

PUBLIC SERVICES MEETING MIGRANTS

EUROMEDITERRANEAN PROJECT ON THE ROLE OF PUBLIC SERVICES DEALING WITH MIGRATION

1st CONFERENCE – BARI, MARCH 1, 2010.

Dear guests, colleagues and friends,

First of all I would like to thank you for accepting the invitation to take part in today's conference, which launches the Euromediterranean Project on the role of public services dealing with migration.

Firstly, my sincere thanks go to President Vendola and the Regional Council of Puglia, not just for their hospitality and for organising this meeting, but above all because over the course of the day we will be able to learn about the experience of Puglia. An experience that we look forward to presenting in the research report which we will be working on over the coming months, because it represents "good practice" to be promoted and at the same time represents the hope, even in times as difficult as these, that inclusive policies that respect human rights can be an element of social cohesion that will improve the wellbeing of local communities.

I would also like to thank President Pendon Muñoz from the Provincial Council of Malaga, who will be with us right up until our final Conference for this project, which will take place in Malaga next October.

We are unions which represent public service workers in Portugal, Spain, France, Italy, Malta, Greece, Cyprus, Israel, Tunisia and Algeria and we have never believed that our representative role is solely based on the defence of the salaries and working conditions of our members. On the contrary, we strongly believe that it is fundamental to defend public work and public services to ensure that everyone has access to the rights of citizenship and to reduce inequalities, principally for those people who are unable to enjoy the alluring promises of the free market and those, of whom there are many more, pushed towards unacceptable levels of poverty by competitive globalisation until they are denied their human dignity and whose only hope is to leave their own country to seek their fortune in richer countries and, in this case, Europe.

Migration affects all continents and in many countries, as our friends in Algeria and Tunisia can tell us, immigration and emigration intersect leading to complex social problems that require our attention.

It is the global nature of the phenomenon of migration, the intersection of migratory flows, which makes coordinated action necessary, by unions too, and it is for this reason that the role of collaboration and coordination in the research provided by PSI and EPSU is important.

Last Thursday the Italian Court of Cassation issued a decision which established that illegal immigrants must be deported even if their children live in Italy and attend school there.

Reversing a ruling made on the same topic just two months ago, it stated that border security takes precedence over the natural right of all children to receive love, attention and parental care to ensure their balanced physical and psychological development, as well as that no less important right of a parent to exercise parental authority, to bring up and educate their children, as enshrined in numerous national and international laws, starting with the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

It is possible that this radical change of direction by the Court of Cassation is simply the result of the different leanings of different ruling judges.

My fear, however, is that this ruling was influenced less by legal efficacy but rather by the Berlusconi government's "Security Package", and therefore more worryingly represents a cultural and ideological shift, which is in response to the alleged threat to national identity and values represented by migrants, and which humiliates those who are different from us and denies them all rights, even human rights.

The UN Human Rights Council was quick to condemn the ruling, as it did previously following the introduction of the crime of clandestine immigration by the "Security Package", and again last summer after hundreds of migrants and refugees were sent back to Libya, while so many other lives were swallowed up by the waters of the Mediterranean, the *mare nostrum*.

Our sea, the sea of the people who have populated its banks, who have crossed it, at times in search of conquests, at others to satisfy a thirst for knowledge, which for thousands of years has provided trade routes and access to profitable meetings and exchanges which have enhanced the civilisations of the countries that face each other and enriched the common traditions and histories of our nations.

A month ago TV channels worldwide broadcast images of a ruthless hunt for a "black man" which seemed like a repeat of "Mississippi Burning".

But this was not Jessup County and the year was not 1964.

This was a report about a day in Rosarno, a Calabrian farming town in the Italy of 2010, where the scandal did not arise from the fact that hundreds of men live like animals in filthy hovels without water or electricity, working like slaves - unofficially of course - but rather from the fact that they were protesting because they can no longer bear to live in those conditions.

The local people know about it and businessmen – this is the technical term, but it would be more fitting to call them slave drivers – told TV journalists that it is normal to employ immigrants under these conditions, otherwise they can not keep up with the competition, meanwhile the Italian Minister of the Interior calls for zero tolerance for "clandestine immigrants" and organised crime makes money out of what by now has become a veritable traffic in human beings reduced to slavery.

And let's not forget that this racist frenzy is being fed by the Security Decree which requires civil servants to report any illegal immigrants who try to get access to public services.

This is the description of a country, unfortunately our own, which has lost its capacity to welcome people, which has lost the historical memory of centuries of emigration to the rest of Europe, the Americas and Australia, where solidarity, ethics and equality are considered unforgiveable weaknesses and selfishness, violence, repression and the violation of rights are considered the right and proper response to alleged invasion by new barbarians.

In Brescia, the city where I was born, 17% of the population are foreign residents as a result of immigration which dates back to the 1970s.

It used to have an efficient network of services for migrants, who were perfectly integrated in the social and urban fabric, so much so that they were included in the European Commission's "CLIP Project".

One of the first acts of the new right-wing Council was to close the Immigration Office, together with a new regulation for council accommodation which prevents immigrants from being allocated council housing, a resolution which excludes foreign children from the financial benefits provided to the children of residents and another which bans foreigners from sitting on park benches. All of these measures were contested by the union.

All of the newspapers mentioned operation "White Christmas" by the mayor of Coccaglio: this consisted of a house-to-house search for all foreigners without a residence permit, which resulted in over 100 expulsions over the course of a week. An easy result at a time when the first people to

pay the price for the financial crisis are immigrants who, once they have lost their job, lose their residence permit, and without a residence permit become illegal immigrants!

But repressive policies will not stop millions of people from fleeing war, poverty, financial crises and climate change.

Over the last decade Mediterranean countries have experienced an increase in migratory flows, both of migrants and asylum seekers.

A study by the International Centre for Migration Policy Development revealed that 120,000 migrants cross the Mediterranean every year, 80% of whom set off from southern shores via Libya. From 2002 - 2003 there were 14,000 sightings at sea from Italy, 11,000 from Spain, almost 5,000 from Cyprus and 4,000 from Greece.

In the first nine months of 2006 there were 25,000 landings on the Canary Islands, 17,000 in Italy and 1,500 in Malta. In the same period Greece intercepted 900 people arriving by sea and arrested 28,700 illegal immigrants within its borders.

It is also estimated that 2,000 people drown every year while trying to reach Europe.

These cold statistics conceal the drama of the men and women in question, but give us information about a growing phenomenon which is adding the presence of these people in our countries to that of the migrants who arrived through government programmes.

In our opinion, this requires a proactive stance on the part of national governments and inclusive choices in local government policies, as they make demands on public services.

If it is true, as we say, that public services are the place where the rights of people are fulfilled, they must be capable of adapting quickly to the significant changes produced by globalisation, and must be able to meet the fundamental rights of the new citizens coming to our cities.

It was by studying the situation in the countries where our unions operate that some of us decided, four years ago, that it was necessary to bring the topic of migration to the attention of EPSU as one of the subjects on which to concentrate negotiations and the union's initiatives, including in public services.

It was not an easy task: unions from some countries showed signs of underestimating the problem, which was also due to the different nature and quality of the phenomenon of migration in the 27 Member States of the European Union.

However, well before the financial crisis, immigration was already an emergency throughout Europe, a clear sign that the globalisation of the economy had already carved out a deep divide between rich and poor nations. This emergency presented our governments and our societies with entirely new problems in defining policies and organising services.

Guaranteeing the health of migrants, the education of their children, providing them with a home, helping them enter the world of work and ensuring their right to a pension are only the most obvious of those needs which local governments and public services ought to be able to resolve.

What is more, many migrants are employed by public services (health and social services in particular), often for salaries and under working conditions that are clearly inferior to those of the native population, and they ask us for protection, at least when the threat of dismissal is not so great as to also deny them the right to join the union.

These are all topics which we addressed two years ago in the EPSU annual conference on collective bargaining, and which, in June 2009, the Mediterranean group presented in the resolution approved unanimously by the EPSU Congress.

This was an important sign in the congress which merged the EPSU and the PSI: that of a European union which honours its tradition of solidarity by opening itself up to discussion and dialogue with the rest of the world, often with those less fortunate, and in this way coming together on a field of action with regard to which the PSI has been heavily involved for many years.

Nadja Salson will tell us how the decisions of the congress are translating into directions for action for the union, and will present the results of the first seminar on migration held by EPSU in Athens in conjunction with the Global Forum on Migration and Development.

The project we are presenting today seeks to investigate how our countries are preparing to meet the challenge of multi-ethnic coexistence under the banner of solidarity, first of all by starting to map out the laws of the European Union and those of the countries participating in the project.

Among those objectives we have outlined, and which we will describe in detail in this afternoon's workshops, the principal ones involve:

- the identification of specific sectors in which public service employees in each country can achieve a higher operative level and those in which there are failings, seeking to identify the underlying causes;
- an evaluation of professional training with regard to problems linked to the migration of public workers who work in contact with migrants.
- the identification of specific training paths for public employees linked to the subjects of migration and asylum seekers.

To achieve these objectives, in each participating country we will identify a sample of public bodies and public administrations with whom we can extend our research using a questionnaire, to spread and promote good practices, but also to highlight the effects that policies of exclusion can have on the social fabric and the work environment, where such situations are encountered.

However, the project also aims to implement the initiatives that the union adopts to help migrants, attempting to analyse our choices regarding hiring, our ability to include migrants in union activities and to ensure they are fully represented.

This could be useful for us if, at the same time, we are able to strengthen cooperation and solidarity between our unions through the coordination of policies and actions to defend the rights of migrants in all phases of their journey, from arrival to insertion in employment, from integration in the host country to repatriation and reinsertion in their country of origin.

And with the support of the PSI it will be interesting to be able to meet unions from other regions, particularly the Inter-American region, which includes the native countries of many workers who are employed in public services in Portugal, Spain and Italy and who are facing these same problems.

I am convinced that if we complete the study and the project we will have taken an important step, particularly if in the process we are able to form alliances with those responsible administrators which, like the Region of Puglia and the Provincial Council of Malaga, are working to improve living conditions for all those who live in their communities.

In this way we may be able to expand collaboration with the many associations and NGOs that carry out such valuable work in aiding and welcoming migrants, all too often as a substitute for an absent general public.

Achieving these objectives will not change the world or eliminate inequality, but I hope that doing so can make a small contribution to reducing injustice and slowing the drift of the European social

model, which is also put to the test by migratory processes on the banks of the Mediterranean - an achievement from which our unions will not refrain.

Thank you.

Speech by Rosa Pavanelli, FP-CGIL National secretary, 16 March 2010

U:\06 - COMMUNICATIONS AND PRESS\speeches, presentations & articles\migration-migrantsrights