

Address by Alessandra Servidori, Adapt – Marco Biagi Foundation

Thanks.

I would like to thank the minister, who honoured us with his presence. The project we discuss today started last year, and involved a number of actors who were seriously committed to achieving important results in terms of legal protection at an European level. Adapt, Marco Biagi Foundation, the municipality of Milan, LILT and AIRC, here represented by Dr. De Lorenzo, who I met at the beginning of the project, have always been at the forefront of this important initiative. We are working hard together to plead this cause and to pursue our aims. Cooperation, integration, and teamwork will be our instruments to combat and also change the current idea of social welfare, which failed to cope with changes in society in terms of social protection, and to deal with related key issues. This is why Sacconi's Green Paper is a point reference in this connection. We started this project last year, together with Prof. Tiraboschi and Marina Biagi, who give their regards as today they are engaged in their tasks at the university and Marco Biagi Foundation. While meeting employment consultants, jurists, and those who would have attended this seminar, we told each other: "We must all play our part in the project, making a contribution to the success of this initiative".

My thanks are also due to Rosanna Santonocito and *Il Sole 24*. The latter strongly supported this initiative and was one of the first bodies to undersign the *Manifesto for the Human Rights of the workers affected by cancer*, which was presented to President Napolitano on 8 July 2008. The project was greeted by the President with enthusiasm, delight, and engagement. The seven points provided by the Manifesto include many key aspects, which have been already underlined by the Minister in his opening address.

It is important to consider that we worked at a national and European level, because Milan is a European city and because Italy plays a fundamental role in the European context. In this connection, the European Commission issued a series of directives on reconciliation, discrimination, and other important topics, which are part of an ongoing (social) welfare reform. Such restructuring already started with the drafting of the Libro Unico del Lavoro, to which those present here are very interested, because it represents an attempt to simplify employment law. In this connection, Biagi Act succeeded in improving existing legislation. These provisions, which are closely connected to the issue we discuss today, have been carried forward with firmness by the Italian government and Minister Sacconi. It is also important to underline the European dimension of this project. With 10 April 2008 Resolution on combating cancer, the European Parliament officially asked the Commission "to adopt, whereas necessary, legal measures, and to encourage and support initiatives aimed at involving a large number of individuals, in order to prevent cancer, by reducing professional and environmental exposure to chemicals, and by promoting a healthy lifestyle and better working conditions". A safe working environment! This is what town councillor, Mascaretti, has just said. When we talk of *corporate social responsibility*, it is important to define the parameters which help us to evaluate people's quality of life. The company has to focus on the human being, promoting a series of initiatives in terms of good practices, aimed at supporting more disadvantaged people, "the disabled", as stated by the health councillor. He reminded us that individuals with these conditions, and those who are not self-sufficient more generally, face many problems because of their status. This is because sometimes life is different from what we want it to be. Therefore, it might happen to suffer a permanent or a temporary disability, or to look after a disabled who is a member of our family. For this reason, the illness does not affect only the sick individual. Many of us dealt with cancer, combated it. Many of us recovered from it. Many of us looked after their loved ones until the end. Economic bodies, and all institutions involved in the labour market, as well as the world of work are also taking into consideration another basic issue, involving families and workers looking after the sick person.

As far as we concerned, we have urged the European Parliament to draft a real charter of rights, to safeguard workers affected by both tumours and chronic illnesses, according to which enterprises should allow patients to maintain their job during the therapy, facilitating also their reintegration.

Meeting the representatives from Roche was also very useful. Besides producing medicines, this pharmaceuticals industry also deals with issues referring to safety at workplace, asking its employees' opinion about the illness, related legislation, the way it applies, and facilitating *consultation between social partners*. At a practical level, it means that social dialogue is very important, especially if there is a match of purposes between concerned parties.

Those who deal with the illness would need more flexible working hours, in order to undergo medical treatment. In addition, improvements in life expectancy and a caring community might facilitate their reintegration. Therefore, the implementation of what is known as *corporate social responsibility* starts here, in Milan.

This is the reason why the Charter of Rights for the workers affected by cancer should provide people with this specific condition, and especially those whose performances are affected by life-saving therapies, with the right to modify their employment relation from full-time to part-time, both horizontal and vertical (according to contract arrangements). At the request of the workers, and whereas their health status will make it possible, they should also have the opportunity to return to a full-time contract.

I want to welcome Arja Leppänen, a friend of mine coming from Scandinavia who is sitting in the front. Less than three months ago we were in Brussels, taking part in a convention with the European partners involved in the project.

This initiative will also involve trade unions. This is because, as the Minister said, in view of a renewal of collective agreements (also considering decentralised bargaining), improvements might be possible in terms of good practices (such as the extension of the grace period).

In the near future we want to set up modular training courses and informative programmes, drawing the attention of the actors involved in the industrial relations to the issue of workers' legal protection. In this connection, Confindustria Vicenza invited us to a meeting next week, in order to discuss the implementation of the project on workplace. We are carrying forward this initiative together with social partners, also by promoting new Memoranda of Understanding and bilateral agreements, in order to provide sick workers with a high quality integration of health services. Improving healthcare delivery and setting up new support facilities might be a good starting point. Tuscany region, for example, is giving priority to the provision of wigs for those who undergo cancer therapy.

These are only some of the issues we are discussing, which show how much attention is given to this topic. As I said before, at the end of the current project, we will present the Green Paper, containing, among other things, a draft legislative proposal (*una bozza di possibile proposta di articolato normativo*).

We are aware this initiative is ambitious, but we are also aware that many authoritative people are involved in this activity, which has been carried forward with determination. Also thanks to the political reform process carried forward by the ruling government, we will be able to present to the European Union a program that I am sure will provide our country with a sense of achievement. The *EXPO* to be held in Milan within a few months will prove another opportunity to share ideas and strategies.

They all have to fulfil their duty, they all have to play their part, and the goal will be achieved.