



Social Platform conference

“How the Cyprus EU Presidency will respond to the social consequences of the EU crisis”

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Anthoula Papadopoulou: KISA’s priorities for the Cypriot Presidency

Dear colleagues and friends

[thank you to SP for organising the conference and opportunity for Cypriot NGOs to engage in dialogue and exchange with European NGOs on the Cyprus Presidency]

In the context of the priorities of my organisation, KISA, the oldest NGO in Cyprus working in the areas of migration, asylum, anti-racism, anti-discrimination, anti-trafficking and for human rights of all, irrespective of nationality or ethnicity, colour, creed or gender, sexual orientation, or any other diversity, allow me to give a very brief outline, mainly for the benefit of our friends from abroad, of the migration model, the policies and structural setup in place in Cyprus.

There are currently some 180.000 migrants, about half of whom are European citizens (from Greece or of Greek origin, Romania, Bulgaria, Britain, Poland, Slovakia, Germany, Latvia), and the other half are from third countries (largest communities from the Philippines, Sri Lanka, Vietnam, but also from Bangladesh, Syria, Russia, India, China, Georgia, Ukraine, etc). Third-country nationals include migrants, refugees, beneficiaries of international protection, asylum seekers, foreign students and other temporary-staying non Cypriots. Undocumented migrants are estimated by government sources to number 20.000 – 25.000 but in view of the crisis and the systematic police crackdown operations these numbers may be lower.

Instituted in the early 1990s and still largely unchanged to date, the migration model prescribes an extremely strict, temporary stay and employment framework for migrants (initially for 6 years, since 2005 reduced to 4 years, expressly changed to render the Long Term Resident Directive almost totally unenforceable) and perceives “foreign labour” as a commodity to be “imported” and used when necessitated by Cyprus’s economy and society and disposed of when no longer required. As the migration and employment permit is inextricably linked to a specific employer and a specific job, and the prospect of changing employer, even in cases of blatant employment and human rights violations, is restricted and subject to the administration’s arbitrary discretion, migrants are totally dependent on employers, who are even licensed by the state to directly deport migrants at will and with no requirement to report the reasons for such actions. In the same context, migrants are systemically excluded, even from social cohesion and inclusion plans, while integration has up until recently been mostly confined to language learning programmes.

The migration framework, policies and practices have produced an overtly hostile environment for migrants, who are used as scapegoats and blamed for all economic and social evils. In conjunction with people’s fear and uncertainty as a result of the continuing stalemate in the Cyprus question, compounded by anxiety, decreasing living standards and high unemployment rates brought about by the economic crisis, manipulated by populist politicians for short-term electoral gains, the Church for promoting its ultra nationalist agenda, and aided and abetted by a large section of the

(right-wing) media, this environment has facilitated the emergence of ultra nationalist, neo-Nazi organisations and groupings, with anti-migrant, anti-Turkish Cypriot and racist agendas and violence. This was clearly demonstrated in the attack in November 2010 against the Rainbow Festival, the oldest and largest anti-racist multicultural event in Cyprus, organised by KISA in cooperation with migrant, human rights and bi-communal organisations. The police reacted to the attacks on the Festival with the prosecution of Doros Polykarpou, KISA's Executive Director, for rioting! What is even more disturbing is the permeation of these perceptions and sentiments of almost the whole spectrum of mainstream political system and parties, including the House of Representatives. In an unheard of political move against the government, the Cyprus parliament demanded and decided by majority that the social welfare benefits for all migrants (in effect recognised refugees, persons with subsidiary protection and asylum seekers) be controlled and sanctioned by parliament every single month!

In view of the above, which gives only a glimpse of the cruel reality that migrants in Cyprus experience daily, our priorities for the Cyprus Presidency are the following:

1. Integration of migrants

As admitted by top EU officials (eg Cecilia Malmström, the European Commissioner for Home Affairs), unless integration finds its way in the EU common migration and asylum policy at EU level and not left to member-state competence, the goals set will fail to materialise. We therefore urge the Cyprus Presidency to take a leading role in promoting and continuing the debate for the formulation of an effective integration policy as part and parcel of the common migration and asylum policy. Further, social inclusion and social cohesion measures should include migrants and specifically address their needs as a particularly special target group. We also call on the Cyprus Presidency to actively engage in the promotion of the adoption of a new Directive on discrimination and equality.

2. Migrant women

Women, especially domestic workers and others at risk of trafficking, along with children and undocumented migrants, are one of the most vulnerable groups of migrants because they are often subjected to multiple discrimination, racism and violence, including rape and trafficking, for either sexual or labour exploitation. Particularly vulnerable and confronted with serious violations of their human and labour rights are migrant domestic workers. Despite the growing feminisation of migration, migrant women remain largely invisible and their situation grossly under-reported. The landmark ILO Convention on Domestic Workers, adopted in June 2011 has given new hopes to migrant women and their supporters world-wide. We call on the Presidency to play an active role in including migrant women as a particularly vulnerable to violence group in the policy and measures for combating violence against women. In addition, we strongly urge the Cyprus Presidency to take a leading role by example in initiating the process of ratification of the ILO Convention in the EU.

thank you