinking this through.

Overall, the main obstacle is not OMC's conceptual framework, but the *lack of political will and commitment to the untapped potential* of the Method and its (still) ambiguous place within the Europe 2020 Strategy. Strengthening mutual learning on people-centred strategies, linking it to policy impact and opening it to more actors are key to help OMC remain fresh and enhance its potential to deliver policy change in the years ahead.