

Roadmap on Carcinogens Conference 27.11.2019

Minister Pekonen

OPENING SPEECH

Distinguished guests,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure I welcome you all to Finland, to the House of estates. This building has played an important role in Finland's history, and the Finnish democracy.

I would like to begin with a couple of words on the priorities of Finland's Presidency. As the Presidency of the Council of the European Union, Finland wants to contribute in building socially, economically and ecologically sustainable future for Europe.

A key priority of Finland's Presidency is the EU's global leadership in climate action. This means committing to climate neutrality by 2050, making it in a socially just way.

Furthermore, another priority of Finland is to make the EU more competitive and socially inclusive. The Finnish Presidency also wishes to strengthen common values and the rule of law. Human rights, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law are all values that EU countries commit to as part of membership. They are principles that Finland has promoted since its independence.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The main Presidency theme of the social and health sector, the Economy of Wellbeing, contributes to our Presidency goals. The Economy of Wellbeing is a holistic approach, emphasising the importance of cross-sectoral cooperation and contributing to the implementation of the UN Agenda 2030.

With the Economy of Wellbeing Finland wishes to increase understanding in the EU, how inclusive growth improves people's wellbeing, while wellbeing of the population enhances not only economic growth, but also the stability of the economy and society. At the same time, with this approach we want to ensure that no one is left behind in our rapidly changing world, and that people feel safe and cared for. After all, promoting people's wellbeing and safe-guarding peace, security, prosperity and the rule of law, are the most important task of the European Union.

Occupational Safety and Health is an important part of the Economy of Wellbeing, as a cornerstone of workers' wellbeing and productivity.

The Council Conclusions on the Economy of Wellbeing were adopted by the Member States on 24th October. The idea of putting people's wellbeing at the centre of decision-making is also linked to the draft Council Conclusions on Occupational Safety and Health, prepared by the Finnish Presidency to be adopted in December EPSCO Council. The Council Conclusions on Occupational Safety and Health will address challenges like monitoring working conditions, raising awareness and the enforcement of occupational safety and health.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Protecting its citizens is one of the most important functions of the European Union. One of the biggest health problems that workplaces face across Europe – and in the world – is work-related cancer. Cancer is, indeed, causing more than 50 per cent of work-related deaths in the EU and other developed countries, as a result of exposure to carcinogens, leading to around 80 000 fatalities annually.

This is devastating. Roadmap on Carcinogens has now been actively fighting against occupational cancer for three years. The purpose is to raise awareness about the risks arising from exposure to carcinogens in the workplace and exchange good practices to prevent them.

Carcinogen exposure threatens workers' health and life. It also affects their ability to participate in work and the productivity levels. This, in turn, has adverse effects for companies and employers. Occupational exposure to carcinogens needs to be prevented, or at least reduced. If appropriate measures are taken at workplace, the burden of cancers could be significantly reduced.

We are working hard in the EU level to establish binding limit values for a number of cancer – or mutation – causing chemical agents. Finland supports actively this work and warmly welcome the effective work of the Commission on this important matter. We encourage the good co-operation to continue, as we still have more work to do, and we need more efforts that go beyond limit values.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to thank the Roadmap Partners, Austria, the Netherlands, Business Europe, European Trade Union Confederation, EU-OSHA and the European Commission, for initiating the Roadmap on Carcinogens campaign in the first place. Finland is very happy to be part of the Roadmap, and I am more than happy to inform you, that it will continue beyond 2019, as the German Presidency will organize the next Roadmap conference.

Roadmap on Carcinogens has been a joint effort for a voluntary action scheme on good practices in the prevention of work related cancer. It has facilitated the exchange of information about good practices is an effective way to help companies and workers. The Roadmap – like the Economy of Wellbeing approach – is a great example of how important it is that we put our strength together.

Dear Friends,

I want to thank for your contribution in this important work, and for attending this Conference, either here in Helsinki or via web-cast. Only by joining our efforts, we can achieve our goal, to reduce the burden of work-related cancers, which is also our theme today.

With these words, I wish you a very pleasant stay in Helsinki and fruitful days at the Conference! The fight against occupational cancer must go on!

Thank you.