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Ladies and Gentlemen,

First, I would like to thank the organizers for holding this important meeting in such nice surroundings which became the birthplace of the European Social Charter more than 50 years ago.

The Czech Republic has always perceived the outstanding importance of social and economic rights and the need to advocate their full use and enjoyment by all human beings. With this aim, the Czech Republic has ratified numerous instruments of various international organizations.

The last Council of Europe treaty ratified by the Czech Republic in 2012 is the Additional Protocol to the European Social Charter Providing for a System of Collective Complaints. The Czech Republic sees the collective complaints procedure as an important tool for more effective safeguarding of social and economic rights in the Council of Europe Member States. The Charter and the Collective Complaints Protocol thus form a unique system to guarantee social rights which so positively influence the lives of the Europeans.

During the relatively short time since the ratification of the Protocol, two collective complaints were lodged against the Czech Republic. We have gained our first experience which I would like to mention briefly today. In both cases, the merits of the complaint went beyond the responsibilities of my Ministry. In other words, we have to involve more ministries and coordinate the positions of all the institutions concerned. And that takes time. I would, therefore, ask for taking this into account when the Committee of Experts sets a deadline for national statement to a collective complaint.

With regard to the Collective Complaints Protocol, I would like to emphasise that we should not forget the purpose of the Protocol. That is to enable more effective use of social rights guaranteed by the Charter through adoption of new measures. The Committee of Experts has a crucial role concerning the admissibility. They have to make sure that the collective complaints mechanism does not become only an administrative procedure. In cases when the merits of the complaint is based solely on the arguments that have been raised during the standard reporting mechanism, the collective complaints tool brings no new impulse to improve the situation regarding rights guaranteed by the Charter. Some people then may ask about the added value of the Protocol.

In general, the Committee of Experts plays a very important role with regard to observing the rights guaranteed by the Charter. I must appreciate and highlight the painstaking work the Committee does year after year upon the reports of the Member States and the assessment of national legislation. The Czech Republic aims to meet the obligations of the Charter. In this regard, I would therefore like to ask the Committee for clear distinction between the commitments of the original Charter of 1961 and those of the Revised Charter.

The Czech Republic is a member of the Council of Europe and also of the European Union. Both organisations consider application of social and economic rights as priority objectives. I see a great potential for closer cooperation here that will benefit all inhabitants of the Council of Europe countries.

The Czech Republic takes seriously commitments of the European Social Charter and makes every effort to guarantee full access to rights to all the citizens of the Czech Republic as well as the other Contracted Parties of the Charter. In my speech, I have made several recommendations which all have one goal. That is to maintain and strengthen the importance of the Charter in this difficult time.

Thank you for your attention.