



HUNGARIAN PRESIDENCY OF THE COUNCIL OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

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## Work and family life – conference of experts on demography

Article date: 2011, March 29 - 11:30am Last modified date: 2011, March 29 - 11:31am

**Entitled “Reconciliation of Work and Family Life – Its effect on Demographic Processes,” a two-day expert conference, began at the Hungarian Academy of Sciences building in Budapest, on 28 March 2011. This event opens “Europe for Families, Families for Europe,” a thematic week of the Hungarian Presidency, focussing on issues related to demography and family policy.**

The week is devoted to scientific and public conferences, including an informal meeting of ministers responsible for Demography and Family Policy Issues, and “Family Festival with Europe,” a major public event to close the program series.

Seven Member States of the European Union including Hungary, are already facing a diminishing population at a national level. This is a major challenge the European Union has to face, in coming decades. The Hungarian Presidency wishes to increase the priority given, to family support in the EU agenda.

“Who will carry love over to the other side?” President Pál Schmitt, said opening the conference with a quotation from the poem of László Nagy. Hungarians are decreasing in number, so are European nations; the whole of Europe is struggling with an aging population, the crises of families, and a decline in birth rate, the President said. Decision makers, legislators, scientific bodies, and public persons, intend to join forces with civil society at a European level. Together we may be able to stop negative trends and set out in the right direction, he added. Pál Schmitt expressed his hope that the Hungarian EU Presidency would contribute to the adoption of the so-called Trio+1 Statement, in which the Spanish-Belgian-Hungarian Presidential Trio with Poland, to endorse their support of fertility, and the reconciliation of work and family life.

József Pálincás, President of the Hungarian Academy of Sciences, talked about the reluctance of European citizens to settle down and have children. About 60-100 years ago, when the standard of living was much lower, population was growing. Accordingly, the reduction of population cannot be down to financial causes only. The academician believes we should look for the real reasons inside souls, our mindsets and ourselves.

Europe’s future depends on families, said Miklós Soltész, Minister of State for Social, Family, and Youth Affairs, who claimed that troubles start with families falling apart. The Minister of State mentioned a survey, which had found that 20-30 percent of the women surveyed thought their role as mothers, was to stay with their children as long as possible; 50 percent of mothers considered the reconciliation of family and work important; and 20 percent would put their career first. The Minister noted that it would

be interesting to launch a research project in 2012, to examine the elderly lives of persons who opted for career in their active age.

Europe's strength depends on its economic and demographic conditions. Economy does not function without labour, but a further decrease in birth rate may bring more trouble for the European economy, Miklós Soltész declared.