

Conference Presentations

1st Plenary Session

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Thank you very much for your invitation, to this Conference and this meeting. I am going to talk to you on behalf of the Greek Ombudsman. As you know, it is not part of the public sector, it is not part of the mechanisms of political life but it is an independent office and practically facilitates the relationship between the states and the citizen in order to protect the rights of the citizens. I am going to talk to you about the implementation of the legislation in promoting the employment of people with disabilities, as we discover them in Greece. Obviously we see many things outside our field and we see what's going on around us in our society, but I am going to talk to you specifically on the issues that we have examined in our office.

First of all, the issue of having access to the social life in Greece and to work is not something only for disabled people, it's something for the society. It's not the problem of the disabled person, it's the problem of the society, and we as an organization and of all the people that want to be active in this field should try to implement, to try to convince politicians, to take actions in this issue, in this framework, in this perspective. Our office wants to emphasize the fact that we in Greece will have the revised constitution from 2001 in which it is stated that one of the basic aims on this, is to take measures, for autonomy and employment inclusion and social participation of people with disabilities. In the social life our constitution explicitly says in a very well written text that the problem that we are talking about today, and that many people that have talked about in the past, is the problem of democracy. I don't think that anyone would disagree with me that we are not talking about charity. Perhaps some people would like to help and this would be important in cases where there is no republic but today in the E.U, in our country this is a political problem, it is a problem of democracy and nothing else.

In this framework and through the work we have managed in our office, after some accusations of people with special needs, we come to some conclusions, and have some recommendations. This policy in Greece, in a few words is to have compulsory appointment of people with special needs. That's what we do here in Greece, that's how we promote the disabled people here in Greece, I will repeat again the compulsory appointments of the disabled people in the public sector, or in some private sectors. So the conclusion is that this process is designed to have a social impact and protects the rights of the people with special needs and promotes their rights in employment. It is, practically, a bureaucratic and ineffective procedure for everyone involved, for the social workers, for people with special needs, for the businesses and for the state as well.

The public sector, through this procedure, tries very hard with a bureaucratic cost and with the investment of this whole system in time, and with a very complex process, but in the end, what we have, is ineffective measures. So I can assure you that there will be no violations of legality by the state and I can assure you that the state tries very hard and invests in this effort but there is no resort, no outcome from this legislation and these efforts. It's just a reason to have a more deterioration in the relationship between the state and the citizen and nothing else.

Now about the businesses this is a very bad and hateful measure - they hate it because it is compulsory, and it has led them in practice, not to follow this measure. They react and every time that they have to appoint a person and fire a person with special needs they react to that. For the people themselves with special needs, because as you can understand a very small percentage of jobs is covered by this procedure, this whole atmosphere has proven to be quite ineffective, they blame the state for that. In a very schematic way the problems are that the jobs do not surely respond neither to the real needs - sometimes we have jobs in the public sector, for example we have five jobs in business but they are not really needed. We have the ministry saying that we have specific jobs in the public sector for disabled people, but this is not really true and the people with disabilities understand that, that they are not really needed in the business or in the public sector. Or we have another case, that through the procedure the appointment of people was carried out through a very bureaucratic way and many times they were cancelled afterwards and practically the disabled people did not have any job.

Our office has some suggestions and recommendations to the competence of industry within the existing framework of the policies of employment. Of course as you can understand, we are not a governmental organization or government agency so we just have some recommendations to offer. Of course, they are unconstitutional laws and directives from the EU that really recommends the progress of this policy but we feel that we should clear that part as well.

First of all the enhancement of the procedures and processes, we recommend that they should be better explained, better written and describe the priorities towards the disabled people. Nowadays we have a very complicated process and procedure and nobody really understands what's going on. Nobody understands why this person is chosen and not the other person, so I am not going to tire you with all the practical recommendations that we have done. Another thing that we have said is that there should be some responsible persons in the idea of who chooses whom for the specific job.

Up to now no one has these responsibilities, even when they recognize that there is a problem in hiring this person. We are not really needed in the public sector, no one takes the responsibility for doing that. So, being accountable to the state and to the organizations and the partnerships. We also would like to see that the law should be implemented at a quicker rate. First of all, we would like to harmonize the Greek legislation into the policy of the employment and the European directive for equality in employment.

The directive 78 /2000 anticipates measures for the inclusion of disabled people for logical adaptations at the work place for the disabled people.

Here in Greece, we don't have a correspondence between the skills and the jobs needed, there is no process in really understanding the correspondence between the skills and the jobs and according to the law when a disabled person is appointed, the only person responsible and accountable for naturally covering the needs of the specific job is the same, the disabled person, no one knows, not the public sector, not the businessmen, not the business that fired or appointed this person but no one else, only the disabled person.

Everybody knows that here in Greece the disabled person takes all the responsibility and if he does not succeed in this job, he is a fired.

Another thing, as a counter-balance to these measures and all the adaptations that the state has to implement in order to promote people with disabilities in the labor market. Today the businesses take a grant from the state in order to take disabled people. The business itself, when it stops being supported financially by the state may say that "I don't want to take a disabled person anymore, I am going to fire him so we should not think according to the lines of the financial issues only, but there is the idea of the corporate social responsibility of the specific businesses and there is also specific laws and regulations of the Greek state that covered these issues in participating in the states of law.

The legislation, the legal persons should think of adopting employment practices in Greece that would divide autonomies, because here in Greece we have a very weak framework. Developmental partnerships and I am thinking of Cooperativa Sociale that exists in Italy. Here in Greece we don't have it but there are a very restricted number and only for people with learning difficulties and we believe that these partnerships should be supported by legislation. The possibilities of the existing legislation, of the compulsory appointments as far as they can improve, they can not lead to anything. The request for the inclusion into the labour market of the disabled people should have as a principle that it's not a problem of the disabled, it is a problem of democracy, a problem of the society, a problem of everyone. Thank you.