



**SECRETARIAT GENERAL**

DIRECTORATE GENERAL HUMAN RIGHTS AND RULE OF LAW

*DEPARTMENT OF THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL CHARTER*

Strasbourg, 23 September 2016

PECS(2016)7

**EUROPEAN SOCIAL COHESION PLATFORM  
(PECS)**

**1<sup>st</sup> meeting**

**27-28 June 2016**

*Council of Europe, Palais de l'Europe, room 9*

**FINAL REPORT**

## **I. OPENING OF THE MEETING**

1. The Meeting was opened by Mr Régis Brillat, Head of the Department of the European Social Charter, who welcomed the participants and recalled the context of the creation of the Platform for 2016-2017 as well as its Terms of Reference (ToR). He stressed in particular the following points:

- the multidisciplinary approach wanted by the Secretary General (SG) to keep social cohesion high in the Council of Europe's agenda: all instances of the Organisation are asked to participate in the work;
- the importance of social cohesion for Europe and Europeans and the fact that all the definitions of social cohesion have in common the link of individuals to the society to which they belong;
- the importance of the respect of social rights for all individuals and the fact that the European Social Charter provides for rights which concern persons in their relation to the others and to the society they are living in;
- social exclusion is a reality of European societies and puts at risk all the rights of the Charter;
- the fact that some PECS working themes are already present in the ToR in relation to the priorities of the Secretary General as accepted by Committee of Ministers;
- the Platform should pay special attention to the challenges European societies have to face;
- the Platform will have one two-day meeting per year and no Bureau, therefore innovative methods of communication will be used;
- the main result expected is to contribute to the reflection on the future in this field in the SG report (as an Interim report at the end of 2016 and a final report by the end of 2017), including also suggestions on how to pursue and amplify the work in this field.

### **I.ii Adoption of the draft agenda and order of business**

2. The Platform adopted the agenda as it appears in document PECS(2016)1 (Appendix1) and the order of business [doc.PECS(2016)5].

## **II. ELECTIONS**

### **II.i Election of the Chair and Vice-Chair**

3. The Platform elected Mr Alexander Preobrazhenskiy (Russian Federation) as Chair and Ms Petya Moeva (Bulgaria) as Vice-Chair for a one-year term.

### **II.ii Appointment of a Rapporteur on Gender Equality**

4. The Platform appointed Ms Merita Xhafaj (Albania) as Rapporteur on Gender Equality (2016-2017).

## **III. QUESTIONS OF INTEREST TO THE PLATFORM WORKING PROGRAMME**

5. In the context of the central place of the European Social Charter and of an interest to assess its work priorities and to provide for relevant activities within PECS mandate following the Council of Europe activities in the area of social cohesion, the Platform took note of the following:

### **i. European Social Charter**

by Mr Henrik Kristensen, Deputy Head of the Department of the European Social Charter and Deputy Executive Secretary of the European Committee of Social Rights, DGI

6. Mr Kristensen presented an overview of the European Social Charter (ESC) and its monitoring mechanism stressing that the substantive social rights set out by this treaty are indispensable to social cohesion and inclusion.

7. He recalled that the ESC is a wide-ranging treaty, protecting specifically groups of persons and informed the Platform on the present state of ratification of the Charter and of the collective complaints procedure. He explained the role of the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR) within the Charter's two monitoring procedures:

- o Reporting procedure (main findings and problems identified as well as positive developments are reflected in Conclusions 2015)
- o Collective complaints procedure (nature of the procedure; basic statistics; issues complained of; examples of recent high-profile cases and decisions)

8. The presentation also addressed:

- challenges relating to the Charter, such as the need for more ratifications, synergies and a better follow-up/implementation at the Committee of Ministers level as well as at national level, tensions between the Charter and European Union law, the importance of avoiding discrepancies between the two legal orders;

- the Turin Process, launched in 2014, which aims to tackle these challenges and to mobilise political support in order to (1) promote further ratifications of the revised European Social Charter and the collective complaints system as well as identify obstacles to this process; (2) streamline the monitoring procedures; (3) enhance targeted co-operation with member States in the field of social rights and (4) maintain dialogue with the European Union. The Parliamentary Assembly is currently elaborating a report on the Turin Process. High-level meetings gathering together stakeholders involved in decision making on ratification should be organised in Member states.

- the need for the European Social Cohesion Platform to contribute to taking the Turin Process further.

9. Replying to a question on the main achievements of the Turin Process, it was emphasised that the Process had already resulted in more commitment from States to the European Social Charter, in putting it on the agenda of policy makers, as well as in a number of activities including communication and awareness raising activities.

10. On the question on the impact of discrepancies between the ESC and EU law, it was recalled that a document had been elaborated by the ECSR on this issue and that there were ongoing discussions between the Council of Europe and the European Union to improve the situation.

- ii. **Recommendation CM/Rec(2015)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the access of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to social rights** (Enter! Recommendation) and its follow-up  
by Mr Menno Ettema, Youth Department, DG II

11. After recalling the Co-management approach of the Youth Department of the Council of Europe (30 representatives of youth non-governmental organisations (NGOs) work together with governmental representatives in the Joint Council of Youth on the priorities, budgets and programme of the youth sector of the Council of Europe), focus was initially put on the background of CM/Rec(2015)3, called also "the Enter! Recommendation", as it was the result of the initiative "Enter! Project". This was launched in 2009 by the youth sector in order to develop policy responses based on social rights to situations of exclusion, discrimination and violence affecting

young people in vulnerable situations. The initial phases identified the need of long-term training courses for youth workers working in socially disadvantaged environment and included different types of activities and youth interventions, such as:

- local youth projects, involving municipalities, on the theme of access to social rights;
- the educational game "Enter Dignityland!" for learning about social rights through human rights education; the game can be played with young people to raise their awareness about social rights and how to deal with the challenges and to balance needs of different members of a community in order to reach inclusive decisions;
- European meetings of children (10-16) that were trained by the youth workers participating in the "ENTER! Project". These children contributed to the consultation process leading to the CM Recommendation;
- thematic seminars on social rights;
- international youth activities called "study sessions", organised at the Council of Europe's European Youth Centres in order to develop approach to social rights issues in co-operation with international youth organisations.

12. Relevant elements of CM/Rec(2015)3 which should lead to young people's access and enjoyment of social rights were presented, in particular the development of more inclusive policies for young people in need, also to prevent, eradicate violence and exclusion as well as the importance of youth friendly and accessible public services. Programmes on participation of young people from these neighbourhood should lead to active citizenship. The recognition of informal education and youth work was also important to succeed in this area. Local and regional authorities should be involved in such approaches as their role is paramount. Public authorities were asked to translate the recommendation and disseminate it among young people as widely as possible. The Recommendation should be reviewed every 3-4 years.

13. At present the follow-up focuses on how to translate the Recommendation into effective action. Among the main elements:

- User friendly Guidelines are being developed in order to support public authorities, youth workers and youth in putting into practice the principles of the Recommendation and reach adapted policies to include young people. On the Website <http://www.coe.int/en/web/enter/home> examples and good practices can be found to support the implementation of the Recommendation.
- Local cooperation Projects are set up with municipalities in different member States to assist them in the promotion and implementation of the "ENTER! Recommendation" by local authorities and local level youth work initiatives.
- New long training course for Youth Workers and representatives of Local Authorities.
- International meetings, such as the study session "Employability United!" to promote and support access to employment and autonomy for young people.
- National level seminars to support the networking and promotion of innovative and coordinated ways of working on access to social rights.
- Research on youth work and youth policy aspects related to access to social rights for young people
- A data base of practices.

14. A seminar "Enter!: from Policy to Practice" on the implementation of CM/Rec(2015)3 through youth work and youth policy practitioners will take place in Strasbourg, on 27-29 September 2016. The PECS was invited to be represented. Representatives of member states of the Platform could also contribute to the implementation of the Recommendation at a national level and could benefit of the support to a rapid youth policy review. The PECS will be asked to take part in the future review process of Recommendation CM/Rec(2015)3.

15. Among the positive feedback on this presentation by members of the Platform, focus was put on:

- the on-going follow-up of this Recommendation was considered as a good example of a mechanism for the implementation of policies and to make them more effective, which could be useful to the Platform when it comes to the implementation of its mandate in the field of social rights.
- the challenge to empower young people to express their specific needs;
- the importance in this context of a secure budget and of a consistent approach.

The PowerPoint will be available on the PECS' Website.

### **iii. Report on social inclusion and young people**

by Ms Clémentine Moyart, European Youth Forum

16. The European Youth Forum (EYF), which is a platform of organisations, including several National Youth Councils, and covering a broad range of youth related issues, elaborated a report on "Social inclusion and young people - Excluding youth a threat to our future", which led to EYF's Resolution on "Autonomy and Inclusion".

17. The report was rooted in the present situation, with new forms of exclusion, young people had to face, which was worsened by the crisis. Though employment and unemployment of young people is high in the European agenda, there were aspects to be taken care of - also in countries with high employability. New forms of exclusion and new challenges needed to be faced. Social inclusion and young people were important in the context of radicalisation (young people would not be risk if they were fully included in the society and not discriminated). The report focused on:

#### a. Quality education and the effective access to a quality education for all young people.

Under 'Inclusive education' were considered: (a) the barriers more vulnerable groups have to face, leading to segregation or school leaving; (b) lifelong learning, which should not be only linked to labour market needs; (3) Non-formal education, which develops competences necessary in building an inclusive society, but has seen reduced investment. A holistic approach to education is needed as well as support for young people and their families in order to ensure equality of chances.

#### b. Unemployment

Youth unemployment, which did rise together with social exclusion since the crisis, was generally monitored and dealt with, but there were still aspects to consider, such as underemployment and poor quality jobs for young people who gave up job search.

Job creation efforts were missing and did not adequately take into account recent graduates, with an almost complete disappearance of entry-level jobs. Equal access to apprenticeship and internship should be ensured as presently many graduates take apprenticeships (with subsequent fall of apprenticeships without prior qualifications and training). Traineeship, were often non paid and not recognised, with no contract and consequent impact on social protection. A better cooperation in this context should exist between employment services and the education system.

Discrimination on the labour market, based on the age and even reflecting multiple discrimination, was quite common for young people, who were often not aware of their rights. One example were the youth minimum wages existing in some European countries; it was not proved that such wages would provide more jobs, but could lead to work poverty.

Another difficulty was related to the eligibility for and receipt of unemployment benefits to strict conditionality, often dependent on previous employment and even coupled with negative

sanctions, and their adequacy. The accessibility issue was even more challenging in the framework of labour mobility.

#### c. Employment

A longer period of time was necessary before finding a first job, also in countries with high employment rates, with consequent involuntary temporary work and non-standard forms of employment. New challenges were related to precarious jobs and the pension schemes, which are not aligned to young people transition from education to employment and the reality of present employment's trajectory. In a situation of non-standard employment young people were not able to contribute to such schemes. Current pensioners are favoured over future ones, creating a problem of intergenerational equity. Concerning self-employment and the sharing economy, there is a forward thinking approach to deal with changes: creative freedom for business should go with the necessary protection of workers' rights.

The work life balance, in particular for women, was a key challenge, especially in the expected demographic context of an ageing society. Obstacles to the access of care services and inadequate services should be dealt with and effective care and reconciliation policies should be focused upon.

#### d. Independent life

Member States were giving more attention to family benefits than supporting independent life of young people, with consequent income support for them – when available - not sufficient to prevent poverty and social exclusion. Only in very few European countries young people with no work experience were entitled to receive the full amount of unemployment benefit. Adequacy of disability benefit should also be a concern. The report suggested a non-discriminatory adequate means-tested minimum income as a strong pillar for an active inclusion of strategy for youth, in a framework supporting comprehensive access to affordable quality services and quality jobs in an inclusive labour market.

Access to affordable housing was a main concern in a context of “stay-at-home” policies, with reduced access to housing benefits as a way to save public money, instead of supporting young people in achieving independence through moving out of the family home. A coherent housing policy for young people should be foreseen.

In such context, together with increased poverty, youth homelessness is growing in Europe. The concern should include also insecure and inadequate housing, which decreased young people's chances of social inclusion. Youth effective homelessness strategies should be adopted, with a comprehensive range of services aiming at their quick reintegration into the society.

Access to health care services was still problematic for the most vulnerable young people, in particular undocumented migrants. More investment should be put in this sector, including mental health services, which can be vital for young people. Society should adapt to young people and long-term sustainable policies should be implemented in order to reach their inclusion.

18. During the exchanges which followed the presentation, it was said that:

- young people should be involved in the topics of their concern;
- intergenerational aspects were important and generations should not be put against each other (one partner in the preparation of the report has been “Age Platform Europe”, network of NGOs focusing on policies impacting on older and retired people);
- employment was crucial for young people, but other issues too and a broader set of policies had to be foreseen for young people;
- the “quality of the employment” was important as young people had to keep a certain level of life;

- EU countries endorsed the principle of youth guarantee, however an uncertainty lies on the fact of young people knowing it or how to proceed;
- member States should invest in public employment services to follow different young people.

The full report was available on line on <http://www.youthforum.org>

#### **IV. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN MEMBER STATES**

19. The representatives of member States gave a focused short presentation on topical recent developments in the field of social cohesion in their countries. There were some common concerns related to social cohesion and guaranteeing social rights in the following areas:

- Social protection and better care services, with minimum requirements for local social services;
- Deinstitutionalisation;
- Employment and access to labour market, in particular for young people, long term unemployed and disadvantaged people;
- Impact of economic crisis and increase of poverty;
- Special attention and support, including financial one, for families with children;
- Minimum guaranteed income and sustainability of pension systems;
- Improvement of access to housing, in particular for young people;
- Integration, including in the labour market, of migrants and refugees.

The presentations sent to the Secretariat will be available on the Webpage of the Platform and could contribute to the exchange of best practices.

#### **V. PECS WORKING PROGRAMME FOR 2016-2017**

20. The delegations discussed possible ways to implement the mandate of the Platform. The following remarks were made:

- the need to stick to the ToR – and its main “pillars”: the European Social Charter; access and enjoyment of social rights; vulnerable groups - and to find ways to work efficiently and reach concrete results with limited means and time;
- social cohesion should be related to the enjoyment of, social rights including social protection; the Platform should take into account the outcome of the monitoring by the European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR) and the obstacles identified in order to contribute to overcome them;
- Turin process’ reports should be considered, in relation to the future of social policy;
- the Council of Europe’s definition of social cohesion, which according to some delegations, should not be revised (nor the Strategy), though there was an agreement on the fact that social cohesion was a dynamic and changing concept;
- two or three priority areas should be identified;
- an approach taking into account all dimensions of social cohesion, not only target groups, and the threats to it was suggested;
- the importance of a focused work, not duplicating other committees’ specific one, and of finding a balanced approach as mainstreaming will include connection with it in the field of social cohesion in order to guide and support them;
- a prospective study by an expert should be envisaged, especially with the view of implementing the future-oriented part of the PECS mandate, but the present budget would not be sufficient;
- visits and seminars were also mentioned as important for the implementation of the work of the Platform, but the very limited financial means would not allow these kind of events.

21. Following the discussions, the Platform underlined the importance of a focused approach with concrete output and decided to organise its work through 3 Working groups (with a rapporteur for each group), which will use IT technology for its work and would be dedicated to:

### *Group 1: Mainstreaming of social cohesion*

This group's aim would focus on the assessment of the impact of the activities of Council of Europe bodies and committees with regard to achieving social cohesion and to promote specific actions which contribute to social cohesion and to the enjoyment of social rights.

### *Group 2: Fostering the exchange of good practices and innovative approaches*

This group would start by elaborating a questionnaire, with a view to identifying good practices and innovative approaches at the levels of member States, of relevant international institutions and other stakeholders.

### *Group 3: Examination of new trends and challenges in specific areas*

The final outcome would be a Declaration to the Committee of Ministers on future prospects and the role of the Council of Europe in this domain.

22. Visits and seminars were considered to be important for the implementation of the mandate of the Platform, but not possible within the present budget.

## **VI. TRANSVERSAL CO-OPERATION**

23. The oral presentations made by other Council of Europe structures<sup>1</sup> focused on aspects of their work programme relevant to social cohesion. A majority of them included the issue of migrants and refugees, with the view of ensuring their human dignity and their integration/inclusion in the society. The economic crisis and its consequences were also considered by different bodies. Other on-going work was relating to Roma's issues, the fight against poverty and social exclusion, the rights of the child, social protection and health, extremism and radicalisation. All interventions were also indicating willingness to cooperate with the Platform, for instance:

- synergies which could be found with the work of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (APCE) on new trends and challenges; the Platform could also inform the APCE of topics of interest to be carried to national Parliaments;
- within the on-going CDDH work on social rights, it was foreseen that the Platform should send a representative to the Drafting Group on social rights (CDDH-SOC) [1<sup>st</sup> meeting in 2017] and that, reciprocally, the CDDH will be represented in the meetings of the PECS by the CDDH Rapporteur on social rights, Ms Chantal Gallant (Belgium). For the future CDDH questionnaire aiming to identify good practices and make proposals to improve the implementation of social rights, it will be communicated to the Platform;
- the newly created Ad hoc Committee on the Rights of the Child will focus also on guarantying social rights for children and invited a PECS representative to the first meeting of the Committee;
- as governance also includes service delivery aspects at both central and local authorities, the work of the European Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG) and of the Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform often supports capacity building in areas impacting on social cohesion; the Committee and Centre could provide practical assistance when appropriate and a link with the Platform could be considered in this framework.

The presentations sent to the Secretariat will be available on the PECS' Webpage.

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<sup>1</sup> Parliamentary Assembly; Congress of Local and Regional Authorities; European Court of Human Rights; Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights; Conference of INGOs; Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB); European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR); Governmental Committee of the European Social Charter and European Code of Social Security; Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH); Steering Committee for Youth (CDEJ); Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ); CDDG; CDCPPE; CAHROM; CAHENF; Intercultural Cities



24. Mr Thorsten AFFLERBACH, Head of the Support Team to the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe for Roma Issues, informed the Platform about ongoing activities related to Roma and Travellers in Europe, notably the “Thematic Action Plan on the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers (2016-2019)”, approved by the Committee of Ministers on 2 March 2016. The Plan contains 21 concrete actions which are regrouped under the following three priorities: tackle anti-Roma and anti-Traveller prejudice and discrimination and fight anti-Gypsyism; protect the most vulnerable (women, children and youth); promote innovative models for local-level solutions. The total budgetary envelope envisaged for 2016 is about 5 million Euros and for 2017 about 4.5 million Euros, of which about one third are covered by the Ordinary Budget of the Council of Europe and the rest by extra-budgetary resources (e.g. voluntary contributions from member states or joint programmes with the European Commission).

25. The Director of EUROFOUND – the tripartite [European Commission; member states; social partners] EU agency providing knowledge to assist in the development of social and work-related policies – informed on its work relevant to social cohesion, such as reports and on-going research, in its four areas of expertise (labour market, working conditions, industrial relations and living conditions and quality of life), as well as the three European surveys (on Company, Quality of Life and Work Conditions) implemented in EU member states and candidate countries. The added value of EUROFOUND input to the Platform was not clear yet, but EUROFOUND was open to cooperation, which could range from basic to more sophisticated contributions.

26. The representative of the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), the EU independent centre of expertise on fundamental rights, presented its work in particular in relation with social rights, The FRA mandate related with all matters falling within the scope of the EU law but its main point of reference was the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, which for social rights had common points with the European Social Charter, which has been the model of the text of the Charter. Several network of experts were set up. Information was given on recent handbooks and reports, such as on the rights of persons with disability, the right to decent living, social inclusion and migrant participation in the society, multiple discrimination in health care. All documents and findings were available on the FRA Website <http://fra.europa.eu/>. The field of cooperation was depending on the definition by the Platform of concrete thematic projects, but open to share expertise and services and provide ideas on relevant sensitive topics which should be covered.

## **VII. WORKING METHOD AND CALENDAR**

27. The Platform discussed its working methods and work plan with a view to implement its working programme, and decided to:

- invite representatives of member States to express their interest in the 3 Working Groups by order of preference and inform the Secretariat by 15<sup>th</sup> of July 2016;
- appoint a rapporteur for each Working Group, who could also participate in exchanges with rapporteurs from the other groups;
- ensure cooperation of the Working Groups with the representatives of other CoE structures;
- by the end of December 2016, prepare the input for the interim report of the Secretary General on the progress and results in this field of competence.

28. Concerning the functioning of the working groups, the following elements should be taken into account:

- working groups should work in parallel and exchange during working progress;
- communication should combine emails and shared spaces; the Secretariat will explore new technologies' possibilities with the relevant department;
- the Group on mainstreaming should have the contribution by other Council of Europe bodies, through contact persons, but contact with them would be interesting also for the other two groups;
- best way to cooperate with other international institution and stakeholders should be sought;
- preliminary results should be disseminated to all members to reach a common agreement.

29. The PECS expressed its willingness to participate as an observer to relevant committees of the Council of Europe and asked the Secretariat of the PECS to liaise with the Secretariat of these committees to this effect.

### **VIII. EUROPEAN SOCIAL COHESION PLATFORM NEWSLETTER**

30. The Platform took note with satisfaction of the first edition of the monthly PECS Newsletter, which was also available on line and thanked the Secretariat for its work.

### **IX. EUROPEAN SOCIAL COHESION PLATFORM WEBPAGE**

31. The Secretariat presented the Platform webpage new PECS Webpage (<http://www.coe.int/fr/web/turin-european-social-charter/european-social-cohesion-platform>) and invited PECS members to inform the Secretariat of any improvement they would like to suggest. The Platform took note of the presentation and congratulated the Secretariat for this result.

### **X. OTHER BUSINESS**

32. The Platform took note of the request to appoint a representative the Ad hoc Committee for the Rights of the Child (CAHENF). The delegate of Denmark informed the PECS of her participation in this committee. The Chair communicated his intention to represent the Platform, subject to availability on these dates.

### **XI. ADOPTION OF DECISIONS**

33. The Platform adopted the list of decisions [doc. PECS(2016)6].

### **XII. VENUE AND DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING**

34. The Platform agreed to hold its 2<sup>nd</sup> meeting in Strasbourg, on 19-20 September 2017.

## APPENDIX 1

### 1. OPENING OF THE MEETING

#### 1.1 Adoption of the draft agenda and order of business

### 2. ELECTIONS

#### 2.1 Election of the Chair and Vice-Chair

#### 2.2 Appointment of a Rapporteur on Gender Equality

### 3. QUESTIONS OF INTEREST TO THE PLATFORM WORKING PROGRAMME

#### - Within the Council of Europe

##### i. European Social Charter

by Mr Henrik Kristensen, Deputy Head of the European Social Charter Department and Deputy Executive Secretary of the European Committee of Social Rights, DGI

##### ii. Recommendation CM/Rec(2015)3 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on the access of young people from disadvantaged neighbourhoods to social rights (Enter! Recommendation) and its follow-up

by Mr Menno Ettema, Youth Department, DGII

#### - At international level

##### iii. Report on social inclusion and young people

by Ms Clementine Moyart, European Youth Foundation

### 4. RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN MEMBER STATES

### 5. PECS WORKING PROGRAMME FOR 2016-2017

### 6. TRANSVERSAL CO-OPERATION

### 7. WORKING METHOD AND CALENDAR

### 8. EUROPEAN SOCIAL COHESION PLATFORM NEWSLETTER

### 9. EUROPEAN SOCIAL COHESION PLATFORM WEBSITE

### 10. OTHER BUSINESS

### 11. ADOPTION OF DECISIONS

### 12. VENUE AND DATE OF THE NEXT PECS MEETING

## APPENDIX 2

### LIST OF PARTICIPANTS/LISTE DES PARTICIPANTS

**1<sup>st</sup> meeting of the European Platform on Social Cohesion/1<sup>ère</sup> réunion de la Plateforme européenne de cohésion sociale**  
**27-28 June/juin 2016**  
**Strasbourg – Palais de l'Europe**

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