

**2<sup>nd</sup> Convention of the Platform against Poverty and  
Social Exclusion  
Brussels, 5-7 December**

**Opening Statement by  
the Cyprus Minister of Labour and Social Insurance,  
Ms Sotiroula Charalambous, on behalf of H.E. the  
President of the Republic of Cyprus,  
Mr. Demetris Christofias**

Mr. President of the European Council  
Mr. President of the European Commission  
Honorable Members of the European Parliament  
Distinguished Participants, Ladies and Gentlemen

First of all, I would like to convey the greetings of the President of the Republic of Cyprus, Mr. Demetris Christofias, and express his regret that he was unable to accept the invitation to participate in the opening session of this important Convention.

The President has asked me to read his address on his behalf.

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The Second Convention of the Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion is taking place at a critical time - five years into the crisis. A crisis that started as a financial crisis and soon evolved into an economic crisis, an employment crisis and a social crisis, affecting the quality of life of millions of European citizens.

It is true that the European project has gone through many crises since its establishment. It seems however, that the ongoing socio-economic crisis, largely deriving from the

global economic crisis, is the greatest challenge that the European Union has ever faced. This is because the Union's prosperity and social cohesion have been significantly threatened.

The strict austerity policies implemented to address the crisis, are not simply proving incapable of resolving the problems, but have exacerbated them. Austerity policies alone lead to the dismantlement of the welfare state and strangle growth. **The economy and sustainable development should serve society. The resulting wealth should be shared more equitably. The chosen approach cannot be "socializing losses and privatizing profits." We cannot through our policies put the weight of the current crisis on the shoulders of those who barely earn a living. Ordinary citizens of European Union Member States are the last to blame for the inherent weaknesses of the Economic and Monetary Union. In any event, we have a moral and political obligation to apportion the burden of the crisis equitably and, most certainly, protect the financially and socially vulnerable groups.**

Allow me to express my deep shock each time images of people waiting in queues at the shelters in Europe for a portion of food are shown on TV. And how frequently such images are shown! It is offensive at the very least, for any of us, to tolerate such a situation. We cannot stand idly by while a large section of the European population is led to social exclusion and reduced to poverty. It is imperative thus, to expand and strengthen the ***Most Deprived Persons Programme*** through the use of public intervention stocks of agricultural products. In this regard, I would like to commend the Commission and President Barroso for their commitment and efforts.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

In times of economic recession and the imposition of austerity measures, it is particularly important to develop an adaptable, dynamic and modern **social flank of the EU**, which will moderate changes in our societies and economies and enhance social cohesion. Social protection and social services must be regarded as useful economic stabilizers and their efficiency and effectiveness must be strengthened.

Let me underline that we have worked hard at the Council to improve the way the European Union manages the crisis. Recognizing the importance of consolidation of public finances, structural reforms and targeted investments for sustainable development, the European Council agreed, in June 2012, on a "Compact for Growth and Employment". In this context, Member States are called upon to engage in differentiated and growth-friendly fiscal policies for the future, to promote development and competitiveness, to fight unemployment and to effectively address the social impact of the crisis.

This approach is fully in line with the Cyprus Presidency's overarching priority to work towards a "Better Europe", giving emphasis to promoting growth and job creation, in parallel with solidarity and social cohesion. These aims are particularly relevant in view of the economic crisis. Without placing emphasis on *both* growth *and* combatting poverty, we will not achieve the goal of a competitive Europe of innovation, a Europe of solidarity and cohesion, a Europe for all.

Dear friends,

The success of the Europe 2020 Strategy depends on an integrated and coherent approach between all relevant policy areas: social, employment and economic policies. However, the goal to reduce poverty by 2020, which was set as a quantified target of at least 20 million people, seems grim nowadays. Member States have to manage difficult but at the same time important challenges. One of these challenges is to preserve the momentum gained throughout the years in the field of social policy. We believe a message of commitment for promoting strong social policy is an important social investment in itself.

The Commission's Communication on the European Platform against Poverty and Social Exclusion **brought commitment**. The announcement of an Annual Convention providing opportunities to all relevant actors to review the state-of-play with regard to the poverty target, to share experiences and inspire future actions **brought a vision**. The **forthcoming Social Package** of the European Commission, in conjunction with other actions announced in the 2013 Commission's Work Programme, can bring the **necessary concrete actions** that will facilitate inclusive growth.

We strongly believe that the success of the Europe 2020 Strategy depends on the active involvement of all sections of society. This is why a key priority of the Cyprus Presidency is the strengthening of the participatory processes and the involvement of NGOs, local authorities and the social partners in the implementation of the Europe 2020 Strategy, especially as regards the employment and poverty targets.

Civil society must work in partnership with governments in order to conceptualize and implement successful reforms that deal effectively with the social consequences of the crisis. This is why I fully support the initiative to provide, through this Convention, a forum for consultation on the forthcoming Social Investment Package of the European Commission.

In closing, I would like to wish all participants of this important Convention fruitful deliberations and look forward to receiving information about the outcome, which will be fed into the forthcoming Social Investment Package.

[President's Opening Statement. Convention against Poverty and Social Exclusion. 5.12.12]