

Conference Presentations

Gala Dinner Speeches

Ms Efi Kalliga, (Greece), President, Social Work Foundation - IKE

Good evening, it is an honour. Secondly thanks to our guests who came from outside Greece to share their experience with us and their knowledge.

You must have been informed of the programme and some names on it. May, as you know, is very thick with such events. Particularly this year, on account of the Greek presidency, we have seen an epidemic of such events. So it is not strange that both the Greek Commissioner and the Minister of Labour are unfortunately (and in spite of their interest) unavailable because they are engaged in Rhodes as well as other government officials. They communicated their interest with us in the conclusion of tomorrow's session.

Our foreign guests - perhaps they are not aware of the difficulties we encounter - joined actions and particularly within Proteus. I would say that Proteus with respect to Greek standards is a unique organization not only because of the great numbers of partners participating (there are 16 partners involved) co-operating for one and the same project. Proteus is unique because of its size and of the eminence of the partners. So we rarely see such a kind of co-operation among our eminent partners. However there are difficulties.

However the fruitful results are here and explained. My explanation is the invaluable targets and aim that this partnership tries to serve. It is really hopeful that all the participants agree that we have gone beyond the stage of trying to change the attitudes in Greece. And we have set the foundation for the conditions so that the disabled can catch up with the rest of the working population.

One of our targets concerns the aims and methodologies that will help the disabled integrate into society into mainstream life, with access to jobs specifically with very good terms and long-term prospects. In respect of whether our intentions of the initiatives are humanistic or practical, what is important is the joined goals and the positive results.

We should mention that such needs and policies have been adopted by the European Union and are at the stage of implementation in co-operation with the competent ministries of the member states. We are grateful on the assistance and support from all sources. Without this support our effort wouldn't have gone so far. Proteas co-operates also with two countries and organization of those countries. One country is Ireland and the other is Denmark, a representative of Denmark is here this evening and he is a co-organizer of the conference tomorrow. The inter-state character provides options to enrich knowledge and our possibilities. It is the beginning of a new effort.

I will not take much of your time for more details. I have to admit that it's very important and will agree on this that tomorrow's conference is an exception to the prevailing climate. It is not only a "firework conference" for the benefit of the disabled. It is a conference organized with the aim to exchange experiences to deepen into the problems and draw valuable conclusions to help us promote our thoughts and our knowledge and the main subject that we are elaborating to serve our target to bring into the mainstream jobs as many disabled people suffering of this problem as possible.

Let me remind you and say to many who don't know that in Greece, the population, the statistics, demographics are very disheartening and of course we encounter the same feeling with the marginalized people and we should not allow the disabled to stay in the margins of society. These people are very young, highly qualified and they should be allowed to enter in the mainstream society and life. We should not marginalize them.

This is the practical side of the issue. It is very important, I think. And I am sure that tomorrow we will all have the chance to follow the discussion to enrich our knowledge and find the opportunity to break new ground into finding the means to help the disabled: The people who, perhaps, it was not their own doing to find themselves in the margins of society, and they are able to serve society on equal terms.

Thank you very much.