

**Address of Mrs. Emiliya Maslarova, Minister of Labour and Social Policy, at  
a session on the subject of “Policies of social cohesion and prosperity for all –  
a vision of the future” within a Conference of European Ministers responsible  
for social cohesion in the member states of the Council of Europe –  
“Investment in social cohesion – investment for stability and well-being in  
society”,**

Moscow, 27 February 2009, 9:30-11:00 am

**Honored chair,**

**Distinguished Ladies and Gentlemen,**

I would like to congratulate the Council of Europe and the Russian federation for the initiative and the organization of the present conference. Today, in the situation of a global crisis, social ministers bear the load of even greater expectations as the foundations of social systems and the achievements in the field of social cohesion are threatened.

Today’s crisis is not the only and most significant challenge we encounter. The complex of long-term changes in the structure of production and trade as a result of globalization and the negative demographic and social changes in our societies require determined actions. The subject of social cohesion continues to be a topical one.

In my country, considerable progress has been made in the efforts for modernizing the social system and social policies.

**In the first place, I would mention the higher degree of flexibility and security on the labour market.** Increasing flexibility and security is one of the most important instruments for modernizing labour markets and creating more and better jobs. One of the trends in this direction is reconciliation of professional and personal life. Considerable resources have also been channeled in developing the training of adults. An important focus is the opportunity for on-the-job training of unemployed without education and qualification in the form of internship and

apprenticeship at enterprises. Another priority is improving the access to training of disadvantaged groups on the labour market. The target groups for training already also include persons who have acquired the right to early retirement, mothers returning on the labour market after maternity leave and others.

In the second place, I think we should **put the redefining of the rights and obligations of all stakeholders in the process of providing adequate protection and support for social integration**. This is a process ongoing in most European states. It is not by chance that complete and highly productive employment has been placed in the centre of the Lisbon Strategy of the European Union. This is a guarantee for the prosperity of society and an opportunity for a career for every one. That is why we should continue with these reforms while also providing sufficient stimuli for economic activity.

Third, the subject of **effective governance and social partnership at the formation and management of social cohesion policies** will continue to be of key significance for achieving progress on the important priorities we have identified together. In 2009 social dialogue in Bulgaria will be subordinate to discussion of unification around joint partner actions for overcoming the negative consequences from the economic crisis on the labour market.

In my opinion, in addition to providing protection for the most vulnerable, we also have to boost our investments in the future, providing the necessary support to our most valuable capital – young people. There should be comprehensive coordination of the policies for young people in the sphere of education, social and housing policy, health care, culture, as well as promotion and development of a modern national policy for the development of youth. A national programme called Career Start is being implemented successfully in Bulgaria. Under this programme, young people who are university graduates acquire professional experience in the state and municipal administration. At the same time, employers receive subsidies so that they would employ young people under 29. The promotion of maternity is also an important priority to us: the Republic of Bulgaria is the country with the longest paid maternity leave among all EU member states. It is 775 days, including

45 days before delivery. As of this year, mothers can use maternity leave for a period of 410 days – until the child turns one. Conditions have also been created to encourage the professional career of mothers. Two national programmes are applied through which for those who wish to return to work earlier individual and group care for the children financed by the budget have been provided.

These and a whole complex of measures related to increasing employability capacity, the acquisition and preservation of specific knowledge, promotion of enterprise and others, lie at the basis of providing young people with honourable work through which they would be able to preserve their hopes and enthusiasm, their positive outlook on life and to develop a society based on fundamental human values.

In conclusion, I would like to express my confidence that the concentrated efforts of the government, in cooperation with our partners on both national and international level, will bring positive results in spite of the severe economic conditions.

Thank you!

