

EVALUATION OF THE 4TH ASEM SOCIAL PARTNERS FORUM SOFIA, BULGARIA, 2-3 DECEMBER 2015

Although the employers could have been better prepared to negotiate joint messages to the Ministers, exchanges through emails and discussions at the venue of the SPF4 enabled us to submit two papers with "converging messages" after the employers agreed to deduct language on "high minimum wages that impede job growth" and "legal migrants", as opposed to undocumented migrants. Unions did not withdraw elements that would reduce the value of our original statement.

It was the first time that unions and employers convey some sort of messages together on all items of the agenda. Before this, an agreement was struck on the themes of discussion which comprised: supply chains, migration, youth employment and social protection.

After the exchange of opinions on the different topics and an effort to find additional areas of convergence, other than that contained in the submissions, the Vice-Prime Minister of Bulgaria and Labour Minister, Mr Kalfin, and the European Commissioner for Employment, Ms Thyssen, addressed the participants of the SPF4. Unions thanked the Commissioner for her help in getting the AELF officialised.

Ms Thyssen said that EC indeed supports granting the AELF the "ASEM Status" as part of EC's commitment to promoting social dialogue and tripartism in Europe and beyond. She also welcomed the participation of the ILO in the LEMC5. In her opening remarks to the LEMC5 she repeated her support. *"I am very pleased to welcome the representatives of business and labour. Their engagement in the ASEM labour and employment dialogue has been much appreciated and I can only support the deepening of their joint engagement in the entire ASEM process. The establishment of an ASEM Labour Forum, alongside the existing Business Forum, would facilitate this joint engagement."*

On the issues on the social partners' agenda the Commissioner said that

- migrants and refugees need to be distinguished and that although there needs to be help for both, Europe cannot house all migrants;
- youth unemployment is central on the radar of the EC with guidelines and new initiative on skills to be issued next year;
- many are stuck in precarious jobs, especially women, and we need much to clear supply chains off abusive practices. Rana Plaza has been evidence that supply chains are problematic even for responsible companies.
- despite country-specific differences, a clear consensus that covers a job-rich recovery, quality jobs and social protection has emerged between Europe and Asia

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The Sofia Declaration contained particularly positive points, especially on steps that might lead to the officialisation of the AELF but did not go as far as we wished on supply chains. The evaluation of the Ministerial Sofia Declaration is done on a separate document.