

## **Opening Speech**

### **Joint Meeting of Expert Group for the UNECE Conference on Ageing and Task Force *Monitoring RIS (Regional Implementation Strategy)***

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is my pleasure and privilege to welcome you to the Joint Meeting of the Expert Group for the UNECE Conference on Ageing and the Task Force *Monitoring the Regional Implementation Strategy*, which is to follow up the implementation of the objectives under the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) in the UNECE region.

The Madrid International Plan of Action has taken a major step in effectively responding to the issues of population ageing in international co-ordination. The countries of the UNECE region, where the process of population ageing is most advanced, agreed on a Regional Implementation Strategy (RIS) at the Ministerial Conference on Ageing in Berlin in September 2002. The adopted Ministerial Declaration and the Regional Implementation Strategy include a concrete catalogue of measures in the form of ten commitments.

The United Nations call on the regional commissions, in our case the Economic Commission for Europe with its 56 member states, review and appraise implementation of these commitments at member states' national level and evaluate achievements within the ECE-Region. The regional commissions will convene regional conferences in 2007 to consider the findings of national reviews, share experiences and good practices and identify priorities for future action.

In this context we have to thank the Government of Spain for hosting the UNECE Conference on Ageing in November 2007, which will conclude the first five-year cycle of review and appraisal of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing in the UNECE region.

In preparation for this conference, the UNECE secretariat is establishing an Expert Group, which is expected to provide policy advice and expert assistance to the intergovernmental Preparatory Committee of the Conference. One particular outcome should be a background paper on the achievements regarding implementation and priorities for future action, proposals for key areas and topics for the political declaration and agenda items for discussion at the 2007 UNECE Conference on Ageing.

Austria is very proud that this Expert Group is mainly based on experts of the Task Force *Monitoring RIS*, which traces back to an Austrian initiative to assist the UNECE secretariat in its mandate. Therefore, it was our request to invite all members of the Task Force to take part in the constituting meeting of the Expert Group.

On this occasion, let me express my gratitude to all the members of the Task Force for your work and for representing such an indispensable think tank on our demographic future for the benefit of all generations. Your commitment provides a strong impetus and a model for all as to how demographic challenges should be tackled in politics and society.

We are looking forward to presenting the results of your work on the Website "MonitoringRIS" where all member states will be invited to publish their implementation activities and good practices with the assistance of the European Centre for Social Welfare Policy and Research.

For the implementation of policies on ageing, Austria especially encourages the bottom-up approach. Older persons' participation in policy formulation and their own definition of quality of life has to be respected and ensured. Also within the European Strategy on Social protection and Social inclusion a comprehensive approach is used by the integrated Open Method of Coordination. The member states are highly recommended to involve the social partners and all relevant stakeholders of the civil society in the development of their national strategies.

Last week we have accepted the new Joint Report on Social Protection and Social Inclusion at the level of European Ministers. The key messages of this report could also be highly relevant to the development of strategies at the international level. A

mutual cooperation and interaction between these different levels could improve the effectiveness of all measures set at the national level.

Let me now outline some main topics of interest.

For several years I have been responsible for social affairs in the province of Salzburg. I am fully aware of challenges and opportunities of ageing societies. I will therefore dedicate my strong effort to joint solutions at national, regional and local level.

As a rich and highly developed country, Austria is faced with the responsibility of guaranteeing that nobody is excluded from its wealth. Therefore, one of the first measures in the new government's fight against poverty and particularly one of my own departments' priorities will be the introduction of a demand-oriented minimum income in cooperation with the provincial governments of the *Laender*.

One piece of legislation serving as a model for this measure is the Equalisation Supplement for older people drawing a low pension, which has been raised to € 726.—, with 14 payments per year, in 2007.

Traditionally, Austria has had an excellent system of social security for its aging citizens. The new Federal Government is now introducing modifications where these reforms were leading to social hardships.

A major point of interest is the employability of older people: work incentives must be improved; employers must be encouraged to hire and retain older workers; and the employability of older workers must be strengthened. Thus, a co-ordinated and comprehensive package of age-friendly employment measures and policies is required, which should be developed and implemented jointly by government, employers, trade unions and civil society.

Our measures of support for family members providing long-term care accord with the obligations formulated in the International Plan of Action on Aging in the ECE region. In line with the process of tackling problems from the bottom up, the needs and problems of the people concerned are sorted out directly at the base, i.e., at their homes. An improvement of the social protection offered to this group – will include a

complete assumption of liability for the payment of their contributions towards pension insurance, as well as a provision of house-calls by certified nursing staff, available from long-term care level IV onwards. My first measure on entering into office was the introduction of a special benefit for family members of persons suffering from dementia so that they could take a vacation from their nursing duties and finance a replacement for this period.

One of my most important objectives is the formulation of a good solution under social security law for around-the-clock care for people in need of long-term nursing at home, in conjunction with the governments of the Laender, local authorities, the Labour Minister, the Social Partners and the NGOs.

For me the concept of “mainstreaming aging” means creating an awareness of a positive view of aging, where older people contribute their experiences to the community as active participants. Active aging requires education, free spaces of the mind and the body, and interdisciplinary exchange and the full potential of our human creativity.

For this, in turn, we will need a more powerful linked international effort, with multilateral input, with a greater exchange of experiences and comprehensive networking.

The UNECE conference on Ageing will be a good opportunity to identify common priorities for future action.

Let me wish you the best of success for the joint Expert and Task Force Meeting!