

VICE PRESIDENT FOR DEMOCRACY AND DEMOGRAPHY

Speech – United Nations Economic Commission for Europe’s Regional Conference – review of the ICPD30 “Population & Development: ensuring Rights and Choices

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Distinguished speakers and guests

Ladies and gentlemen,

It truly is a pleasure to be with you today.

Back in 1994, the Cairo Conference on Population and Development set out a bold new vision.

It inspires today’s discussion.

And in the current complex geopolitical context, vision is much needed.

In the European Union we will be reflecting a great deal on what vision to offer for the future. In June next year, citizens will go to vote across the entire membership of the EU to elect the next European Parliament.

There will be many issues for them to consider. Some of them will be local or national. Others will have implications across the whole Union. One of those will be the prospect of the **enlargement** of the Union.

Those most closely impacted by that, the citizens in our immediate neighbourhood, will be looking at the European elections to see what standards we hold ourselves to.

I intend to travel to the candidate countries of the Western Balkans in the coming months and I intend to engage with them directly. I want to hear what they have to say.

These elections are significant for so many reasons. I am of the firm belief that the European elections will be contested and won on the basis of trust.

Trust in the process and the results. Trust in the people who will deliver a new vision.

And crucially trust in how our elections are run and managed. And for this we need to also look more closely at how our societies and communities are evolving.

There are clear links between the two parts of my portfolio.

Democracy and demography do not exist independently of each other.

For example, how will **rural and urban trends** influence election results?

How does ageing affect your vote?

If you vote and how you vote?

How does education, migration or brain drain affect citizens and how do they impact support for the European Union?

That is why I am pleased that at the European Union level, our leaders understand the importance of addressing demographic change.

Our policies in this field must be rights-based and respectful of all. Including the disadvantaged and vulnerable: women, children, seniors and minorities.

Our policies must be non-discriminatory and support family diversity. I know my distinguished fellow speakers will address these important issues in their contributions.

Which leads me to tell you about the most recent initiative that I presented to the European Commission for adoption only last week – the demography toolbox.

(Slide 1 – with title)

It came in response to a request from our Heads of State and Government at the European Council meeting of last June.

They tasked us to answer the following question: why does demographic change matter when we look ahead to our future economic growth and competitiveness?

(Slide 2 – urgency)

The short answer is that demographic change matters and it matters a lot!

The long answer starts on the basis of the many reasons for which we need to act now, urgently.

1. Plummeting birth rates.
2. Rapid ageing.
3. A shrinking working age population.
4. Parents struggling to reconcile work and family.
5. Labour and skills shortages.
6. Huge pressure on public budgets.

The list goes on!

So we came forward with a toolbox.

Why is this called a toolbox?

It is literally a set of tools that the EU Member States can pick and choose from to address the challenges they face.

To complement their own national strategies and measures!

And while this is an EU initiative, I hope many of the actions can inspire others from the region. Because many of our challenges are ones that all of you can identify with.

By working together, both EU and national institutions, as well as across the international fora like the one we are in today, we can anticipate this demographic change and act more efficiently together!

If left unaddressed, demographic change will negatively impact the European Union's human capital and long-term competitiveness.

We are obliged to act!

(Slide 3 – barometer)

Our toolbox is underpinned by 2 key products.

A demography mapping that showed diverse results across EU Member States and secondly, a Eurobarometer survey that showed that citizens' perceptions actually match the reality on the ground. And, as I said, this reality is shared by many regions across the World.

The toolbox has 3 key elements.

The first is longevity.

This means a shift from an ageing society to a longevity society.

The second is human capital because we are activating all our human capital, from the young to the older people, migrants and parents.

The third is Synergy – because we need to coordinate actions from the EU level together with the national governments of our member states.

(Slide 4 – pillars)

The toolbox is strongly anchored in the territorial dimension.

The message for parents is that you don't have to make a choice.

You can have a child and contribute to the labour market because these tools support that.

The second pillar is youth.

This is about empowering youth to have the right mix of skills and talents to match the needs of the labour market, and in the context of the green and digital transitions.

I am very eager to hear about the specific **Albanian** experience from the minister today, because **Albania** has a very large youth cohort; which is rather exceptional in Europe!

The pillar on older people looks at them through a dynamic lens.

We want to empower older people to be the productive seniors they can be.

We shift the focus from an ageing society to a longevity economy and society.

A longevity society is one that sees and harnesses all the benefits that living an additional 20 or 30 years can bring.

50% of children born in Europe today will live all the way up to 95!

We need to make Europeans longevity literate.

In this context, I am interested to hear about experience and policy actions from **Turkey** – because I understand that the deputy minister will focus on this ageing dimension.

The fourth and final pillar is migration.

This is all about harnessing the potential of legal migration.

You know the people I am talking about.

They are your bus driver and local doctor.

They are your carer and teacher.

These people, with their talents and skills, help fill the gaps on our labour market.

This is a different story of migration. It is a story that capitalises on the skills from our neighbours and from third countries. This is about optimising circularity and cross fertilisation. It is about ensuring a mutual win-win. I am very eager to hear about the Portuguese experience here today!

All 4 pillars are anchored into the territorial dimension, because demography is place-based.

All pillars are infused by digital technologies that can boost Europe's competitive edge and help offset the impact of demographic change. This panel will also cover technology and Artificial intelligence. Our message is that Artificial intelligence and automation are both reshaping the economy and labour markets.

(Slide 5 – toolbox)

(Slide 6 – operationalising)

We will operationalise the toolbox through 3 key actions.

First, we will reinforce the data and the evidence.

Second, we will upgrade demography-related policies at all levels and mainstream demography across the board.

Thirdly, we will make sure that no-one and no region is left behind by acknowledging the place-based and territorial nature of demography.

And I cannot conclude without making a reference to the current geopolitical context.

Today's conference brings together 56 states. The Ukrainian deputy minister (Tetiana BEREZHNA) is with us. We know that the war has generated huge losses of members of the labour force in Ukraine.

That will require a demographic resilience strategy and our support!

The war in Ukraine is currently not the only conflict unfolding in this region. And as we talk about demographic change, we are talking about very human matters. Therefore, we cannot ignore the human tragedies that we witness and which have an impact on all of us.

We cannot operate in isolation of what is happening around us.

We cannot look into the drivers of demographic change without comparing them with the demographic drivers of our neighbours.

We will have climate induced migration, also conflict induced migration. With our work we need to not only anticipate the change, but also to cater for the new and evolving needs.

And the best way of doing it, is by doing it together.

Thank you.

END

Words: 905 (approx: 7 minutes)

Sub question

I understand that you are currently working on the outcomes of the global survey on demography. Can you tell us more about the findings?

Thank you for this question, because with this survey we're really building this global dimension of demography. And this is important because many of the issues we are mentioning are without borders, so we must look at global solutions.

The reason why we look so attentively into demographic change and its determinants is exactly because we want to:

- 1) **grasp** it correctly,
- 2) **anticipate** it so that we can be better prepared,
- 3) **adjust** to it when necessary,
- and 4) in some cases, when still possible, try to **mitigate** it.

And that is why this survey is so important, because it very much highlights the importance of the contextualisation of the demographic change.

In the survey we have the low fertility and high fertility contexts that very much determine the views one has when it comes to policymaking.

This is confirmation that context matters.

That whatever we do, we need to do it while being mindful of what is happening in the rest of the world.

Our world is intrinsically interdependent.

Demographic change in our neighbouring countries has an impact on us and vice versa.

To come back to the survey, the trends in Europe when compared to the rest of the world are in relation to 3 key drivers: **low fertility, low mortality, and population movements.**

The toolbox we have presented comes with tools that address and mitigate these drivers.

It calls for the adjustment of our policies to better cater for the new demographic needs.

It is all about how to optimise our data and evidence.

How to optimise the use of our funds, how to adjust the tools we have and how to redesign our policies so that they better correspond to the EU's changing demographic landscape.

The key lesson from the global survey is that demography needs to be factored into the evolution of our sectoral policies that may in turn generate improve the way our society adapts.

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