**Greece: The Role of Social Partners so far**

Ladies and gentlemen,

I too would like to congratulate the organizers on the initiative to make this useful event possible, to thank you for the invitation and to express the hope that the conclusions of this conference will help to launch the process of a broad tripartite consultation to solve the problems of integration of migrants at a European level.

Before referring to my country, I would like to begin with two givens at least in my own personal view:

First, I will explain later on, I have to clearly distinguish the economic migrants who have been coming to and integrating in Greece for 25 years from the refugees whose influx my country is experiencing at present and over the last two and a half years.

Second, the social partners must actively support the planning and implementation of a modern, long-term and socially just policy that will make migration a case of growth and progress for all parties concerned.

With this in mind, I have to start from the opinion of those I represent, the traders of Greece, on the subject of economic migration. It is an important factor in economic progress, both for host countries and countries of origin. This illustrates the need to integrate migration policies into broader development strategies so as to benefit migrants on the one hand and host countries on the other. At the same time, economic migration can lead to the demographic coverage of a country, especially now, at a time when low birth rates coupled with longer life expectancy lead to a decline in employment and exert disastrous pressure on insurance systems. The youth structure of the migrant population contributes significantly to the slowdown of demographic aging and its consequences, provided a country achieves a satisfactory degree of integration of this population into the society. In other words, the problem can be significantly addressed via an exogenous population growth. My country is already in this phase, so it is now time for Greek society to implement a proactive policy of migrant integration.

Well, the truth is that the social partners' contribution to this issue is not what it should be. In the 90s and the 00s, when the country experienced unprecedented growth rates, there was no particular problem, the state did their own job and we did our own. During these prosperous times, we did not develop what was really needed, that is a culture of tripartite dialogue on the subject. I have to stress that tripartite dialogue in the past decades was almost exclusively limited to the boards of administration of major state institutions like the Hellenic Manpower Organization and the Social Security Fund. Beyond that, contacts with the state were purely bilateral. In this context, the state was taking care of the conditions of integration of economic migrants and us, social partners, treated them like all ordinary workers with the extra of making sure that behavior towards them was as non-discriminatory as possible. In order to do that, we had a real “weapon”, the National General Collective Agreement, through which social partners were designating minimum wage and working conditions.

Enter the crisis together with three memoranda of economic adjustment!

The economic and social situation in the country has turned dire and gloomy. Economy has been shrinking over the past 10 years. Innumerous fiscal measures introduced to meet the bailout targets have had a tremendous impact on private consumption and employment, leading to a continuing decline in gross domestic product. Excessive direct and indirect taxes and heavy social security contributions -directly linked to income- have also significantly affected everyday life of businesses, workers and society alike.

Unemployment reached nearly 28% in 2013, now standing at 20,5%, taking however into account that part-time employment and work rotation for one or two days per week are prevalent these days. Youth unemployment exceeds 45%.

To cap it all, competitiveness at national level suffers by Greek traits such as bureaucracy, overregulation, slow justice, outdated tax and social insurance systems and anti-entrepreneurial mentality. In the meantime, we, social partners, have lost our main instrument of intervention that once was the National General Collective Agreement. Nowadays, whatever we decide through collective bargaining does not have a general effect and minimum wages are currently set by the state.

The only positive thing brought about by the crisis, was the realization for the necessity of tripartite dialogue, the Supreme Labour Council and the Social Control Council for Labour Inspection being the best examples. Now, to return to the economic migrants, it is clear that part-time work affects them as much as the natives, but the most urgent problem they face is that of undeclared work.

In the recent past Commissioner Thyssen mentioned *“we need to avoid precarious jobs becoming the norm and labour markets where just a few enjoy high standards of social protection and many next to none. The most extreme form of precariousness is, of course, undeclared work”*. Well, I couldn’t agree more, but in Greece and within the frame of crisis and recession, undeclared work is expanding instead of shrinking. Though I have no intent to sanctify undeclared work, there is a paradox in that it actually helps a number of battered businesses to save the day, keeps qualified youngsters in the country, therefore limiting the devastating brain drain Greece is experiencing as we speak, and provides a certain amount of cash flow in a continuous era of capital controls. When undeclared work is assuming characteristics as such within the society, it is even more difficult to fight it. Over the last 2 years, the social partners in Greece together with the government, the ILO and the European Commission have started a programme in order to identify the problems and tackle the situation. So far, we have at our disposal a diagnostic report on undeclared work and a very useful roadmap of joint efforts with the state to fight the problem.

What we are currently trying to do as social partners is to help migrants, including refugees, to escape undeclared work, to acquire full rights and not to be subject to discrimination in the hierarchy and the workplace. We all understand that the exploitation of migrants eventually constitutes a burden to competitiveness and creates unfair competition against law-abiding employers. Recently we have been talking with the state at the Supreme Labour Council on the necessary amendments and reforms of the Greek legal framework for inspections in agriculture, in line with ILO Convention No.129. At the same time, we are developing cooperation protocols on language learning, acquisition of knowledge about the history, culture and way of life of Greek society, integration into the Greek labour market, active social participation and promotion of equal opportunities.

In 2015, together with the Trade Unions Confederation, we issued a policy paper aiming at reinforcing social dialogue with a view to effectively combating discrimination in the labour market prohibited by law. Subsequently, the National General Collective Agreement of 2017 recognizes the need for new actions against diversity in pursuit of an interdependent and multi-racial modern society. In order to combat the phenomena of racism, xenophobia and intolerance in workplaces, we have stated our intent to contribute to the recording of racist incidents and we encourage their reference to the network of records set up by the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the National Commission for human rights.

Now, with regard to refugees coming to the country in waves from Turkey, the truth is that we have no actual voice. Although, since 2017, we have asked to participate in the proceedings, this has not yet been accomplished. We do not participate even in the elementary stuff, such as the involvement of local societies or markets. What we are actually left to do –and we are doing it- is to keep our members constantly informed on the situation and ask them to provide jobs where feasible. But for the rest, we have no organized dialogue as we should.

My Confederation is a leading social partner; we represent the trade of the country and amongst them the merchants of Lesbos, an island where there is one of the largest refugee camps in Greece. The Regional Governor of Northern Aegean Sea has recently issued a mandate to close the camp down, as conditions for both refugees and locals are not appropriate. And all these actions take place, without anyone asking us how the situation can improve. The truth is that in Greece the problem of refugees is not considered an issue of integration. The refugees themselves do not help, since they are only interested in how they will manage to leave the country for a destination in northern Europe. When they were not in the camps and circulated freely, many of our small and medium-sized members offered them jobs they declined. All they cared about was to accept our members' offers in things, clothes and food and charge their mobile phones, a most essential tool to communicate with smugglers and their families. In this way, the general perception in society and the market has never been one of integration or protection of labour rights.

As a result, key tools of the social partners, such as job descriptions, in which we actively participate and the diagnosis of local market needs cannot be exploited.

Despite all the said, I would like to close my presentation by pointing out that it is my country's duty to find a way for economic migrants and refugees to have access to proper hospitality, healthcare and the labour market. We need to provide greater transparency, hygiene and safety, information on conditions and conventions affecting migration, flexible, fast and inexpensive procedures, adequate information, labour and human rights. We also need to use marketing as a tool, in order to improve the public image of migrants.

Greek trade, as a leading employer in the country, accepts the challenge of participating in strategies aimed at better integration of migrants into the workforce. The social partners as a whole, we have our own mission with regard to migration and we need to actively engage in policymaking and work together in harmony with the state on this issue.

Thank you for your patience.

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