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General debate on national experience
in population matters *Adolescents and youth*

S T A T E M E N T

by

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Mister Chair, Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am honored to address the 45th session of the Commission on Population and Development on behalf of the Republic of Poland.

At the beginning, I would like to congratulate you, Mister Chairman, on your election as President of the 45th Session of the Commission of Population and Development, and other members of the Bureau on their election.

Lately in Poland the topic of youth and adolescence has been present in the public debate as well as on the agenda of the government. Issues related to the education of young people are reflected in strategic documents of the Polish government. Those undertakings are *inter alia* connected with the fulfilment of the commitments under the ICPD's Plan of Action. Such actions are reflected in the Report "Youth 2011"; providing an analysis of the situation of the young generation in Poland. The document published by the Chancellery of the Prime Minister, is a part of a new strategic perspective, that was initiated by the "Poland 2030 Report" (as the long-term strategy "Poland 2030. The Third Wave of Modernity" or "The National Development Strategy - 2020"). Other recommendations are directly connected with such fields as education, employment or health. In the area of education the authors of the report recommended for example: assuring the possibility to obtain digital competences at school, improvement of the job advisory services at schools and modernisation of vocational education.

Mister Chairman,

Poland is a European country with a substantial demographic potential. Young people between 15-29 constitute 22% of the total population (38.5 million inhabitants) placing us as one of Europe's youngest societies. At the same time, the total fertility rate (1.38) is one of the lowest in Europe, with a forecasted value of 1.45 for the period between 2030-2035. Poland does however have, in contrast to other EU states, numerous generations of ageing baby boomers, the average life expectancy of which will continue to grow. The decreases in the share of the youth and the increase in the number of seniors will be greater, among others, due to the coincidence of subsequent baby booms and demographic declines as well as the effects of cultural behaviours, changing attitudes towards procreation as well as current childbearing models. The above has its origin in Poland's opening onto the European influence as well as in cultural transformations and the economic model of a family caused by system transformation.

In Poland, as in many other European Union countries, there is a high level of unemployment among people aged up to 25 (27.7%). With a view to increasing their employment prospects, young people seek to obtain occupational qualifications through higher education. This is fostered by the rapid development of higher education; the number of students in Poland has grown over four times (to 1.8 million) over the last 20 years. However, given the high number of higher education specialists entering the labour market, being a graduate does no longer guarantee finding a suitable job, though it still provides better opportunities on the labour market. Some of the most common factors that inhibit finding a suitable job include pursuing education in those fields which are not in line with market demands, or having no previous work experience.

Poor adjustment of the educational offer to the labour market demands is, therefore, a serious problem. Due to the lack of involvement of social and business partners in the educational process, the skills and knowledge acquired through academic studies seem hardly adequate to the real needs of the labour market. This makes it necessary for young people to seek further training right at the beginning of their careers. The instruments available in Poland, oriented towards the occupational training of unemployed persons, comprise:

- Organising and financing training courses and postgraduate studies, as well as granting loans for this purpose;
- Paying out scholarships for the purpose of gaining new qualifications or continuing education;
- Covering the costs of examinations, and making it possible to acquire licences to perform various professions;
- Organising internships;
- Conducting occupation preparatory courses for adults, which are a special form of gaining craft qualifications.

Young people who are often under age, who have abandoned further education, and who have no job form a special group at risk of permanent exclusion from the labour market (referred to as the NEET group). In order to ensure a more effective assistance, the tasks connected with training and teaching such persons have been entrusted to a special State institution, known as the Voluntary Labour Corps. This institution has implemented a number of specialised projects, including projects co-financed under the European Social Fund, aimed at social and occupational activation of young people at the verge of exclusion, as well as making it easier for them to recommence education and to become self-sufficient.

The development of entrepreneurship carries a huge potential of youth activation. Based on the data gathered as part of the European „Youth on the move” initiative, it transpires that 64% of young people in Poland would like to set up their own business. The Act on Employment Promotion and Labour Market Institutions provides for an opportunity to receive a non-returnable subsidy to the commencement of business activity, the amount of which is six times higher than the average wage and salary. The 2008-2011 analysis has shown that the beneficiary group comprises mainly young people – over 60% of all beneficiaries are people aged up to 34. Furthermore, people commencing their first business activity get the privilege of paying lower social security premiums for the initial two years.

Distinguished Delegates, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Referring to the issue of young people and migration in Poland, it must be noted that in 2011 the Interministerial Committee for Migration adopted the document entitled "The Migration Policy of Poland: a current state of play and further actions".

This document of a strategic character that recommends adoption of instruments providing more active actions of the Polish state in the field of migration also refers to the situation of the youth. Migration of foreign students and young scientists is one of the priorities indicated in the above-mentioned document.

In the recent years the phenomenon of internationalization of Polish universities has become visible. The growing number of foreigners intending to undertake studies in Poland can also be looked at from the perspective of demographic changes. In the years to come the number of Polish citizens undertaking university studies will decrease. For these reasons Poland intends to promote more actively migration in the area of education by adjusting the legal administrative system in this field.

Young people also constitute an important segment of the labour migration. Almost 25 % of employers' declarations on willingness to employ a foreigner on the territory of Poland in the framework of a simplified system for seasonal work were issued for people less than 26 years old. A similar situation appears in the area of labour emigration estimated for about two million Polish people in the European Union. The participation of young Poles in labour emigration to other EU countries is comparable to the age structure of immigrants working in Poland.

The document "Migration Policy of Poland:" suggests: supporting adaptation of returning emigrants' children in the Polish education system and improving access to the Polish language and history teaching for children and teenagers leaving abroad. Support for families of emigrants staying in Poland (mainly children and teenagers) is another very important question in the frame of counteracting the problem of "Euro-orphanage".

Mister Chairman,

Reproductive health of young people is a crucial element of the State health policy. Also central and local government administration bodies provide citizens with a free access to methods and means of conscious reproduction. During the last two decades, the range and availability of modern contraceptive methods have increased.

I would like to underline that in our understanding any reference made to the sexual and reproductive health and rights does not constitute an encouragement to the promotion of abortion on request. According to Polish law abortion on request is illegal.

With regard to reproductive health, the Government of Poland strives to provide women during pregnancy and at labour with the best health services that match their expectations and the medical knowledge. The protection of women in the period of pregnancy, labour and postpartum is ensured in the national legislation and in international agreements ratified by Poland. The fundamental legal act of the Republic of Poland – the Constitution – ensures special protection by the State over pregnant women. Its article 68(3) states that "Public authorities shall ensure special health care to children, young people, pregnant women, handicapped people and persons of advanced age

When talking about reproductive health and development, the question of prevention of sexually transmitted diseases, especially HIV/AIDS, cannot be overlooked. After thirty years that have passed since the first incident of HIV infection was recognised, it is known that the AIDS epidemic has a destructive impact both on all spheres of an individual's life and on the development of the entire society. In Poland, the fight against the epidemic is led by government institutions, health care systems, scientific community, private sector and civic society, as well as persons suffering from HIV/AIDS.

The process of developing a health policy should focus on the protection of human rights, on the respect of human dignity of persons living with the virus and on the support of particularly vulnerable populations, such as women, children, adolescents, migrants and marginalised persons, in order to minimise negative consequences of the epidemics.

The Polish strategy for combating HIV/AIDS is based on the principles of inviolability of human dignity and respect for human rights. This results in a systematic improvement in the quality of life of persons infected with HIV and suffering from AIDS, and in higher social awareness of this problem. The institutional system existing in Poland guarantees continuity of funding both for preventive measures and for an easily accessible, free-of-charge ARV therapy. In Poland, due to the fact that women during pregnancy and in the perinatal period receive antiretroviral therapy, the percentage of infections at this stage has fallen to below 1%.

The Government of Poland has undertaken numerous activities aiming at the advancement of the level and the quality of childcare. In Poland, the health care system fully respects the provisions of Article 24 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child. These provisions are implemented through the Act of 27 August 2004 on health care services financed from public funds. Under the law, children and young people, regardless of their social status, are provided with health care, including disease prevention, disease detection, treatment and prevention of disability. According to art. 15, paragraph 1 of the Act, the beneficiary have, on the terms of the Act, the right to health care services, which goal is to preserve health, prevent diseases and injuries, detect diseases, treat and prevent disabilities and its limitation.

This year Poland specifically focuses on children's rights. The year 2012 was declared in Poland as the year of Janusz Korczak, the author of the idea of children's rights.

Thank you for your attention.