

**Address by Minister of Labour and Social Insurance, Ms Sotiroula
Charalambous at the 4th European Conference on Lifelong Guidance Policy,
October 24, 9 am, Palm Beach Hotel, Larnaca**

Ladies and Gentlemen,
Distinguished Guests,

It is a great pleasure for me to open the 4th European Conference on Lifelong Guidance Policy aiming in discussing the “Lifelong Guidance in Europe up to 2020”. I am also very pleased to see together here in Cyprus so many key experts from national and international institutions, policymakers, and academics in the field of career guidance. I am sure that the objectives of this conference will be met and your participation will create a forum for discussion on the crucial matter of life long guidance. So, I would like to extend a warm welcome to you all and as we say in Greek “Kalos Orisate” to Larnaca.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The issue of career guidance is fundamental for both the providers of guidance and the policy makers across Europe. Career Guidance, seen as a social asset, affords many public as well as private benefits.

First of all, it provides educational benefits to individuals when they are presented with correct and relevant information concerning their educational options, in relation to their own aspirations and capabilities;

Secondly, it provides job-related benefits when it is closely linked to the demand and supply for labor and the management of adjustments when there is a change in the career path;

Thirdly, it provides equity benefits when guidance is given to disadvantaged or to risk groups to support them in accessing education, training and employment opportunities.

This conference is very important because it marks the launch of the new work program of the European Life Long Guidance Policy Network (ELGPN). The ELGPN

Network in its 5 years of existence has proved that a collective action owned by the Member States for the benefit of the Member States can produce remarkable results. The ELGPN is a network driven by the eagerness of its Members to make a difference in the life of the citizens when it comes to quality provision of life long guidance.

The same conference is also important as it is dedicated to the dissemination of information on various new methods and frameworks for guidance, a very detailed and thorough work that was taken by the Network during the previous two years. Your findings and especially the Toolbox for Policy Makers must be promoted to all Member States for assessing their guidance services and find ways to make them better.

Dear friends, why is the theme of guidance so crucial today?

Knowledge, as we all know, is a source of economic wealth as well as a source for personal employability, competence, well being and personal wealth. Every day we are exposed to more and diverse knowledge, knowledge however that has limited duration and value than ever before. Nowadays, the need for learning is continuous and life long. In times gone by, a person could have a job for a life time, in his or her town of residence and the planning for that could be done easily.

Nowadays, the question of guidance is absolutely crucial on account of the growing need for qualifications and competences needed to secure a job. Academic learning and professional knowledge have become an obligatory prerequisite for every form of professional integration.

Taking Cyprus as an example, on one hand we are very pleased to be included in the top 3 countries in Europe with the highest percentage of university studentsⁱ; however, the average rate of unemployment in young graduates is much higher compared to the average rate of total unemployment. In September 2012, the unemployment rate of young people aged 15-24 reached the alarming figure of 22,4%.

The above situation represents a paradox that needs to be addressed urgently. The career options of young people must become better synchronized and lead to a successful match with the existing vocational opportunities in Cyprus and in Europe in general.

For the Cypriot Government the application of policies concerning life long career guidance constitutes an on going engagement. The new socio-economic environment, the international economic crisis, in combination with the new needs of the Cyprus economy in human capital, demand the provision of quality guidance services that will enable people to be well informed and to self-manage their lives and careers. The pillars of our intervention towards this goal include:

- Valid and reliable information concerning occupational decisions during the course of secondary education.
- Reliable information on the developments in the Cyprus economy and the labour market.
- Life long advisory support during all critical phases of the decision-making process, not only during the course of the initial education, but also after their entry into the labour market.

Towards the implementation of the above mentioned objectives and in the framework of services provided by the Ministry of Labor and Social Insurance and more specifically by the Public Employment Services, citizens have the possibility of using the Specialized Advisory Services and the Individualized Approach method offered by the PES. These services are provided by a network of Employment Counselors using suitably shaped tools and techniques for the professional integration and activation of all jobseekers into the labor market.

Furthermore, since 2003, the EUROGUIDANCE Centre is operating in the Department of Labour. The main mission of EUROGUIDANCE Cyprus is the provision of qualitative information to all citizens concerning education and training opportunities throughout Europe while trying to provide an insight view in the current situation of the labour market needs.

The European Lifelong Guidance Policy Network, also represents a major development in support of the national lifelong guidance policy development in Europe. The ultimate aim of the ELGPN is to provide added value to the participating countries for the development and implementation of their lifelong guidance policies, systems and services.

For Cyprus, the ELGPN network acted as a catalyst for the creation of a National Forum for Life Long Guidance. A proposal to establish a National Lifelong Guidance Forum has been approved by the Ministerial Council in 2009. The Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Labour and Social Insurance are currently holding detailed discussions in order to launch the Forum later this year

Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am sure that your discussions will produce some very interesting findings on the issue of guidance. I wish you all a very fruitful and successful discussion and once again I welcome you all to Larnaca.

ⁱ 2007 Eurostat figures