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**Statement
on behalf of the European Union
by**

**Mr. Michal Sedláček
Deputy Minister of Labour and Social Affairs of the Czech
Republic**

**on Agenda Item 3 (b): Review of relevant United Nations
plans and programmes of action
pertaining to the situation of social groups**

**at the General Discussion of the 47th Session
of the United Nations Commission for Social Development**

New York, February 6, 2009

Distinguished Chairperson,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union.

The Candidate Countries Turkey, Croatia* and the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, as well as Armenia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine align themselves with this statement.

Chairperson,

The Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and Programme of Action, adopted during the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen in 1995, represents a consensus for putting people and sustainable development at the centre of interest and promises to eradicate poverty, promote full and productive employment and to strengthen social integration as a means of achieving stable, secure and fair societies for all.

The EU confirms its full support of the UN Commission for Social Development and reaffirms its resolution to effectively implement the commitments set in Copenhagen and at the 24th special session of the UN General Assembly, as well as the commitments ensuing from internationally agreed development goals including the Millennium Development Goals. However, social development cannot be realized without the collective effort of the world community. Preservation and support of freedom and democracy, as well as promotion and protection of human rights including the special attention paid to the disadvantaged groups of people still remain the key elements of social development.

As well as in other areas, equal access to rights is the linchpin of EU policy in the field of disabilities. As fully-fledged citizens, persons with disabilities have the same rights as everybody else. They have the right to dignity, equal treatment, independent living and full participation in society. The main goal of the EU long-term strategy is to enable persons with disabilities to effectively enjoy those rights.

The most important part of the European Disability Strategy (2004-2010) is the Disability Action Plan (DAP). Until 2010, the European Commission will strive to achieve improvement related to prospects of employment, accessibility and independent living for citizens with disabilities.

In the 2008-2009 period, DAP activities are aimed to improve access for all especially with regard to employment, goods, services, and environment. The EU considers warranting accessibility as the basic prerequisite for active integration of persons with disabilities and their ability to enjoy the fundamental human rights. At the end of 2008, discussions were started on what activities should be implemented by the EU after 2010 for persons with disabilities.

The EU is convinced that the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which came into force in May of 2008, will be of high importance for the life of those people in the EU and the whole world. The document reflects all the basic elements of EU strategy in the field of disability: the fight against discrimination, equal opportunities and active inclusion. At this time, we consider it important to make sure that the principles set in the convention are supported and implemented in all the Member States.

All the EU Member States and the European Community have signed the UN Convention. The European Community is committed to protect and effectively implement the human rights of persons with

* Croatia and The Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process

disabilities enshrined in the UN Convention. Therefore, the Community and all its Member States cooperate closely with regard to the process of joint conclusion of the Convention and its practical implementation. The first joint report on progress achieved by the Community and its Member States, prepared within the EU High Level Group on Disability, was submitted to the EU Ministers responsible for disability policies and also published in 2008. Such progress reports will be made every year.

Chairperson,

The demographic ageing and increasing longevity are general features of EU demographic development. Population ageing is not a burden, but an achievement of individuals and society as a whole. Due to economic, social and scientific progress life expectancy continues to increase and, as a result, the age and intergenerational structure of families, community, work force and society are changing. Those are complex phenomena that the EU has to address with a holistic approach similarly as other global processes such as technological changes or globalisation.

The EU Member States reaffirm their commitments made in the Madrid Plan and the Berlin Regional Implementation Strategy (RIS/MIPAA) to mainstream issues of ageing and older persons into all relevant policy fields and to adjust its societies and economies to demographic change. To address these comprehensive goals, the EU reaffirms its commitment to meet the challenges and priorities identified in the León Declaration adopted at the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe ministerial conference on ageing in León.

The EU recognizes that these challenges and priorities must be addressed in a comprehensive and integrated way, which, inter alia, includes promotion and development of a life-course and intergenerational approaches. Such approaches are crucial for policy action in such areas as health, education and training, labour market and social integration and inclusion. The life-course approach recognises the responsibility of individuals and society to start investing into health in the early years of life and to promote the contributions of older persons, inter alia, by active ageing after retirement. A healthy start to life requires ensuring conditions for the development of healthy and stable families and communities. Consideration should be given to gender perspective in all aspects of this process.

Increasing the overall employment rate and productivity are key measures and adequate responses to meet economic challenges related to ageing and longevity. The EU puts emphasis on this dimension within the Lisbon Strategy. Reconciliation of family and working life play an important role in this context. The promotion of social and intergenerational cohesion remains a key priority.

Demographic ageing urgently requires reshaping health strategies and focusing on investments in health, prevention and adaptation of the services and environment. We believe that these are effective responses related to long-term sustainability of our health and social care systems in the context of ageing.

The EU appreciates and welcomes the role of United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs in assisting countries around the world in developing their national capacities to address the challenges of ageing societies and promotes further development of cooperation in Europe and at the global level.

The EU appreciates the important role of the social partners and civil society in addressing the challenges and opportunities of ageing, including the contribution of non-governmental organisations to the implementation of the bottom-up participatory approach to the policy on ageing.

Chairperson,

The EU continues to support the World Action Plan on Youth and the Supplement of the World Programme of Youth. In 2005, the EU agreed on the European Youth Pact as one of the instruments to achieve the goals of the revised Lisbon Strategy, the support of growth and more and better jobs. The Pact has three pillars: employment and social inclusion, education, training and mobility, and reconciliation of

family and work life. The Lisbon Strategy, itself, concerns the young because it is focused on those areas which directly concern them such as education, employment and social integration, etc.

The Youth in Action programme, which runs from 2007 – 2013, continues to provide opportunities for young people, especially around mobility and international cooperation in their spare time activities. It follows on from the previous programme Youth (2000-2006) and continues to promote international exchanges of young people, the European Voluntary Service, and other youth initiatives and activities aimed at the development of qualifications of people working with youth.

Over the last two years, there has been a strong focus on the situation of young people with fewer opportunities through the EU voluntary framework for cooperation in the field of Youth Policy. This culminated in a Resolution relating to their participation in education, employment and society being adopted at the Youth Council in May of 2008. The cooperation framework is to be renewed from this year and social inclusion of young people is likely to be one of the priority areas in any new framework.

Chairperson,

Many European states are facing very low fertility and demographic ageing. The trend of increasing individualisation and variable forms of coexistence, the significant orientation towards performance and economic prosperity imply the need of versatile support for families. The family policy, which should aim at increasing the freedom of families to choose the best option for their children, should be perceived as a complex set of mutually reinforcing measures in different areas, e.g. financial support of families (taxes, benefits), health care, and quality programmes to promote and enhance parental competences, etc. Such support should be long-term, sustainable and at the same time focused on families with different specific needs.

The crucial issue of economic growth is to ensure a high employment rate and thus the effort to maximise activation of human resources within the work process. Interruption of work career is typical mostly for women in reproductive age who leave the labour market due to the birth of their children and the need to care for them and therefore, need specific support measures to remain at home or return to the work force. Involvement of fathers in the childcare is becoming more and more frequent and socially accepted. This helps to substantially improve opportunities for women in the labour market and to increase the prestige of parenthood in general. The aim of the European Union and its Member States is to create conditions for improving the balance of professional, private and family life.

It is crucial to create conditions conducive to guaranteeing the healthy development of the child in the early period as well as later on and to draw attention to the policies of reconciliation of family, private and professional life. Following the principle of the best interest of the child should, therefore, be one of the main criteria for drawing policies for the reconciliation of family, private and professional life including respect for the voluntary decision to devote fully to the raising of children as a legitimate option to employment. Not only should the focus be on the family as a whole, but also impacts on individual family members must be taken into account. Real freedom of choice, equal participation and non-discrimination should be ensured.

With regard to discussion on the pro-family issues at the European level, one of the successes is the functioning of the Alliance for Families as the platform for exchange of experience, best practices among Member States, in the area of family friendly policies.

Chairperson,

Availing myself of this opportunity and on behalf of the EU, I would like to express the gratitude and support to the UN Commission for Social Development as well as to non-governmental organisations for the effort they make to promote the goals set by the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Programme of Action.