

ETUC Seminar in Cyprus 4-5 October 2012
DEOK General Secretary Address,

"EY 2012 - European Year of Active Aging and Intergenerational Solidarity: Improving intergenerational solidarity and active aging - overcoming our older people to remain in work and to facilitate the access of young people to the labor market."

Let me first welcome the Secretary-General of the ETUC, other officials and all of you delegates in Cyprus. It is a great pleasure and gratitude for the DEOK the choice of Cyprus for the conference especially at now during the Cyprus Presidency of the European Council. Choosing Cyprus offers you an opportunity to have a close look of our beautiful island and to experience the kindness and hospitality of our people. I'm also sure that you will spend a little time to learn more about the hard reality that our island and our people continue to suffer from the military occupation of 37% of Cyprus by Turkey and about the perpetuation of the violent division of a country, member of the EU. I kindly ask you all you, after your visit and when you return to your countries, to become carriers of the message that it's time for a fair and democratic settlement of the Cyprus problem that will free Cyprus from the division and occupation.

The theme of the two-day conference is probably one of the hardest and most complex issues and dilemmas in today's critical social and economic conditions. The generation gap is theoretically a hot and strongly debated topic.

We are facing a deep economic and social crisis with global, regional and national dimension similar of which we have not met and lived the last 30-40 years. At the same time there are further serious socioeconomic challenges and problems that affect generations of young people and older.

Due to the economic crisis, young people face a hostile environment where conditions of limited opportunities and discrimination against workers prevail. Low wages, job insecurity, questioning labor rights, discrimination against young people and challenging the qualifications of young people are parameters that make a difficult reality for young people looking for a job and access to the labor market. It has also been observed that work experience is a qualification that exceeds the objective qualifications of the individual. This situation leads young people to increased pessimism about the future of their occupational and personal lives.

The problems faced by older workers in order to keep their jobs, get a new job, return from unemployment to employment; to have the same opportunities for training are numerous because of the huge changes that occur over time in the

labour market and the economy. In particular, the introduction of new technologies, the demand for new skills and abilities, and the demand for new upgraded academic qualifications etc. The result is a reduction in the number of participation older workers in the labour market. It is extremely difficult for many older age (over 50) employees to adapt to these new conditions.

The same time we want and to pursue active aging, which means in simple terms longer participation in the labour market and job opportunities for workers with advanced age, we face high unemployment rates of young people. Young people possessing high academic qualifications and skills that have before them towering walls preventing them from entering the labor market.

Even though we understand the urgent need to find and maintain resources to strengthen the viability and sustainability of our pension schemes and funds and pressure for an increase in the retirement age, we strongly disagree with this option because it is not a rational treatment of older workers. Moreover, we stand firm with the just reaction of young people against this option because it will exacerbate the problem of youth unemployment and exclusion from the labor market.

The unions and the labor movement, as a purely social movement, must demonstrate high sensitivity and determination to find balanced and socially cohesive solutions to issues of access to the labour market and active aging, integration and retention of older workers in the labor market. The issue of exclusion of people over 50 from the labor market is as dramatic as the exclusion of a whole new generation of young workers from the economic and social fabric of the labor market itself.

For the labor movement the case, perhaps the dilemma, of prioritizing participation in the labor market, young people or older people, is non-existent and false. There is no dilemma; at least we can not accept there is. Because if we accept there is, that will be an immediate and dangerous threat to undermine the very existence of the labor movement and the fundamental principles of its origin and viability. Solidarity between generations is a fundamental principle and value upon which we built employee strength and the unity of workers.

The European Commission's initiative to declare the year 2012 as Year of Active Aging and Intergenerational Solidarity is dramatically relevant, useful and very necessary. This is of course an initiative that it is not expected to provide immediate and direct, practical and effective solutions and remedy for such critical social and economic issues. But it is an opportunity for reflection, debate and awareness especially for European and national decision-makers and leaders / officials involved in policy making.

The approach of the issue and its productive and effective management becomes even more complicated due to the deep economic crisis which unfortunately gives the European Council and other European institutions the feedback to impose hard fiscal discipline and budget readjustment plans to Member States. Particularly in the EU MS who are currently in the midst of the Memoranda, facing unprecedented

economic downturn and are apparently threatened with impoverishment and social disintegration. Thus, one can not realistically expect policies and measures that will enhance solidarity between generations. Most member states can't afford such measures which will promote active aging and reduce at the same time unemployment among young people.

These really critical issues, questions and challenges inspired the European Trade Union Confederation to put on the agenda of the European social dialogue at the highest level the intergenerational solidarity problem. The initiative to circulate to all national affiliate organizations of the ETUC the relevant questionnaire and this two-day conference here in Cyprus which will address the findings of the research is another of the many steps and activities held by the Confederation aiming to reach and promote common positions and demands for the European workers movement.

The DEOK welcomes this initiative and is ready and committed to the participative process aiming to develop common positions and proposals. We also emphasize our commitment determination in the promotion and implementation of measures and policies to strengthen solidarity between the generations.

I wish that the work of this two-day conference will to lead to the achievement of its ambitious objectives, and finally I wish you to all friends from abroad an enjoyable time in the beautiful island of Aphrodite, Cyprus.

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