

## **Elements for the speech by the President**

for the Council of Europe Ceremony  
on the occasion of the 50th Anniversary  
of the European Social Charter  
Strasbourg, 18 October, noon

**Secretary General,**

**Dear colleagues,**

Today we commemorate the 50th anniversary of the European Social Charter. This is a landmark convention, which has brought about great improvements in the lives of millions of Europeans.

We are gathered here to reiterate our commitment to promoting the full enjoyment of social rights.

We all share the respect to the dignity of the human being. We must ensure that this dignity and the rights which flow therefrom are respected by every entity in a state. Parliaments, governments and economic actors should all act to ensure the full enjoyment of social rights as a matter of priority.

The European Social Charter is often compared to the European Convention of Human Rights, whose 60<sup>th</sup> anniversary we celebrated last year. These two instruments are major milestones in the development of human rights in Europe.

One being devoted to social, economic and cultural rights, and the other – to political and civil rights, the two conventions together make a whole, giving full value to the principles of universality and interdependence of human rights. They should therefore be treated with equal value.

First of all, they should be treated with equal value when it comes to the number of ratifications. All member states should be bound by both instruments. I think it is no longer acceptable to make excuses when it comes to ratification of the European Social Charter. All human beings have basic rights, and these include health, employment, and the right to be “free from want”, namely to be protected from poverty and exclusion.

All Council of Europe member states should, therefore, ratify the European Social Charter – in particular, the revised instrument of 1995 – as soon as possible.

Second, the two instruments must be treated with equal value when it comes to the protection by law of the rights enshrined therein at national level. This year in June, the Assembly discussed the role of parliaments in the consolidation and development of social rights in Europe.

Parliamentarians stressed the need to ensure the effective protection of social rights in domestic courts in all Council of Europe member states. We should train our judges, lawyers and civil servants to ensure that they apply the law, also as far as social rights are concerned.

Third, I would like to highlight the importance of states' acceptance of the collective complaints procedure, so as to reinforce social democracy and compliance with the Charter at national level.

Collective action is essential as it brings the values of democracy into the daily functioning of state structures. Collective complaints give people a voice. And this voice cannot and should not be ignored. Governments should not be afraid to be at the service of their people. Collective complaints are a litmus test of how ready our governments are to listen. This is, really, a democracy test.

I would like to take this opportunity to thank the European Committee for Social Rights for its tremendous work for making the European Social Charter a living instrument, bringing the social rights standards in line with the legal developments in Europe.

The Assembly reiterated in June this year that member states should respect their commitments under the charter and comply with the decisions of the Committee to ensure that social rights protection works in practice.

As was the case 50 years ago and ever since, I assure you, dear colleagues, that the Parliamentary Assembly will be at your side to ensure full support by European parliamentarians of the unique system of human rights protection provided by the European Social Charter together with the European Convention of Human Rights.

The Assembly will encourage national parliaments to use the Charter and the case law of the European Committee for Social Rights when drafting national or regional legislation incorporating principles and rights which are enshrined in the Charter.

Finally, I would like to underscore the important role played by civil society organizations and trade unions which often act as watchdogs for the protection of social rights. We must make sure that their substantial contribution to making our societies better are acknowledged and that their active participation is praised and supported.

Taking advantage of the past achievements, we shall strive to determine what our future, and that of our children, will be.

The 20<sup>th</sup> century was considered as the century of political and civil rights. A lot has been achieved, and a lot still remains to be done.

I am convinced that the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be the century of economic, social and cultural rights. Let's make that happen!

Thank you,