

**Economic and Social Council**

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Committee on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights**Fifty-sixth session****Summary record of the 70th meeting***

Held at the Palais des Nations, Geneva, on Monday, 5 October 2015, at 3 p.m.

Chairperson: Mr. Sadi

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The meeting was called to order at 3 p.m.

Consideration of reports

(a) Reports submitted by States parties in accordance with articles 16 and 17 of the Covenant (continued)

Second periodic report of Greece (E/C.12/GRC/2 and E/C.12/GRC/Q/2 and Add.1)

1. *At the invitation of the Chairperson, the delegation of Greece took places at the Committee table.*

2. **The Chairperson** said that he appreciated the fact that the Greek delegation was presenting its report to the Committee despite the recent change of Government and the current hardships faced by the country.

3. **Ms. Antonopoulou** (Greece), introducing the second periodic report of Greece (E/C.12/GRC/2), said that it had been drafted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in close cooperation with the National Commission for Human Rights and other ministries responsible for economic, social and cultural rights in Greece. The late submission of the report did not reflect any lack of commitment on her Government's part to the fulfilment of its obligations under the Covenant.

4. In 2008, global economic and financial turmoil had precipitated a debt crisis in Greece which had been exacerbated after 2010. In response, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the European Commission and the European Central Bank (ECB), which had collectively come to be known as the "troika", had introduced three economic adjustment programmes. Five years on from the introduction of the initial programme, the impact of the original crisis and the proposed rescue package had been devastating for the country: gross domestic product (GDP) had plummeted by 25 per cent, the largest contraction of any peacetime economy since the Great Depression; employment had surged from 7 to 27 per cent; and poverty had risen exponentially. The proposed solution involved rebalancing the internal budget and the external current account in ways that had serious repercussions on the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights.

5. A thorough study on the impact of the economic and financial crisis on the enjoyment of fundamental rights across European Union member States had found that Greece had some distance yet to go in that regard; in its efforts to improve the situation, Greece had benefited from a number of reports prepared by United Nations treaty bodies which had helped the country to design countervailing measures to that end. Nonetheless, in 2013 the Independent Expert on foreign debt and human rights, particularly economic, social and cultural rights, had expressed the view that those measures had undermined the enjoyment of human rights and, in a return visit in 2015, had stated that Greece needed to find better solutions in its efforts to rebalance the economy. Meanwhile, the Hellenic Parliament Debt Truth Committee had concluded that the international community had failed to mount a human-rights-based response to the debt crisis.

6. The lessons learned from the Greek crisis could be applied by other countries as well. The global economic system had created a pyramid structure in which financial institutions and the financial sector were at the top, followed by States and then communities and households. It was therefore not surprising that a people-centred and rights-centred approach had not prevailed in recent decades. Greece had held two national elections in 2015 which had reaffirmed three basic tenets: Greece wished to remain within the euro zone and to fulfil its obligations thereunder; it was committed

to a people-centred economy and society; and it was seeking to promote well-being and human rights through the use of redistributive countervailing measures.

7. **The Chairperson**, speaking in his capacity as Country Rapporteur, said that the State party's candour in its replies to the list of issues was admirable. Its report was not only of significance for Greece, but also for other countries which struggled to meet their obligations to their creditors.

8. Although Greece had stated that the Covenant was an integral part of Greek law and that the courts invoked it, there appeared to be a lack of concrete evidence to support that statement. If Greece had emphasized its obligations under the Covenant to the troika, it might have been better able to withstand the considerable pressures placed on it during the negotiations. He hoped that the Covenant would be referenced in future talks. Greece was effectively facing four crises at the same time: the initial recession, a debt crisis, an austerity crisis and, more recently, a migrant crisis. He would be interested to hear the delegation's views as to what extent Greece might bear some responsibility for its initial recession and how, in retrospect, it could have minimized the recession's impact. He would also welcome the delegation's comments on the question as to whether the debt crisis had been directly caused by the austerity programme and whether the austerity crisis could have been less devastating if the Covenant had been more fully observed.

9. Although he was aware that European Union directives 2000/43/EC and 2000/78/EC on discrimination had been incorporated into the State party's main anti-discrimination law, article 2.2 of the Covenant provided for a comparatively broader range of prohibited grounds for discrimination. Were all the grounds enumerated in the Covenant and in the Committee's jurisprudence covered in Greek law?

10. In the light of the refugee crisis, clarification would be appreciated on the reasons why most minorities were not formally recognized in Greek legislation. The Muslim community of persons of Turkish origin was recognized under the 1923 Lausanne peace treaty, but while many other minorities in Greece, including many refugees and asylum seekers, theoretically had considerable social and economic rights, he was unsure whether that was true in practice. While the State party had stated that migrants legally residing in Greece enjoyed the same social rights as Greeks, he would like clarification as to the rights enjoyed by refugees whose cases were pending. The National Roma Integration Strategy for 2012-2020 notwithstanding, it appeared that the Roma had a long way to go in terms of the enjoyment of such rights.

11. Given that the legislative elections in January and in September 2015, as well as the cabinet formed some 10 days earlier, had resulted in very few women occupying senior positions, he wished to know why women did not feature more prominently in the decision-making process. How then could the Committee be assured that the Government had a fair gender policy or that fair conditions existed in respect of such matters as wages and conditions of work?

12. **Mr. De Schutter** said that the delegation's opening statement and the replies to the list of issues denounced the adverse impact of the economic adjustment programmes of 2010 and 2012 on the rights of Greek citizens. And indeed, 92 per cent of the bailout funds received under those programmes had been used to repay creditors rather than to benefit Greek citizens. He was concerned that the political agreement of 13 July 2015 and the third economic adjustment programme of 19 August 2015 seemed to follow that same trend. He wondered whether a human rights impact assessment had been carried out in advance of the latest economic adjustment programme. Although the European Commission had released a working paper on the subject on 19 August 2015, the document had not been up to standard, as it had not

been drafted independently, nor was it based on consultations with civil society. Given that the corresponding Memorandum of Understanding attached importance to tackling tax avoidance, he wished to know why Greece had cancelled a duty of 26 per cent on cross-border transactions that would have boosted tax receipts. To what extent were the measures provided for under the Memorandum compatible with the stipulation made by the Committee Chairperson in a letter of 16 May 2012 to the effect that any retrogressive measures, if unavoidable, should be necessary and proportionate, strictly temporary, not result in discrimination or increased inequalities and not affect the minimum core content of the rights protected under the Covenant?

13. While welcoming the reference in the Memorandum of Understanding to the creation of 50,000 short-term work opportunities, he would welcome further details on how those jobs would be created and, more generally, how the economic adjustment programme would help to uphold the right to work as set forth in article 6 of the Covenant. He also wished to know how the Greek Government viewed the allocation of responsibilities between it and the other European Union member States and its creditors. Did it agree with the many observers who felt that the Greek Government had been coerced by the country's creditors into acting as it had done?

14. Paragraph 19 of the replies to the list of issues indicated that, out of concern for the need for data protection, Greece did not collect statistical data on the origin of persons living in the country. Both European Union law and Council of Europe standards allowed the processing of those kinds of sensitive data provided that certain safeguards were in place. Exactly what factors prevented the Government from processing data on ethnic and national minorities?

15. **Mr. Ribeiro Leão** said that, in view of the difficulties faced by Greece, he would be interested to learn how effective international cooperation had been since 2010 in promoting the progressive realization of economic, social and cultural rights. He also wished to know what steps the State party was taking to protect the economic, social and cultural rights of the waves of foreign nationals arriving on Greek territory.

16. **Ms. Shin** said that she wished to learn more about the Government's position regarding the importance of conducting a human rights impact assessment of measures introduced during the financial crisis, especially in respect of women and of the various disadvantaged and marginalized groups in society. On the subject of gender equality, she wondered whether the State party applied a system of equal pay for equal work or of equal pay for work of equal value. She would welcome further details on how the one-third quota for female candidates in local and parliamentary elections was applied in practice and would like to know whether there were any other temporary special measures for the promotion of women and especially for their appointment to public positions. She would welcome further information on the National Programme for Substantive Gender Equality, which apparently did not include a comprehensive plan for the promotion of women's employment and political representation.

17. **Mr. Uprimny Yepes** said that, even though the austerity measures had to some extent been imposed on Greece, the Government had a duty to try to reconcile them with its obligations under the Covenant. The measures should not be discriminatory and should be the subject of prior consultations with the persons who would be affected by them. He wondered what concrete steps the Government planned to take to ensure that such measures did not have a disproportionate impact on the most disadvantaged and marginalized groups in society, including women and older persons. Since, as noted earlier, Greece did not collect statistical data on the origin of persons living in the country, he wondered how it would be possible to gauge whether given policies would have a discriminatory impact on particular groups of the population. He would also be interested to hear more about the participation of civil society in the preparation of the report.

18. **Ms. Bras Gomes**, noting the State party's view that the international community and institutions had not been able to design and implement a human-rights-based response to the debt crisis, said that she would be interested to know how the Government viewed its national responsibilities in terms of the need to contribute to the development of such an approach. She wondered what lessons had been learned from the austerity process that might serve to strengthen consultation mechanisms and cooperation with stakeholders. Noting that the State party's replies to the list of issues indicated that the National Roma Integration Strategy had sufficient funding to enable the country to deliver on the European Union Roma integration goals, she asked where that funding came from and how integration measures had been implemented. She invited the delegation to comment on the recommendation by the National Commission for Human Rights concerning the need to reverse the sharp decline in civil liberties and social rights.

19. **Mr. Kedzia** said that he would like to invite the delegation to comment on the fact that, in the current crisis, the issue was no longer merely the application of temporary austerity measures, but rather an overall decrease in available resources. In the light of the State party's assertion that the international community and institutions had not developed a human-rights-based approach to the crisis, he wondered whether the Government had offered to conduct its own human rights impact assessment of the planned measures. He wished to know whether there was any domestic legislation that established a procedure for the recognition of minorities or whether such recognition was based only on the 1923 Lausanne peace treaty. In the absence of such a procedure, he wondered how constitutional guarantees regarding the right of minorities to preserve their culture and identity could be upheld. Clarification on the status of the Roma would be appreciated.

20. **The Chairperson** said that some of the human rights issues of concern to the Committee were not affected by the financial crisis or austerity measures, such as gender equality, particularly with regard to the low rate of female representation in parliament, and the status of the Covenant in domestic law.

21. **Mr. De Schutter**, noting that, under the most recently negotiated memorandum of understanding with its creditors, Greece was to introduce a range of measures related to pensions that would diminish the level of enjoyment of the right to social security, asked about the reasoning behind those measures, how the rights of the most vulnerable groups of the population were to be protected and whether any compensatory measures would be adopted.

22. **Mr. Ribeiro Leão**, referring to the labour force statistics presented in paragraphs 37 and 38 of the report, which dated from 2011, asked whether more recent statistics were available and whether there had been any significant changes in the figures. He would also welcome updated data on the predominant types of employment that were mentioned in paragraph 44 of the report. Were statistics available on the results of the subsidies known as "reintegration cheques" that were provided to unemployed persons in order to support their reintegration into the labour market? Was that subsidy still in place?

23. **Ms. Bras Gomes** said that she wished to invite the delegation to comment on the State party's assessment of the effectiveness of the National Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan. She would be interested in hearing the delegation's views as to whether that plan had led to the creation of non-standard forms of employment that did not provide protection in terms of labour rights or social protection. She would also welcome additional information on the employment programmes under which beneficiaries were employed for a period of five months in municipalities, and she was particularly interested in learning what happened after that five-month period had elapsed. She would also appreciate clarification on the rotation system of employment

mentioned in paragraph 66 of the replies. Did either of those systems provide any kind of social security guarantees? She would appreciate further information on the collective bargaining system, which had been weakened as a result of the crisis, and would like to know whether the minimum wage was still frozen. She also wished to know whether the core content of the right to social security had been preserved and would welcome information on the State party's position in relation to the minimum guaranteed income and pension systems.

24. **Mr. Abashidze** said that, since the majority of refugees and migrants who crossed the Mediterranean to reach Europe arrived in Greece, he would like to know what support the State party had received from the international community in dealing with that situation. As many migrants living and working in Greece did not have work permits, he would be interested to hear about the State party's policy regarding people in that situation.

25. **Mr. Kedzia** said that he would welcome further details on the rotation work system referred to earlier, including the number of employees involved in that system. The State party had indicated that the Labour Inspection Office must be kept informed about rotation work arrangements, but he wondered exactly what role the Office played in that regard. Could it modify those arrangements, for example? He would be interested to hear more about the impact of the debt crisis negotiations on the role of trade unions and about how the arbitration system functioned under the conditions that currently prevailed.

26. **The Chairperson** asked whether the State party's creditors were adopting a more conciliatory stance in the light of the burden being shouldered by Greece due to the huge influx of refugees and migrants into the country en route to other parts of Europe.

The meeting was suspended at 4.10 p.m. and resumed at 4.35 p.m.

27. **Mr. Kastanas** (Greece) said that the provisions of the Covenant prevailed over any other laws. Laws passed by parliament must be in conformity with the Covenant, and the courts had a duty to refrain from applying any legislative provision that ran counter to the Covenant. Individuals and groups could avail themselves of a range of legal procedures for filing complaints of alleged violations of economic, social or cultural rights with the courts. In principle, the provisions of the Covenant were justiciable and could be used as a standard of reference for assessing fulfilment of the obligation to respect economic, social and cultural rights. Thus, the courts could provide remedies for the violation by legislators or the executive branch of constitutional or international treaty provisions pertaining to economic, social and cultural rights. The system was quite effective; in recent years the Council of State had refused to apply a number of legislative provisions that would have introduced austerity measures under the earlier financial assistance programmes on the grounds that they were unconstitutional. It was true, however, that the Covenant had not been frequently invoked before the courts, as the legal community was more familiar with the Constitution, which covered an extensive list of economic, social and cultural rights, and other regional instruments, such as the European Social Charter. It was hoped that the current dialogue and the Committee's concluding observations would increase the visibility of the Covenant as a highly effective instrument for the judicial protection of economic, social and cultural rights.

28. The Muslim community was the only group in Greece that was officially recognized as a minority, and its status as such had been established under the Lausanne peace treaty. That minority consisted of three distinct groups — of Turkish, Pomak and Roma origin — whose common denominator was their faith. The State party fully respected the principle of individual self-identification, and all persons

living in Greece were free to declare their origin, speak their language, practise their religion and observe their traditions. However, it was the State party's firm position that a State's decision to recognize a group as a minority and to provide its members with additional, specific minority rights must be based not only on the subjective claims of a numerically small group of persons but also on objective facts and criteria. The main concern should not be whether a State had decided to rely on solid legal and factual grounds for refraining from recognizing a group as a minority, but rather whether that decision created protection gaps in the areas covered by the Covenant. In Greece, the members of groups not officially recognized as minorities fully enjoyed their Covenant rights.

29. In his Government's view, claims about the existence of a Macedonian minority in Greece did not correspond to reality. The use of the term "Macedonian minority" to refer to a small population group in northern Greece whose members, in addition to Greek, spoke a Slavic dialect was inaccurate. While a small segment of that group promoted the idea of a Macedonian minority through a political party called Rainbow, that party had won a mere 0.1 per cent of the votes in the most recent European Parliament elections and had not participated in the recent general elections. Evidently, the level of support for a political agenda focusing on the existence of such a minority was extremely low. Furthermore, the use of the term "Macedonian" to describe the population group in question infringed on the rights of the more than 2.5 million Greek Macedonians who had for centuries used that term to refer to their regional and cultural identity. At the same time, nothing prevented the proponents of the concept of such a minority from freely expressing their views or organizing cultural events.

30. The Roma living in Greece were not recognized as a minority at their own request. Nevertheless, his Government's various social programmes took the characteristics and lifestyle of the Roma population into consideration and, among many other measures, provided for the participation of Roma mediators in education and health matters, for example. Other population groups that were sometimes described as minorities did not meet his Government's criteria for being recognized as such. The European Court of Human Rights had, in a ruling concerning Poland, stated that international law did not require States to adopt a particular definition of "national minority" in their legislation or to introduce a procedure for the official recognition of minority groups.

31. Greece, like a number of other countries, did not collect statistical data on its inhabitants' ethnic origins or religions. His Government did have comprehensive data on migrants in Greece, including their number, citizenship and country of origin and the type of residence permit held. A recent survey on income and living conditions, cited in his Government's replies to the list of issues, had collected data on the extent to which foreign nationals residing in Greece suffered from poverty and social exclusion. He wished to emphasize that the main factor contributing to diversity in Greece was the presence of migrants, not the existence of groups with distinct ethnic or cultural identities. His Government believed that the existing tools at its command were suitable means of detecting and combating discrimination.

32. The drafting of the report had been coordinated by the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity using input from other ministries involved in protecting economic, social and cultural rights. The process had enabled the Government to identify shortcomings in the protection of such rights and had raised awareness of the Covenant at all levels of the government administration. Constructive comments had been received from the National Commission on Human Rights, which represented six major NGOs and had been very active in defending the rights enshrined in the Covenant.

33. **Ms. Papageorgiou** (Greece) said that her Government was aware of the problem of the underrepresentation of women in the Greek Government. It was willing to do what was necessary to rectify the situation, including giving consideration to the possibility of electoral quotas, and had already adopted a number of measures to address the gender imbalance in decision-making positions. Unfortunately, the recent elections had not alleviated the situation, at least in part because of the system whereby the electorate voted for parties rather than for individual candidates. The new National Action Plan for Gender Equality was being prepared, and within the strategic framework of the General Secretariat for Gender Equality, a project was being pursued to promote and support women's participation in positions of political responsibility at the regional and local levels. A similar project focusing on political representation at the national and European levels targeted female candidates and officeholders. Its aims included empowering women, increasing their knowledge of European and national gender policies and upgrading their communication and negotiation skills.

34. The financial crisis had had a particularly strong impact on women, as they were more likely than men to be performing temporary, part-time, low-paid or unpaid work and were therefore more vulnerable to poverty. Her Government had taken various steps to support the employment of women, and the new National Action Plan for Gender Equality would aim to reduce gender segregation in the labour market and, by extension, the earnings gap between women and men.

35. **Ms. Margaroni** (Greece) said that the principle of non-discrimination was enshrined in her country's Constitution and applied to all areas of the legal framework. The two European Union directives that had, as mentioned earlier, been transposed into the anti-discrimination law prohibited all direct and indirect forms of discrimination. The grounds for discrimination explicitly prohibited by the law were the same as those in the directives. Furthermore, specific legislation on gender equality also covered economic, social and cultural rights.

36. The principle of equal pay for work of equal value was enshrined in articles 4 and 22 of the Constitution, while article 116 stated that positive measures to promote equality between women and men did not constitute gender-based discrimination. The texts of collective agreements were submitted to the Ministry of Labour, Social Security and Social Solidarity for review, and no violations of the principle of equal pay for work of equal value, or evidence of discrimination against either sex in terms of remuneration or working conditions, had thus far been uncovered.

37. **Ms. Zomenou** (Greece), replying to questions about collective bargaining, trade union rights and arbitration procedures, said that the laws enacted to implement the provisions of the Memorandum of Understanding were based on the assumption that the country's protective labour laws would be dismantled in order to make the economy more competitive. In line with the austerity measures, the previous Government had allowed collective agreements to be negotiated at the enterprise level rather than the sectoral level, which made workers more vulnerable to pressure from their employers. The abolition of the collective autonomy measures protected under article 22 of the Constitution restricted the right to collective bargaining. In 2012, the Government had reduced the minimum wage levels established by the national general collective agreement by 22 per cent in general and by 32 per cent for workers under the age of 25. Automatic wage increases had been suspended until such time as the national unemployment rate might fall below 10 per cent. Collective agreements could no longer exceed three years in duration. Unilateral recourse to arbitration had been abolished except in certain situations, as the Council of State had considered the practice unconstitutional. Recourse to arbitration led to a 10-day suspension of the right to strike, which weakened employees' bargaining positions. When a collective agreement expired, the parties were obliged to reach a new agreement within three

months; otherwise, the terms of individual employment agreements would apply, a provision that encroached on the right to collective bargaining. Furthermore, arbitration was limited to issues regarding basic wages.

38. Her Government would shortly launch consultations, to be led by a group of independent experts, to review the framework within which the labour market currently operated. International best practices and the principles of the European Union social model would be taken into account, and input would be provided by international organizations, including the International Labour Organization.

39. **Mr. Oikonomou** (Greece) said that funding to assist Roma inhabitants of Greece was provided mainly by the European Union. Since 2013, his country had had a national focal point for Roma issues whose responsibilities included monitoring the impact of integration measures.

40. **Ms. Gavouchidou** (Greece) said that the years 2014 and especially 2015 had seen a huge increase in the flow of refugees into and across Greece. As of September, the total number of refugees entering the country during 2015 had surpassed 300,000. The majority of recent arrivals belonged to categories of migrants entitled to international protection, with Syrians, Afghans, Somalis and Eritreans topping the list. Her Government was making heroic efforts to handle the crisis; for example, the Coast Guard had already conducted more than 57,000 search-and-rescue operations. The International Organization for Migration, the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees and the European Asylum Support Office were helping Greece and Italy provide migrants with food, shelter, and registration and counselling services, while the European Commission was helping to coordinate relief efforts.

41. **Ms. Charokopou** (Greece) said that migrants had access to education and emergency health care regardless of their residence status. Migrants who had resided in the country for more than three years could access national employment, education, social security and health-care services on an equal footing with nationals. Asylum seekers and refugees had access to the same services and were granted additional housing benefits and family reunification rights. They also had the right to move freely within the country and could travel abroad for periods of up to three months.

42. **Mr. Ribeiro Leão** asked whether steps had been taken to identify and combat any possible cases of child exploitation following the significant increase in mixed migratory flows. He also wished to know whether any cross-cutting national policies had been introduced to reduce the number of persons living in poverty.

43. **Ms. Shin** asked whether national anti-domestic-violence legislation made specific reference to the particular needs of vulnerable groups of women and whether measures had been adopted to ensure that women with disabilities had equal access to the national shelters, hotlines and support services made available to victims of domestic violence. She also wished to know more about the steps taken to guarantee access to health care for vulnerable and disadvantaged persons following the introduction of national austerity measures and about the outcome of such health promotion programmes as the national programme designed to encourage people to adopt more healthful diets and the anti-smoking campaign.

44. **Mr. Pillay** asked whether specific measures had been taken to protect vulnerable persons from the effects of national austerity measures and, if so, how effective they had been in shielding those persons from poverty. He also wished to know whether the State party had introduced other policies, aside from those providing for rental subsidies, to combat extreme poverty and address housing issues on a long-term basis.

45. In regard to the Roma, he asked whether the Government had considered requesting assistance from the European Social Fund and the European Regional

Development Fund in order to improve their living conditions. What efforts had been made to safeguard the Roma's land and property ownership rights?

46. **Mr. De Schutter**, noting that there had been a rise in cases of HIV/AIDS and other communicable diseases over recent years, said that he would like to know what steps had been taken to reverse that trend. He also would like to know whether the national compulsory testing programme for communicable diseases remained operational and, if so, whether it would be discontinued in the near future given the medical community's serious concerns about its effectiveness.

47. **Mr. Uprimny Yepes** said that information on efforts made to introduce a holistic harm reduction policy and provide access to appropriate treatment and support services for drug users would be very welcome.

48. **Ms. Antonopoulou** (Greece) said that specific measures would shortly be taken to improve national monitoring of the impact of austerity measures on poverty levels and on the enjoyment of human rights. The first two European Commission economic adjustment programmes for Greece had called for wage reductions and greater labour market competitiveness as part of efforts to increase national exports, reduce unemployment and lower the government debt-to-GDP ratio. Regrettably, the outcome of those measures had differed significantly from the expected results. The debt-to-GDP ratio had in fact risen from 120 to 180 per cent of GDP over the course of the programmes, and unemployment had soared. During the negotiations of the third European Commission economic adjustment programme for Greece, the Government had presented evidence of the previous programmes' failure to address the debt-to-GDP ratio and had advocated an alternative solution. However, its suggestions had largely been disregarded in favour of continuing the same approach. In order to avert the reoccurrence of similar crises in future, transformative solutions at a global level would be required to address international financial governance issues. A specialized international financial observatory with consultative powers would be required to promote that stance. Without a new approach, Greece and the other eight European countries with similarly high long-term unemployment figures would continue to face the same difficulties in future. A European job creation and guarantee policy alongside the existing retraining and capacity-building programme must be established in order to bring about real change and reduce national unemployment rates. During the negotiations of the third European Commission economic adjustment programme for Greece, the Government had managed to secure specific provisions aimed at creating around 150,000 new jobs, which would go some way to lowering the high unemployment rate. It had also launched a temporary job placement scheme for young persons to enable them to gain a foothold on the career ladder and acquire the workplace skills required to progress onto permanent positions.

The meeting rose at 6 p.m.