



European Economic and Social Committee

## **Europe should get together to support the European Social Charter and stand up for social rights**

**The Council of Europe, the Economic, Social and Environmental Council of France (ESEC) and the EESC held on 23 September in Paris at the headquarters of the French ESEC a joint conference on "The Council of Europe's Social Charter 50 years on: What next?" to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the 1961 Social Charter. The conference brought together representatives of legal and academic circles, trades unions and employers' organisations, as well as civil society bodies.**

The conference looked at how the European Social Charter has been applied over the last 50 years and at how it can be better used to help tackling the current economic crisis. The last session, which counted on a large participation of EESC members, reflected particularly on how the European Social Charter, the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights and the Community Charter of Fundamental Social Rights of Workers can complement each other to create a more social Europe.

Staffan Nilsson, as President of the European Economic and Social Committee, stressed at the opening of the conference:

*"The current financial crisis and corresponding social gloom in Europe require bold measures, not only in terms of European economic governance, but also through more European social solidarity. It is vital for the European social dimension to remain a visible and credible guarantor and stabiliser of social democracy. Civil society must play its part. The two Social Charters both of the Council of Europe and European Community, more than ever, remain benchmarks and measuring sticks of our attachment to social rights."*

Messages expressed during the conference included the need:

- to enhance the role of the charters in the current economic crisis to avoid the subsequent social crisis and to protect the most vulnerable and excluded;
- to insist on information and awareness-raising campaigns to promote the different charters amongst the population, so that people feel empowered to stand up to their social rights;

- to set up a new "social action programme" to help implementing the charters, making them more tangible and, by that, help restoring grassroots confidence in Europe;
- to reinforce solidarity in Europe, so that the aim of improving economic competitiveness is accompanied by a growing respect for fundamental social standards;
- to complement the social dialogue with civil dialogue and to adapt both to today's challenges and to really start working together;
- to invest in the complementary growth aims of the 2020 Strategy and to avoid any cuts in the social assistance and protection, given their future economic and social costs.
- to fully use the upcoming European Citizens' Initiative as a framework for true participatory democracy that will hopefully bring up proposals for initiatives for Community legislation in the areas covered by the charters.

This conference marked the start of a joint reflection on the methods and tools to build a culture of social rights for Europe.

In his closing address, Jean-Paul Delevoye, President of the French Economic, Social and Environmental Council, proposed that a joint meeting of the three institutions hosting the conference be held yearly to assess and carry further the Europe-wide campaign to promote basic social rights.

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