

REPORT of the 28th EUFASA Conference - Warsaw (Poland)

The 28th EUFASA Conference took place in Warsaw from 13 to 15 May 2012. 44 Delegates from 22 EUFASA member countries represented their Associations. At the invitation of the Polish Chair, 13 Observers from European Embassies in Warsaw attended the Conference.

Sunday 13 May 2012:

Steering Committee meeting to discuss:

- Composition of the 2012-2013 Steering Committee
- EUFASA Chair for 2013-2014
- EUFASA external and internal websites and the tasks of the new webmaster

Monday 14 May 2012:

The Opening Ceremony took place at the Lazienki Palace, the Conference venue, with speeches of welcome by Mrs. Grażyna Bernatowicz, Under Secretary of State of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Mrs. Katarzyna Braiter, EUFASA Chair.

Establishing the Guidelines for the “EUFASA Welcome Team” was presented by Germany, Chair of the Working Group, along with the Czech Republic, Finland, France, Italy, the Netherlands and Portugal. The EUFASA Welcome Team aims at creating a system whereby European diplomats and their families will welcome their newly arrived European colleagues on postings abroad, similarly to the existing Anglo-Saxon “buddy system” and the French “accueil”. National associations will be responsible for coordinating the support in European capitals, and the EUFASA member countries will take turns in coordinating the support system in postings outside of Europe. One of the first steps will be to complete “post reports” for all the postings, which will be distributed to newcomers. A permanent working group within EUFASA will help kick-start the process and maintain continuity along the coming years.

The legal status of accompanying parents was presented by Poland (Chair), the Czech Republic, France and Hungary. The Group presented and discussed best practices related to the needs and challenges when taking the parents of diplomats (often elderly dependent persons) along on posting, addressing issues such as diplomatic status, medical insurance and travel costs.

The issue of **Communication between the Associations and their MFAs** was presented by Austria (Chair). Based on a survey distributed to all EUFASA members, it analysed the level of interlocutors, intensity and frequency of communication between Associations and their MFAs and proposed recommendations to improve communication channels.

A presentation on **“Being an expatriate spouse: challenges and opportunities”** by Mrs. Svala Guomundsdottir, Assistant Professor in Human Resource Management at the University of Iceland School of Business, analysed the findings of a 2011 survey on expatriates and pointed out to the difficulties for spouses to maintain a career abroad.

Two workshops were held for delegates and guests on:

- Brainstorming on a new Conference model (chaired by Italy)
- Brainstorming on the EUFASA Welcome Team System (chaired by Germany)

Tuesday 15 May 2012:

Workshop reports and recommendations were presented to delegates.

The Working Group on **Establishing Links with the Private Sector**, chaired by Portugal and supported by France, Italy and Switzerland, presented a number of practical issues as a follow-up to its work in 2010-2011, including the set-up of a specific webpage on employment on the EUFASA website and “employment start kits” to help spouses of diplomats find employment abroad.

A Working Group chaired by Italy and supported by Belgium, Spain and the European Commission, presented a set of recommendations on how to improve the format and reduce the overall cost of organizing the **Annual EUFASA Conferences**, at a time when many countries are facing drastic budget cuts and finding volunteers to host these events is becoming more difficult each year.

Finally, a report on the issue of the **legal status of the spouse in the case of same-sex partnerships** was presented by Finland, as a follow-up to the recommendations presented on this topic at the 2011 Conference in Budapest.

In the concluding session of the Conference the **Agenda of the 2013 Conference** was adopted by the delegates and the following **Working Groups** were established:

- Permanent Working Group “EUFASA Welcome Team” (chaired by Germany)
- Permanent Working Group on Employment (chaired by France)
- Working group on “Children on the Move” (co-chaired by Belgium and the UK)
- Working Group on “EUFASA in the Future – challenges and opportunities” (chaired by Poland)

Two specific reports will be presented:

- Pension Funds – Loss of work compensation (Netherlands)
- Allowances for international school fees (Netherlands)

A workshop will be held by Greece on “Self-Marketing and Professional Networking of Spouses”.

In the closing ceremony, Mr. Mirosław Gajewski, active Director General of the Foreign Service of the Polish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, held a farewell speech on behalf of the Polish Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Radosław Sikorski, thanking delegates for their input and work both before and during the Conference, and thanking Switzerland for taking over the EUFASA Chairmanship for 2012-2013.