

The Speech Delivered by H.E. Mr. Faruk CELİK,
Minister of Labour and Social Security of the Republic of Turkey,
on the Occasion of High-Level Conference on European Social Charter

October 17, 2014 / Turin-Italy

**Dear Secretary General,
Honourable Ministers,
Distinguished Participants,**

At the outset, I would like to express my pleasure for being at the city of Turin, which hosted the genesis of one of the most important human rights conventions developed in Europe, namely the European Social Charter.

I also thank the Italian Government and City of Turin for their kind hospitality.

European Social Charter continues to be an influential guide for all of us in our efforts to increase the well-being of our fellow citizens and to strengthen the cohesion of our societies.

It has been more than fifty years since the first version of the European Social Charter opened for signature in 18 October 1961 at this beautiful city of Turin.

Our continent has witnessed significant socioeconomic changes since then.

In parallel to these changes and transformations, European Social Charter has also been updated and further developed with the contribution of all Contracting Parties.

The relationship between Turkey and the European Social Charter had a similar progress and developed gradually.

I would like to underline that as the Republic of Turkey, we have accepted 29 out of 31 Articles and 91 out of 98 Paragraphs of the Revised European Social Charter, which we have signed on 6 October 2004 and ratified on 27 June 2007.

Thanks to this progress, Turkey has become the seventh country with highest number of accepted articles and paragraphs among the Contracting Parties to the Revised European Social Charter.

Besides, I would like to express that a significant progress has been achieved in the works carried out under the coordination of my Ministry with regard to the acceptance of those non-accepted a few articles and paragraphs of the Charter.

In this context, we are making the necessary arrangements for the acceptance of the first paragraph of Article 4 on “The Right to a Fair Remuneration”; Article 5 on “The Right to Organise” and the first three paragraphs of Article 6 on “The Right to Bargain Collectively”.

Obviously, in addition to the efforts and determination put by Turkey, the support of European Committee on Social Rights and the Secretariat of the Social Charter has been decisive in this rapid progress.

For instance, we had the opportunity to comprehensively exchange views and experiences on the non-accepted articles and paragraphs of the Charter in the meeting hosted by my Ministry on 6 May 2013 in Ankara with the participation of the representatives of European Committee of Social Rights.

In addition to this, with the participation of representatives from the Council of Europe, we have held the 5th International Social Security Symposium last month in Turkey. In this symposium, we had the chance to discuss recent developments in the field of social protection and we continue our studies in this respect intensely.

**Dear Ministers,
Distinguished Participants,**

Global financial crisis started in 2008 laid a heavy burden on world of work and on employment.

The austerity measures taken for overcoming the macroeconomic problems led to a step back in the social rights of many people, especially with regard to their social security.

According to ILO figures, due to the negative effects of global financial crisis, more than 200 million people are currently unemployed, 75 million of whom are young persons.

What is more, nearly 2.5 billion persons live under extreme poverty with a daily income less than 2 USD.

As Turkey we are well aware that, the importance of adherence to the Charter provisions has further increased under such a difficult political and economic environment.

I believe that the European Social Charter is not a document which can be ignored in times of crisis. Rather, it is an instrument which we need especially in such periods in order to increase the well-being in our countries.

In this sense, I would like to express that in Turkey we have always considered the social rights and humanitarian aspects of the measures that we have taken against the crisis.

**Dear Ministers,
Distinguished Participants,**

As you all know, great human tragedies are currently being experienced in the world and especially in the close neighbourhood of Turkey.

Unfortunately, hundreds of thousands of people have lost their homes, jobs, food and even their lives.

Turkey has opened its doors to these people regardless of their ethnic and religious identities.

There are approximately 2 million asylum-seekers in Turkey at the moment, 1.5 million of whom are from Syria alone.

Turkey will definitely continue to embrace these people solely basing on the grounds of humanitarian assistance.

Here, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that Turkey has spent more than 4.5 billion USD in order to assist these people, who are victims of the unfortunate developments in Syria and Iraq and took shelter in our country.

Beyond doubt, all Conventions and their provisions centred on human rights would make sense only if they are put into practice.

And the main motive that brought us together here today under the European Social Charter is the “human being”.

However, it is a great disappointment and concern to see the lack of sensitivity of the World and especially of the developed countries towards the human tragedy in the Middle East.

And this indifference causes terrorism to be proliferated and diversified.

It should be born in mind that such problems cannot remain limited to their regions and carry the risk of rapid expansion in a globalizing World.

In this framework, I believe that the European Social Charter should be applied universally and problems should be handled sensitively regardless of their regions.

**Dear Ministers,
Distinguished Participants,**

As a result of globalization, the rate of migration has accelerated and diversified making the international dimension of social security more significant than ever.

As a result of this understanding, in 2008 we implemented the “Social Security Reform” in Turkey.

We enabled social security services to be provided efficiently from a single authority by integrating three separate social security institutions.

Thanks to this reform, we have also increased the number of persons under the coverage of social security system.

Through the implementation of universal health insurance, we facilitated the easy access of our citizens to quality medical services.

We have also established a new Ministry in order to coordinate social benefits from a single unit, namely the Ministry of Family and Social Policies.

On the other hand, our fight against informality is going on by which we have also increased the premium income of our Social Security Institution. Hence, the ratio of the social security deficit to the GDP has been shrinking gradually.

Besides, we have signed bilateral social security agreements with 29 countries up until now.

Furthermore, we currently extend our services through labour attaches and counsellors in a total of 50 centres within Turkey’s diplomatic missions for our 6 million citizens abroad.

In short, I can say that Turkey has made significant progress for all the Articles in the group of “Health, Social Security and Social Protection” of the Charter over the past decade.

**Dear Ministers,
Distinguished Participants,**

Social security is among the most important elements of stability for our countries.

It is an effective and crucial instrument, which protects societies against economic shocks, particularly during the crisis periods, by holding the social fabric together and building the future.

The political stability in Turkey during the last decade has brought about economic stability and thus had positive impacts on both social security and working life.

In recent six years since the onset of the global financial crisis in 2008, Turkish economy has grown by nearly 4% on average annually.

We have allocated nearly 20 billion USD for the active labour market policies and incentive packages in order to increase the qualifications of our labour force.

In total figures, 1.4 million enterprises and 10 million employees have benefitted from these active labour market policies and thus we have managed to create an additional 6 million employment during this six-year-period.

In summary, Turkey prevailed to be one of the few countries that succeeded on creating employment while growing steadily in the crisis period.

On the other hand, on occupational safety and health, which we consider as an integral part of human life and world of work, we have put into practice several prominent arrangement and regulations since 2012.

**Dear Ministers,
Distinguished Participants,**

At the end of my speech, I would like to underline the constructive role of the provisions of the Charter once again, particularly during the crisis period and the crisis exit phase.

Accordingly, as we stressed in Istanbul Declaration adopted at the end of the “Council of Europe Conference of Ministers Responsible for Social Cohesion”, which we hosted in Istanbul in 2012, I believe that our commitment for achieving priorities envisaged in the “New Strategy and Council of Europe Action Plan for Social Cohesion” will also strengthen the alignment of our countries to the provisions of the Charter.

Furthermore, I would also like to express that Turkey, which will undertake the G20 Presidency in 2015, is going to maintain its adherence to the Charter principles on employment, labour and social protection issues and will strive for these principles to become universally accepted.

Apart from this, I believe that strengthening the link between the implementation and scope of the European Social Charter and the EU Law will increase the well-being of all of Contracting Party citizens and thus will be beneficial to all European citizens.

Thank you.