

Radoslaw Mleczo, POLAND

SESSION 2

**Social cohesion as a responsibility shared by all – strengthening
mechanisms of representations and social and civic dialogue
II session**

Thank you very much for the invitation and for the opportunity to address such a fine gathering of European policy-makers and experts responsible for social cohesion. With its report, Council of Europe is once again confirming its invaluable contribution to the development of knowledge on key areas of social policy. Social cohesion is one such area—extremely important in the times of crisis.

Involvement of all social partners and civic organisations in decision making process and sharing responsibility for initiatives and actions is the key element of efficient and modern state, that realises social policy based on solidarity and social cohesion.

It is in the interest of states to strengthen all forms of social and civic dialogue, including implementation of long –term strategy for civil dialogue development and working out the standards of cooperation between social partners, government (central and local) and non-governmental organisations. Social dialogue, as a form of debate on social interests, serves as a communication tool, for articulation of positions and interests presented by its participants, and for elaboration of agreements leading for the achievement of the overriding aim – that is: common welfare.

Ladies and Gentlemen, let me present you basic information concerning legal and institutional network of social and civic dialogue in my country.

The crucial element of strengthening institutional civil dialogue in Poland is an *act of 2003 on public benefit and volunteer work*. It is the base for development of policies, strategic and program documents in social area implementing the rules of subsidiarity, solidarity and social cohesion. The main goal of the act is to define the rules of cooperation between public administration and non-governmental organizations and guarantee that civil organizations has strong and based on partnership position in this relation.

Particular institutional form of civil dialogue in Poland is the Public Benefit Works Council –a body assisting the minister responsible for social security issues. It consists of five representatives of governmental administration; five representatives of local government authorities; and ten representatives of non-governmental organizations. Having Council as a forum, non-governmental organizations can articulate their opinions and needs and participate in decision-making. The Council integrates civil society organizations by establishing special form of cooperation between public administration and non-governmental organizations, complementary to other institutional forms of social dialogue.

The main tripartite social dialogue institution in Poland is the Tripartite Commission for Social and Economic Affairs (composed of the government, representative trade unions and employers' organizations). It's main tasks are: holding social dialogue at national level with representatives of trade union and employers' organizations; and giving the legal possibility of raising issues in its agenda on matters of particular social or economic significance, the solution of which is important to maintain social peace. Representatives of social and

professional organizations are invited to participate in the works of the Commission in an advisory capacity, if the debate refers directly or to a large extent to their interests.

It is worth to stress that Polish law mandates to hold consultations of legislative bills of concern to trade unions and employers tasks (including the EU documents) with representative trade unions and representative employer organizations. Consultation procedures are regulated in detail by the Act on trade union organizations and the Act on employers organizations.

The Strategy of Support for Civil Society (2009 – 2015) is the next example of mechanism strengthening the civil dialogue in Poland. The main objective of the strategy is to reach the optimal level of participation of citizens in public life and the development of civil society institutions.

Finally it is necessary to mention the European Social Fund supported Polish Operational Program Human Capital 2007- 2013. It involves important activities for the promotion and development of social dialogue. One of the areas to be supported by that programme is good governance. It includes strengthening the potential of social partners and non-government organisations oriented at enhancing their active participation in the process of implementing the Lisbon Strategy.

All the above examples show that Poland has developed an institutional and organizational structure to implement the recommendations of the Council of Europe High-Level Task Force Report on social cohesion in the 21st century in regard to social dialogue. In the present difficult times, it is essential to develop and implement social policies which would facilitate the economic adjustment and thus reduce, rather than extend its duration. International cooperation in the

Council of Europe and the European Union helps us identify such policies. Social dialogue at home, however, is now more important than ever in their effective formulation and implementation.

One may ask if in present crisis situation strengthening social and civic dialogue should be the priority. In our view - especially in the context of current crisis - Europe should continue to develop social and civic dialogue both in national and European perspective.

In the opinion of Polish government - economic crisis can not justify protectionism. Flexible, adaptable and mobile labour market is essential to deal with negative effects of crisis, as it contributes to reduction of unemployment and creation of new workplaces, as well as stimulation of economic growth. As honourable Secretary General Mr Terry Davis underlined at the beginning of our discussion, “making the economy work is not enough”.

Therefore social and civic dialogue can be seen as the best way of solving many tensions in the situation of crisis.

Of course social and civil dialogue replaces neither the government nor the parliament in the decision-making process, but it allows to seek for a practical consensus and to make the decisions be accepted by societies.