

Ministers' Deputies

CM Documents

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1241 (Budget) Meeting, 24-26 November 2015

11 Programme, Budget and Administration

11.1 Draft Programme and Budget 2016-2017 –

Social cohesion – Intergovernmental structure

European Social Cohesion Platform (PECS)

Background

The goal of the Secretary General's ongoing reform process is to increase the political relevance and efficiency of the Council of Europe. This involves critically appraising each programme in order to focus on areas where the Organisation has an added value and a comparative advantage. In the social field, the Secretary General seeks to apply a transversal and cross-sectoral approach. Social cohesion should be mainstreamed into all relevant policy processes and into the functioning of the various bodies and institutions of the Council of Europe.

The Council of Europe Social Cohesion Strategy (2010) remains a reference for the work in this area. Building on the distinct transversal and multi-faceted nature of social cohesion, this mainstreaming represents a new and innovative approach to strengthening the Council of Europe's impact in this area. In the intergovernmental sector, all relevant steering and ad hoc committees² are instructed to contribute to the building of cohesive societies. The monitoring and follow-up mechanisms of the Council of Europe will be invited to pay due attention to the social aspect in their work, and co-operation projects will be designed to cover this aspect. The Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, as well as the Conference of INGOs and the Commissioner for Human Rights all make a major contribution towards more inclusive and cohesive societies through their work.

In this way, already existing and future activities on social cohesion will be given the visibility and dynamism they warrant to ensure that this topic is approached in a multidisciplinary and comprehensive manner. Examples include the implementation of Recommendation CM/Rec(2015)3 of the Committee of Ministers on access of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to social rights, the work of the Intercultural Cities Network, as well as the work to be carried out by the Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH) in the area of social rights and their implementation.

Following on from the objective for social cohesion in the Programme and Budget 2014-2015 "to contribute to ensuring that everyone has access to their social rights in practice and without any discrimination, with a special emphasis on vulnerable groups and young people", of particular relevance is the work to promote equal and effective enjoyment of social rights, which is decisive for the construction of cohesive societies. The European Social Charter represents a real added value of the Council Europe in this regard and is all the more relevant in times of crisis to help manage the impact of austerity measures on human rights and to avoid marginalisation resulting in poverty and exclusion. Practical action is required today to give full effect to the rights recognised in the Charter.

¹ This document has been classified restricted at the date of issue; it will be declassified in accordance with Resolution Res(2001)6 on access to Council of Europe documents.

² Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH); Gender Equality Commission (GEC), Ad Hoc Committee of experts on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CAHDPH), European Committee on Crime Problems (CDPC), European Committee on Legal Cooperation (CDCJ), Steering Committee on Media and Information Society (CDMSI), European Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG), Steering Committee for Educational Policy and Practice (CDPPE), European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ), Steering Committee for Culture, Heritage and Landscape (CDCPP). In addition, the Governmental Committee of the European Social Charter and the Ad hoc Committee of Experts on Roma Issues (CAHROM).

The long-term outcome of the targeted work of the relevant intergovernmental committees, monitoring and follow-up mechanisms and co-operation projects will be *inter alia* to contribute to stronger social cohesion and more secure and integrated societies.

In the framework of the examination of the draft Programme and Budget 2016-2017, a number of member States have requested an intergovernmental structure with a focused mandate accompanying this mainstreaming. To respond to this request, the Secretary General proposes the establishment by the Committee of Ministers of a European Social Cohesion Platform (PECS), as an *ad hoc* committee. This would reinforce the intergovernmental component of the Secretary General's strategy to enhance the Council of Europe's work in the area of social cohesion, in particular through the promotion of the European Social Charter and its collective complaints procedure in order to ensure equal and effective access to social rights.

Proposal

The Platform would sustain and underpin the Secretary General's reform process in this field by promoting equal and effective enjoyment of social rights, by ensuring that a social cohesion perspective is mainstreamed in the activities of all relevant committees and bodies of the Organisation, through the sharing of good practices and by examining new trends and challenges. The Platform would be open to all member States, bodies and institutions of the Council of Europe, international organisations and other relevant stakeholders.

Mandate of the Platform

The Platform will ensure the mainstreaming of social cohesion throughout the Council of Europe by further developing the concept, by contributing to impact assessments of the various activities in the different sectors with regard to achieving social cohesion, including the relevant activities aimed at building inclusive societies, and by promoting specific actions which contribute to social cohesion. Particular attention will be paid to ensuring that everyone can enjoy their social rights, as guaranteed by the European Social Charter and other relevant instruments, in practice and without any discrimination, with a special emphasis on vulnerable groups and young people, taking into account the findings of the relevant monitoring mechanisms. For this purpose, the Platform will support co-operation activities carried out upon the request of member States.

The Platform will foster the exchange of good practices and innovative approaches in the field of social cohesion among member States, as well as with relevant international organisations and other stakeholders.

The Platform will examine new trends and challenges to social cohesion in specific areas such as the protection and integration of migrants and refugees, the impact of the economic crisis on social and health protection, in particular combating poverty and exclusion which may foster violent radicalisation, and the access of vulnerable groups and young people to social rights, while including a human dignity and anti-discrimination perspective in this work. It will advise the Committee of Ministers and the Secretary General on any appropriate action to be taken.

The Platform will take due account of a gender perspective in the performance of its tasks.

Membership and functioning of the Platform

Governments of member States will be invited to designate one or more representatives of the highest possible rank in the field of social cohesion. The Council of Europe will bear the travel and subsistence expenses of one representative from each member State. Each member of the Platform shall have one vote.

The following may send representatives, without the right to vote and at the charge of their corresponding administrative budgets:

- Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe;
- Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe;
- European Court of Human Rights;
- Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights;
- Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe;
- Venice Commission;
- European Committee of Social Rights,

- committees or other bodies of the Council of Europe engaged in related work, as appropriate, in particular:
 - o Governmental Committee of the European Social Charter and the European Code of Social Security,
 - o Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH),
 - o Gender Equality Commission (GEC),
 - o Ad Hoc Committee of experts on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CAHDPH),
 - o European Committee on Crime Problems (CDPC),
 - o European Committee on Legal Cooperation (CDCJ),
 - o Steering Committee on Media and Information Society (CDMSI),
 - o European Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG),
 - o Steering Committee for Educational Policy and Practice (CDPPE),
 - o European Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ),
 - o Steering Committee for Culture, Heritage and Landscape (CDCPP).
 - o Ad hoc Committee of Experts on Roma Issues (CAHROM).

The following may send representatives, without the right to vote and without defrayal of expenses:

- European Union, including, as appropriate, the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (EUROFOUND);
- Observer States to the Council of Europe: Canada, Holy See, Japan, Mexico, United States of America;
- countries concerned with the Council of Europe policy towards neighbourhood regions;
- Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) (including ODIHR);
- United Nations including its specialised agencies, programmes, funds and other entities, in particular International Labour Organisation;
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD);
- Nordic Centre for Welfare and Social Issues (NVC) under the aegis of the Nordic Council of Ministers;
- European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) and/or Business Europe and International Organisation of Employers (“social partners”);
- other non-governmental organisations upon invitation from the Platform.

The Platform will hold annual meetings and work, as required, by means of electronic communication between meetings.

The Platform shall appoint a Gender Equality Rapporteur from amongst its members.

Exchange of information and communication

In order to keep the members of the Platform, the interested national institutions, civil society and the public at large updated on Council of Europe’s activities in this area, the Secretariat will provide monthly information in the form of an electronic “Social Cohesion Newsletter”.

Duration and evaluation

The Platform will operate from 1 January 2016 until 31 December 2017. It will contribute to the preparation by the Secretary General of an interim report on the progress and results in its field of competence after the end of the first year and a final report by end-2017.

Estimated costs

One meeting of the Platform per year of two days duration amounts to € 50 000 per year in 2016 and 2017. One A grade staff member will support the Platform and ensure the regular publication of the “Social Cohesion Newsletter”.