

Presentation of main conclusions/ recommendations of the Summit

The summit's theme "promoting equality for growth" has during the past two days been discussed and examined through the different plenary panels and the parallel sessions, not to forget during the breaks, lunches and the dinner last night.

A diversity of thoughts, opinions and experiences has been expressed and exchanged.

Promoting equality for growth – is without doubt a relevant discussion when we are finding ourselves in the midst of an economic crisis – which as quite a few people mentioned yesterday is turning out to be a crisis of human rights.

But I can detect a note of optimism and enthusiasm in the discussions, the concrete examples of good practice and in the suggestions made – despite the dire situation.

One message that came through yesterday was that standing together in solidarity and with our fundamental rights in hand – we can overcome the crisis. We all have a responsibility – the Commission, Member States, equality bodies, social partners and NGO's – everyone!

And as it was also said yesterday – it is not enough to look outside our own realm – it is not enough to look for what others can do. We need to look inside our own to see what we are doing in our own organisations, institutions etc. to promote equality as effectively as possible.

On the subject of employment and social inclusion and how equality and accessibility policies contribute to EU 2020 Strategy – it was questioned whether the crisis and the austerity measures had in fact had an effect in reaching the targets for 2020 Strategy.

The endeavours to promote equality to integrate groups at risk of discrimination in the labour market, addressing the specific issues of different vulnerable groups and poverty on micro level are rich.

However one should not be blind to the fact that the effectiveness of these endeavours is reduced due to what is happening on the macro level.

Austerity policies that cut social benefits of the most vulnerable; cut in pensions of those who have only the meagre pension to live for, reduction of rights of the vulnerable groups by not providing reasonable accommodation; and labour market policies that in effect work against equality, reduce the effectiveness of the good work.

The good work should continue despite what is going on macro level – it was said – yes but there are limits as to how long these endeavours can carry on. Decision makers at all levels have to wake up – and maybe brush up on their contemporary history of Europe – especially those of the 1930s: violation of the fundamental rights, greater inequalities and greater poverty will not lead to growth and prosperity – on the contrary – it leads to social unrest, disillusion and maybe even to collapse.

Education is another area that was addressed yesterday. How can contribution of equality and accessibility contribute to reaching the EU 2020 Strategy targets regarding education?

Education is a fundamental right of all citizens. But it is not enough just to have access – once in the system they have to have the enjoyment of that right. As it was said yesterday education is most probably the strongest tool we have to promote social inclusion.

It is a vital area where equality must be promoted in order to ensure equal opportunities for all to become active citizens. Education systems and the teachers that work within them- whether primary, secondary or higher level – must be heavily invested in so that they are geared to tackle diversity and inclusion in the class room and in the schools as such. They must understand the value of equality and the fundamental rights of the children and youngsters they are responsible for in order to facilitate substantive inclusion.

Axel Honneth the German philosopher writes that recognition of rights entails the recognition of the individual for whom they are and for what they can contribute – only then we can speak of inclusion.

Therefore it should be remembered that if the teacher's experience that they are not recognised for the work they are doing, that they are not receiving reasonable wages and have poor working conditions without the possibility of further education – then they most probably will not have a terrible understanding of the value of equality and the fundamental rights of the children and youngsters and their inclusion!

Equality legislation as a driver for growth is another issue when it comes to reaching EU 2020 strategy targets.

Now coming from a national human rights and equality body – I appreciate EU's anti-discrimination legislation.

But there is still work to be done to make the legislation more inclusive and effective by including groups of people vulnerable to discrimination not yet covered, by getting the horizontal directive adopted. And by including provisions for multiple discrimination and positive duty and better instruments to combat institutional discrimination.

The existing legislation is however workable despite its shortcomings

We all have a responsibility to make the legislation work but Equality bodies play a particularly important role in making it work.

Equality bodies in particular should make the link between the different stakeholders and between the duty bearers and the rights holders. And focus of these partnerships should be on effective implementation, raising awareness on rights and on making the business case for promotion of equality.

Strong and independent equality bodies are imperative and we need to find the right tools to protect the effectiveness of the equality bodies and their independence.

Where to from here?

One thing is for sure we have to continue the good work and trudge on to try and reach the EU 2020 Strategy targets – but we will achieve it by working together – through greater partnership involving all stakeholders – and link the micro and macro.

We will get there by learning from each other and from other fields who can be of inspiration to us.

The business case must be made both for the individuals who currently lack access to labour or their fundamental rights as such but also as many speakers rightly emphasized the business case also benefits to economic growth. We need to evolve our arguments.

So too, for equality polices and legislation.

We advocate for equality for the disadvantaged groups who currently face discrimination and cannot access and enjoy their rights.

But we also need to argue for the value of equality for everyone in European societies. The European social model requires public support for equality, and we must continue to argue for the wider benefits of equality so that European governments will implement policies that can achieve the 2020 goals.

This summit has proved that a lot is being done. It has shown and illustrated that we do have the arguments. But we have to make sure that those who have to hear the message hear it, comprehend it and act on it.

For some odd reason the work done by all of us is not disseminated to the public at large – that we can and should do more of. We have a tendency to talk among ourselves with our selves about *them* – we have to make these academic exercises more a language of the every day and available to those we want to reach.

We need the public to understand – that promoting equality is not only to protect the vulnerable but the whole society - and that if the vulnerable groups are subject to discrimination – everyone is at risk.

I think I will conclude by emphasizing that what makes fundamental rights universal, indivisible and interlinked –is the principle of equality and non-discrimination. And I believe that it is important to remind ourselves of that fact in order to make more fulfil the European Dream ☺