



## **Introduction to the CEC Conference on Diversity and Equal Opportunities in Stockholm on June 7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup>, 2007**

### **Why did we organize this conference?**

It is the role of a European social partner like CEC to facilitate the transmission of the main federating ideas of an enlarged Europe. Promoting diversity is a vast federating idea initiated by the European Commission, which is represented here. The idea will be relayed, deepened, fleshed up and used for the purpose of empowerment throughout 2007 in the networks of social partners, enterprises, citizens, and States. CEC's ambition is to fully participate in the process. Together, we shall try to demonstrate that diversity is a wealth for the continent, for its citizens, for its States and for its enterprises. But we also need to understand under which conditions diversity is a wealth: it will be a wealth provided there is respect of all and of all by all.

### **Which diversity are we talking about?**

Diversity is primarily difference; i.e. accepting the idea that we can live and prosper with one another even if we are different because of our origins, our ages, or our cultures. This is already a considerable step forward. Then, we need to remove a fear that is inherent to human nature: the fear of becoming alienated in contact with the other if the other is different. Instinctively, we tend to be self-centered, to become less tolerant, to close ourselves like oysters and to become narrow-minded. We will not move forward a lot in terms of diversity in Europe if we cannot channel our fear and ultimately get rid of it. We shall see how tolerance can bring confidence, how open-mindedness can widen our perspectives. Within the process, it would be good to already note two non-negotiable principles: i.e. secularism and equal opportunities between men and women.

### **Diversity, a fashion or a vital need?**

It so happens that creativity and innovation are better in teams that include people of different origins. The views of those companies that honor us with their presence will be blatant proof of it. Indeed, Europe needs creative talents and innovators. Hence, diversity is becoming a leverage for growth, job creation and prosperity. Our responsibility is to go beyond diversity as a fashion and keep the core of this diversity that responds to our vital need. Forced diversity, which is trying to wipe out differences and move towards uniformity of behaviors quickly leads to adversity and the opportunity then becomes a constraints. Europe is made of its differences. Are they as incompatible as they might seem?

### **The agenda of the conference**

In French diversity sounds like 'divertir', which means 'entertain'. So in order to start with a bit of entertainment, we shall start our brainstorming seminar with a theater company called Framtidens Ledarskap. Their play is about discriminations at work. Let us forget the words – the play is in English – and try to grasp its profound meaning. If the words are different from one language to another, the meaning remains universal.

After this theatrical preparation, we shall welcome Mrs. Pia ENGSTROM LINDGREN who will introduce the actions of the European Commission in promotion of diversity, non-

discrimination and equal opportunities between men and women. The speech will be followed by a presentation by Mr. Robert ANDERSON of the Dublin Foundation for the improvement of living and working conditions. His speech will deal with the data collected and the means to be implemented to guarantee equal opportunities between all ages, genders and disabilities.

After hearing the institutions, we shall hear the practitioners of European social dialogue on the occasion of a round table. We are both happy and impatient to hear what they have to say. The following people have honored us with their presence: Mrs. Maria Helena ANDRE, Deputy General Secretary of the ETUC, Mr. Christer FORSLUND, Vice-President of Eurocadres, and Mrs. Loes VAN EMBDEN ANDRES of BUSINESSEUROPE. They will also be joined by Mrs. Annika ELIAS, Chairwoman of LEDARNA/CEC.

The day will finish with an exchange of views with all participants during which your questions and comments are more than welcome.

Our informal exchanges will go on in the evening on the occasion of a dinner offered and organized by LEDARNA, the Swedish member of CEC, which will take place at the Vasa Museum at 7:30 PM.

The second day will start with the intervention by Mrs. Erica GRUNDBERG, Head of Human Resources at IKEA, a group which has made diversity a spearhead pretty successfully the world over as we all know. IKEA recently launched operations in Shanghai to serve China and it would even seem that clients go to the IKEA store with a joiner who measures the furniture to make copies... I must pay tribute to the success of IKEA!

Then the morning will be dedicated to two both promising and complementary workshops: one on women in management positions and the difficulty to cross the glass ceiling; and another on how to manage diversity on the workplace. The workshops will look into practices in companies like IBM or L'OREAL, into the agreements negotiated and signed with the social partners and into the viewpoints of specialists of such issues. Of course, tomorrow I shall be introducing the participants to the workshops who I would already like to thank for accepting our invitation and being available.

The afternoon of the second day will be dedicated to sharing the experiences of both workshops with a view to listing present and future best practice. A question and answer session will allow you to seek answers to your questions. And we will be closing the conference with the intervention of Mrs. Marcia De WACHTER of the National Bank of Belgium.

Dear participants, this is the program CEC has prepared for you and I would like to thank the many people who allowed the conference to be a success. I would also like to thank you for being here and for being indulgent because this is a live event. I hope that the spontaneity of what will be said will capture your attention and whet your appetite to learn.

And now, on with the show! Have a very nice conference and long live diversity!

Georges LIAROKAPIS