

Your excellency, ladies and gentlemen

Thank you so much for the invitation to attend this event, and for being given the opportunity to take the floor.

First of all - I would like to give praise to the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, represented here today by His Excellency ambassador Karsten Klepsvik. By giving priority to the “Global fund for decent work and tripartite dialogue”, the Norwegian authorities have contributed to an increased emphasis on social dialogue as a key to well-functioning labour market relations.

Social dialogue has the potential to resolve social issues, encourage good governance, advance industrial stability, and support economic progress.

And the results have been remarkable. In the words of former deputy minister of foreign affairs, Ingvild Stub, at the closing conference in Norway last year.

I quote:

*I am impressed by what has been achieved. A well-functioning labour market depends to a considerable extent on close cooperation between the authorities, employees and employers.*

End of quote.

Both the employer organisations and the trade unions in Norway strongly promoted the establishment of this Fund.

We know that the operators of the projects are interested in concrete results. Which is understandable.

But ironically, in this kind of work it is difficult to be so concrete that the results are easily measured. Simply because tripartite cooperation basically is a matter of trust. Trust is not easy to measure. Especially not on a day to day basis. Trust is best built over time by social partners in close cooperation. Trust is not a question of declarations or formalities. It needs to be built over years, through negotiations, through compromises and sacrifices on both sides.

The Norwegian experience is that a commitment to dialogue has helped to safeguard jobs and labour standards. This experience is something Norwegian partners have brought into the projects.

For me it is natural to refer to our own Unio experiences. Unio has been partner in two projects, with OPZZ in Poland and with SZEF in Hungary. We have been very much impressed by the professionalism and devotion from all the members of the project teams from our partner organisations. I think that this has been a key factor to the good results we have achieved.

We have had many meetings between the leadership of Unio and OPZZ, in Oslo and in Warsaw. We have discussed important topics like social dialogue, pensions, labor laws and European trade union politics. Unio and OPZZ are in touch more or less on a weekly basis.

In the EEA agreements, the objective of strengthening bilateral relations is given equal importance to the objective of reducing social and economic disparities. We have also succeeded in this aspect.

We do not view the projects only as a transfer of knowledge and experience from Norway. This is more a common platform for mutual exchange of best practice. We learn from each other. We inspire and support each other.

And social dialogue is not only a national issue. As confederations of trade unions we participate together in the European social dialogue. A successful European social dialogue needs strong participants – both trade unions and employer organisations. Strong participants who are willing to find constructive solutions together.

In the end, I would like to give credit to the project operator – Innovation Norway. The invisible hand, so to speak, behind the success of the fund. The staff of Innovation Norway, both in Norway and in the offices abroad, have done an outstanding job to facilitate the projects.

By these words I would like to express the best of luck for a future work and cooperation.