

**High-level Conference on the European Social Charter  
Turin, 17-18 October 2014**

**Speaking notes for Mr. Salim Muslumov, Minister of Labour and Social Protection of  
Population of the Republic of Azerbaijan, on behalf of the Azerbaijani Chairmanship of the  
Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe**

Minister Poletti,  
Mr. Secretary General,  
Mr. Fassino,  
Ministers,  
Commissioner,  
Ladies and gentlemen,

It is with great pleasure that I am here in Turin today. On behalf of the Azerbaijani Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, I want to thank the Italian authorities, and our host Mr. Fassino, the Mayor of Turin, for organizing this Conference. We feel particularly privileged that this event is taking place in Turin, a city of grace and rich cultural heritage, and of course the historic home of the revised European Social Charter.

As rightly mentioned in the program of the Conference, the Charter “*must be at the forefront so that Europe can once again count on the full support of citizens and the commitment of states based on the values of democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights*”.

The issues of social protection and social cohesion have been on top of the Chairmanship Agenda of Azerbaijan. Last September, we hosted the Council of Europe Conference on the Social Cohesion Strategy and Action Plan. The event proved to be very useful for tackling important themes such as social cohesion and European social model in times of economic crisis, diversity in European societies, current and future challenges for more inclusive societies. We believe in the importance of a continued dialogue on these issues. Therefore, I would like to reiterate our Government’s readiness to host the next Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Social Cohesion in Baku.

Over the last few years, , many member States of the Council of Europe have experienced – and unfortunately many continue to experience – the most serious economic recession since the Second World War. The austerity measures, which have often followed have had a negative impact on the level of social protection in many States.

Such austerity measures were undoubtedly economic imperatives. But we also need to look beyond the demands of this crisis situation and consider how to maintain the welfare of our societies. We should all be aware that the long-term costs of a failure to adequately protect social rights would be very high for millions of Europeans and, accordingly, for the cohesion and democratic foundations of our countries.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Violence and fragility remain the largest obstacles to ensuring social rights. Peoples throughout the world continue to suffer from devastating wars, and ethnic cleansing. Millions of people have become refugees or have been internally displaced, which makes social cohesion in many parts of the world a significant challenge, including in my country.

In the broader context, we need to embark on a more comprehensive approach by considering the respect for all human rights, including social rights, as mutually reinforcing prerequisites for ensuring human dignity, prosperity and security. Therefore, we must attach the same degree of importance to social rights as we do with regard to civil and political rights.

We should recall two fundamental principles, which underlie all human rights – civil, political, social, economic and cultural – human dignity and equal opportunities for all. This is an important element. As it is often in the social sphere where the biggest challenges to these principles lie. Let us think of potentially vulnerable persons such as the elderly, children, persons with disabilities, refugees, internally displaced people and migrants,– whose human dignity or rights can easily be violated through neglect, inadequate care or external factors. Let us think too of those in situations of poverty, of long-term unemployment – and the despair that this can bring. For people in such situations, having access to social rights can be a lifeline.

Ladies and gentlemen,

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe has a particular interest in these issues, not least because it has appropriate authority to intervene in the Charter's reporting and collective complaints systems, issuing targeted recommendations to the State parties concerned.

I would also recall the Declaration, which the Committee of Ministers adopted in 2011 on the occasion of the 50th anniversary of the Charter, which in particular underlines the relevance of social rights and their guarantee in times of economic difficulties, especially for individuals belonging to vulnerable groups.

With regard to acceptance of the Charter by member States, the Azerbaijani Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers has made efforts to facilitate the ratification of the Revised European Social Charter as called for by the declaration of the Committee of Ministers of 2011. This Conference represents yet an occasion for States to reaffirm their commitment to the Charter.

During our Chairmanship, we have given special attention to the issue of enhancing the partnership of the Council of Europe with the relevant international and regional organisations, including with the EU. In that regard, I would like to express my appreciation to the Italian Presidency of the Council of the European Union for hosting this conference.

Finally, I should like to welcome the fact that during this week, several other side-events relating to the Charter are taking place here in Turin. This is a good example of follow-up to the encouragement addressed to member States in the Committee of Ministers' Declaration of 2011, to increase their effort to raise awareness on the Charter at national level amongst legal practitioners, academics and social partners as well as to inform the public at large of their rights.

Taking this opportunity, I would also like to reaffirm my Government's commitment to the European Social Charter. The last 10 years, since we joined the Social Charter, have indeed been remarkable for the socio-economic development of Azerbaijan. Our GDP increased by 3.4 times,

investment into the economy amounted to 132 billion USD, more than 1 million 300 thousand new jobs were created, the unemployment rate dropped to 5 percent, poverty rate to 5.3 percent, population revenues increased by 6.5 times.

Along with active poverty reduction and job-creation efforts, our Government puts special emphasis on strengthening the protection of the more vulnerable in our country.. Currently, more than 1 million 273 thousand people are provided with retirement pensions, while 491 thousand people receive social assistance, and 321 thousand people receive social benefits. In general, the social security system supported 22% of the country's population.

Ladies and gentlemen,

This concludes my opening remarks. I look forward to very fruitful discussions. Thank you for your attention.