

## **Interparliamentary Conference on the European Social Charter**

Turin, 17 March 2016

### **Inaugural speech by the Mayor of Turin, Piero FASSINO**

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Hello to you all. Welcome to our city. A warm welcome to all the parliamentarians from the delegations of the 47 member States of the Council of Europe.

I would like to extend a particular welcome to the President of the State Duma of the Russian Federation. I would also like to thank the Chairman of the Social Affairs Committee of the Italian Chamber of Deputies, Mario Marazziti; the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Gabriella Battaini Dragoni, who has been the inspiration and conceptual force behind this gathering; and the Chairman of the Italian parliamentary delegation to the Council of Europe, Michele Nicoletti.

This Conference, known as “Turin 2”, takes place about one year after a similar meeting – the first of this kind – which we hosted here in Turin on the theme of social rights and respect for such rights within our countries and elsewhere.

Turin is the city where the European Social Charter was signed on 18 October 1961. Since then it has often hosted meetings, conferences and roundtables focusing on the Charter and its state of implementation. Today's gathering is in point of fact an interparliamentary conference dedicated to the Charter, as an emanation of the Turin Forum on Social Rights in Europe, which we set up last year.

The European Social Charter is one of the fundamental instruments for our continent and deals above all with the application of rights that affect the lives of our communities, our nations, our families and ourselves as individuals. With the Charter the Council of Europe sought to offer all the countries of our continent a series of fundamental rights essential for civil coexistence and for the full assertion of a democratic process guaranteeing equality of rights. They encompass the rights relating to work, to life within society, to gender equality and to recognition of the individuality of every person.

If we look at the constitutions that govern the lives of European nations, we see that the constitutions of the member States of the Council of Europe enshrine the very rights set forth in the Charter. It may therefore indeed be said that the Charter is one of the sources of fundamental rights for every country in the sphere of social and democratic rights. However, this does not mean that these rights are automatically recognised and applied, as we know that their actual recognition and application is dependent upon the social, political and economic circumstances of each country.

We are emerging from a period of deep economic crisis which has affected the whole world, and Europe in particular. We know that times of economic and social crisis are also times when rights are undermined.

When work and wages become less certain, when the conditions of everyday life are more exposed to the uncertainties arising from an economic and social crisis, respect for those rights is weakened. Therefore, it is not a mere formality that, today, after years of crisis, we are debating the state of application and implementation of the principles enshrined in the Charter and the extent of the commitment requiring each of us to assume responsibility for the protection and enforcement of these rights. This debate assumes even greater importance at this moment when we are all aware of how a crisis can trigger a retreat into nationalism, the emergence of populist movements and impulses towards intolerance, all of which clash with the principles of the European Social Charter and stand in the way of its application.

We all have in mind the troubled and complex manner with which our continent is handling the issue of migration, whether driven by economic factors or linked to an explosion of crises and conflicts, particularly within the Mediterranean basin but also farther afield, which have led to an influx of refugees. We are also aware of how the management of this delicate and difficult issue is having a strong impact on our way of life and our society. In the face of this phenomenon, we have witnessed with concern a retreat into attitudes of closure and the emergence of forces that feed on selfish and intolerant mindsets, which not only make it more difficult to deal with migration but also entail a negation of the fundamental rights of persons to whom equal guarantees should be afforded, rights which are in fact present within the Charter. That vests this debate being held today among representatives of the parliaments of all the countries concerned with a particular significance, linked to the issues with which we have to contend.

The parliamentarians who are here today will discuss these issues that are high on their own agendas and the agendas of their countries. This Conference can thus provide some extremely useful inputs for reasserting forcefully the central role of the Charter rights and their relevance, while inviting parliaments and governments to recognise those rights and to implement all the policies permitting their tangible assertion by citizens. We have two days of work ahead of us during which each of us will be able to make his or her own contribution so as to ensure that this conference can be a forum for discussion, reflection and the development of proposals which are useful for all of us.

I can only thank you once again for having chosen to take up my city's invitation, and I hope that your stay here will also offer you an opportunity to get to know it. It is a city which has undergone a major transformation over the last 20 years, after having been the industrial and manufacturing centre of Italy for more than a century.

Today Turin remains a great industrial city, but its horizons have become enlarged to the entire knowledge economy. It is increasingly hosting activities associated with technology, innovation and scientific and industrial research, and is a major university city, which invests a great deal in

education. It is also a great cultural capital, a city that has recently discovered a tourism vocation, becoming one of the main tourist cities in Italy, which opens up entirely new prospects. This shows how identities are never static but can change and evolve, becoming opportunities for work and investment, sowing the seeds for value creation and the assertion of rights that are fundamental for all of us.

I thank you sincerely. We receive you in a spirit of true friendship, hoping that you will also fall a little bit in love with our city and will have frequent occasions to come back here. We will always welcome you with affection and friendship.

Thank you once again.