

Address of *Mr. Klaudijus Stanionis*,
Vice-minister of Social Security and Labour of the Republic of Lithuania,
delivered at the Council of Europe conference of European Ministers responsible for social cohesion
“Investing in Social Cohesion – Investing in Stability and the Well-being of Society”
Session III “**Policies for social cohesion and for well-being for all – a vision for the future**”
Moscow, 27 February 2009

Mr/Madam Chair
Ladies and gentlemen,
Dear colleagues,

I have a pleasure to welcome you in the first Council of Europe conference of Ministers responsible for social cohesion. I express my gratitude to the organisers of this conference for the opportunity to discuss the fundamental issues of social cohesion at the high international level. During this stressful period of the global crisis, focus on social cohesion is of particular importance and it requires us, high state officials, to renew the political commitment.

The establishment and maintenance of social cohesion is, first of all, the duty of the states. However, due to joint actions and support of the Council of Europe and member states, this process is more organised and covers more common European social goals: combating poverty and exclusion, guaranteeing appropriate access to social rights and social protection of vulnerable groups.

Solving relevant social issues, it is important not only to shape common policies for social cohesion and well-being for all, but also to have a common vision for the future. Building confidence in a secure future for all is one of the main priorities pointed out in the results of the report of the High-Level Task Force on Social Cohesion.

As it is emphasised in the mentioned report, in order to build a secure future every country needs the complex and integral family policy, because the family is a fundamental cell of the society. As we all know, the family policy is comprehensive and covers many issues.

Making the family policy, priority should be given to the strengthening of the family institute, building a positive attitude towards the family, emphasising the importance of the family's value in society, reducing poverty and social exclusion, creating a family-friendly environment and reconciling responsibilities of family and professional life.

It is obvious, that due to insufficient and limited family strategies, the families' abilities to have their wished number of children are limited. Therefore, we are facing population ageing in many European countries, which results the different social cohesion-related issues.

I would like to underline the importance of reconciliation of family and work responsibilities. It is of the high relevance to every employed person, particularly young people who are our future. Individual non-coordinated actions are not the appropriate measures to solve family and work reconciliation issue.

Consequently, the particular attention should be paid to complex development of policies, focusing on increasing possibilities for reconciliation of family and professional responsibilities, promotion of birth-rate, increasing accessibility of care services for children and elderly people and development of family-friendly workplaces.

It is definitely important to encourage employers and trade unions to contribute to the development of these policies. Full participation of persons with family responsibilities in the labour market is also highlighted in the Lisbon Strategy as an important factor in

the development of human resources, because it helps to use all human resources more effectively.

Lithuania is one of the leading European Union Member States according to the indicator of women who raise children under 12 years of age; however reconciliation of family and work remains a relevant issue. Our country successfully solves some aspects of the reconciliation issue, other aspects require more efforts. Innovative models of family-friendly workplaces have been developed and promoted with the help of European Union Structural Funds.

In Lithuania the carried reform of social services has created better conditions for the care of persons with disabilities and elderly family members; paternity leave has been legitimated and our men use it willingly. However, insufficient social dialogue does not provide parents, who have family responsibilities, with wider opportunities to use the flexible forms of work, although the respective recommendations were adopted back in 2003.

Furthermore, there is still a lack of high-quality and easily accessible child care services. There is still unequal share of family responsibilities between employed men and women; therefore, we should pay more attention to the solution of these issues.

We share the opinion of the High-Level Task Force that an important step in solving the issues of social cohesion, in particular the European population ageing problem, is to outline a vision based on confidence in the future and foster the sense of reliance to society.

Seeking adequate income equality in terms of units of consumption, the function of redistribution of income between families without children and families raising children

should be reassigned for the systems of social family benefits and taxation. Together with the policy favourable for employed mothers, for care of small children and for the pre-school education, these systems should seek to eliminate financial poverty and children's cultural shortage.

Dear colleagues,

Concluding, I would like to wish that this conference becomes traditional and that social cohesion seeking becomes more and more legal obligation which complements the already existing instruments of the Council of Europe. I strongly believe that the declaration adopted in this conference will be an important step in building a more secure future for all.

Thank you for the attention.