

Intervention by Vibeke Abel, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Social Welfare, Denmark

Madame Chair, Mr. Secretary General, Ministers, ladies and gentlemen

First of all I wish to thank the Russian government for hosting this Conference and also congratulate the Council of Europe on the work carried out on social cohesion.

Social responsibilities is one of the elements of the High Level Task Force report as it was indeed highlighted this morning by Mary Daly.

Social and shared responsibilities is an issue taken up by the Danish government also recently, but actually it has been underlying the Danish system since the Danish Constitution saw the light of the day.

It is a principle laid down in the Danish Constitution that it is up to each and every citizen to look after him/herself and his/her family.

The public authorities only enter the picture if this is not the case.

However, where a citizen is in need of social benefits, a closely knit safety net is available – for acute need as e.g. sickness and unemployment as well as long-term needs as e.g. compensation for disability, etc.

This closely knit system is administered by the local authorities and decisions taken as close to the citizen as possible.

The Danish Parliament sets the framework for the schemes, but it is up to the local authorities to fill this framework with concrete assessments.

The idea is thus that help must be adjusted in conformity with the individual person in order for that persons to manage.

All citizens should be part of society and should contribute and make the most of their resources. We should not tolerate that groups of citizens are marginalised or live in parallel communities outside the established society.

But we are all responsible for creating a cohesive society (the individual, organisations, companies and the public authorities).

Let me concentrate a little on corporate social responsibility in a globalised world.

Many business enterprises, also in Denmark, wish to engage themselves in the immediate surroundings, and the voluntary world wishes to initiate a dialogue with corporate Denmark. New kinds of network thus arise and new ideas and initiatives see the light of the day as a result of such interaction.

Business enterprises and the voluntary world may together create new resources, that not only contributes to solving problems but also prevent that problems arise and develop.

However, in order to encourage to an even higher degree of social responsibility, the Danish government has launched an action plan on corporate social responsibility, not only in a national context, but perhaps even more important, in a globalised perspective.

It may be an easy task in times of growth and stability to carry out such an action plan.

Social cohesion is an engine to economic development and social stability. If social cohesion is challenged it is even more important to find alternative ways to deal with social problems, e.g. by combining efforts of governments, including local governments, and business enterprises.

The financial crisis makes the theme of this conference even more pertinent.

I wish to end this short speech by assuring you that Denmark looks forward to contributing to the work of the Council of Europe on the sharing of responsibilities.

Thank you!