

**Conclusions of the Interparliamentary Conference on 17 March 2016 in Turin
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Preliminary remarks:

This Interparliamentary Conference was organised in the framework of the Turin Process under which different European stakeholders wished to provide a response to current democratic and social challenges.

The Council of Europe has a specific mission and a special responsibility in comparison with the other European institutions. It is the institutional seed from which all European unity initiatives were born, including, as the final stage, the European Union. A united Europe fostering common ethical and legal values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law is needed more than ever.

As parliamentarians, we must promote the respect of fundamental rights and democracy amongst our peers and learn from each other with the aim of serving our citizens. This was precisely the objective of the Interparliamentary Conference in Turin. We should take action to protect the lives and dignity of people, and deepen our unity by adhering to common instruments such as the European Social Charter, which strengthens the common social fabric of our civilization.

Dear Ladies and Gentlemen, dear colleagues,

- This morning at the opening of our separate meeting of the Parliamentary Assembly's Sub-Committee on the European Social Charter, our Chairperson, my colleague Tuur Elzinga, reminded us all: social rights are fundamental human rights! Only the enjoyment of socio-economic rights, and social inclusion, allows people to fully enjoy their civil and political rights, thus fundamental rights. It is by reminding us all of this important fact that I would like to conclude this conference.

- The Parliamentary Assembly, in recent years, has taken targeted action to support the promotion and follow-up of the Charter's implementation, in legislative and political terms. It has notably done so through yearly "capacity-building seminars", which have had a lot of success and positive reception by parliaments attending.

- However, I am convinced that parliamentary action needs to be further stepped up. At the level of the Parliamentary Assembly, and for those delegations and members who regularly participate in our debates in Strasbourg and Paris, I would suggest that we reserve more time for explicitly exchanging on progress made in different countries. Once a year, we could have a mutual exchange on the following questions:
 - What progress has been made at the legislative level, i.e. in terms of ratifications of the European Social Charter or of further articles of the Charter (i.e. by lifting existing reservations);
 - What progress has been made in terms of political action, i.e. how concretely have social rights guarantees been improved in certain areas or for certain groups of population;
 - And what were the processes for achieving this, i.e. what were the obstacles to fully guaranteeing certain rights and how have they been overcome?

- With regard to the European Social Charter, the importance of the relation with the European Union and EU legislation is regularly underlined. As rapporteur on the Turin process, I am willing to take this challenge on board and to make sure that the dialogue between the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the European Parliament is stepped up. I have had the pleasure to discuss with my colleague, Laura Ferrara from the European Parliament, earlier today, and I would be happy if we could launch a substantial exchange and dialogue between our two European bodies this year.

To conclude today's debates, let me also share with you some of the essential ideas that I have retained from this afternoon's discussions and the presentations made by various high-level representatives here present, without trying to be exhaustive:

- Mr Fassino, Mayor of Turin, whilst showing to what extent social rights are a concern for local authorities, such as the City of Turin, recalled that social rights are very often anchored in national legislations, sometimes even in constitutions, but that their application is strongly influenced by the specific socio-economic context. Legislation therefore is one step; its application and implementation needs to be the second one.
- Mr Marazziti, for the Italian Chamber of Deputies, reminded us that, in very practical terms, we as parliamentarians have a special responsibility in guaranteeing the effective application of social rights in the national context, in a long-term perspective, and in response to topical challenges such as the refugee crisis.
- Ms Battaini-Dragoni, Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, outlined an upcoming change in paradigm: Whilst today, we are trying to welcome large numbers of refugees and migrants, and providing emergency services to them, their social inclusion and provision of decent jobs, education, housing and social services to them whilst fighting xenophobia and discrimination, will be the main challenges tomorrow. We as parliamentarians play a crucial role in setting political agendas and achieving political commitment to social rights for all, whilst reassuring our citizens that this does not represent a threat to their well-being. We are amongst the main players in building truly inclusive societies.
- Mr Nicoletti, head of the Italian delegation of the Parliamentary Assembly, reminded us that it is not the external threats, which are most dangerous, but the internal gaps dividing our countries. The Council of Europe, and its 47 parliaments, have a special responsibility in guaranteeing European unity at all levels – for all people on its territory, from all backgrounds and all income categories – and by promoting the full treaty system of the European Social Charter, including its basic texts and its various protocols, and in particular the collective complaint mechanism.

- *Session 1: What role for social rights in responding to topical challenges (crisis exist, globalisation, European integration etc.)?*
 - Ms Laura Ferrara, Chairperson and moderator, highlighted the following essential social rights challenges:
 - Economic development should be the result of a great economic and social process, and ensuring the social rights in order to get to fight against poverty and social exclusion, increase the protection of more vulnerable groups and avoid the decrease in social protections
 - fighting social exclusion and poverty
 - defining minimum levels of rights
 - protecting the most vulnerable
 - The following elements were put forward by speakers during the debate:
 - Mr Naryshkin, Speaker of the State Duma, presented the major social policy achievements including halting the decline in the population through social programmes, as well as remaining challenges in the Russian Federation. The refugee crisis was an emergency but responding to it also was a humanitarian duty. The international context and especially trade agreements represent a threat to parliamentary sovereignty and to the social interests of citizens as guaranteed by the European Social Charter.
 - Mr Farrugia, Speaker of the Parliament of Malta, recalled the need to re-establish trust at the international level and the need for a common vision in order to maintain peace in the Mediterranean and to tackle the challenge posed by the refugee crisis, which could also be considered as an opportunity to affirm our common values. The importance of orienting the benefits of economic growth towards the fight against poverty was also underlined as a moral duty going beyond political divisions.

- Mr Aydin, the Deputy Speaker of the Turkish parliament, affirmed his country's commitment to fundamental values guaranteed by the Council of Europe and the ESC as the second most important Council of Europe instrument, before qualifying the refugee crisis as the biggest one that Europe has had to face in recent years, underlining the Turkish commitment to hosting great numbers of refugees from Syria, and calling upon European countries for their solidarity.
- Ms Jarvinen, representative of the Finnish parliament, hoped for the meeting to conclude that “one floor societies” were still a European aspiration and that the European dialogue on social policies would be kept alive;
- Ms Pettersson, representative of the Swedish parliament, underlined that welcoming refugees in Europe was a necessity, and an influx of population was needed to keep European countries strong, but that the welcoming capacities of individual countries were limited;
- Ms Veselova, representative of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, recalled the situation in Ukraine, underlining the importance to ensure full respect of social rights for all citizens, including internally displaced persons. Ukraine would continue the co-operation for the acceptance of additional provisions of the Charter, for the Turin Process and for the implementation of the national Action Plan on social rights, which also comprised measures strengthening social security.

- *Session 2: How to improve the acceptance of the ESC and its provisions – what role for national parliaments?*

- The challenges as recalled by Mr Elzinga were:

- The need to take political action to improve the social rights for all citizens;

- The fact that the main difference between global social rights systems (between the US and Europe for example) resided in the “social wage”: working conditions, sick leave, holiday entitlements, maternity leave, pensions, equal treatment of part-time jobs, access to health care and education were amongst the European “acquis” to be protected.
- Essential arguments put forward during the debate were:
- Ms Matrai, Deputy Speaker of the Hungarian Parliament, recalled that it was important to ensure equal access to public services for all, including national and ethnic minorities, such as the Roma people who should have the equal rights;
 - Ms Kasimati, representative of the Greek Parliament, remarked that budgetary cuts and austerity put democracy at risk, and called upon parliaments to develop essential social programmes to fight against poverty; she also pointed to existing contradictions between economic measures taken by the EU and the European Social Charter; these measures were causing the increase in inequalities across Europe; social rights could not be negotiated;
 - Ms Doucet, representative of the French National Assembly, reported on national measures taken to improve the guarantee of social rights, in particular through equal access to education and health care.

As parliamentarian of the Parliament of Andorra, I hope that, when going home after today’s conference, we will all find some inspiration in these ideas shared by some of our colleagues, and that we will manage to achieve some progress in social rights matters, both in terms of topical challenges linked to the current refugee crisis and some of the more long-term challenges related to ensuring equal social rights to all Europeans. We need to take action in our respective national parliaments and to encourage our governments to ensure that the Revised Social Charter will soon be ratified where this has not yet been done, and that a greater number of its provisions and the collective complaints procedure will be accepted.

Finally, may I add that, it is my intention to also take the outcomes of the present conference into consideration for my report on the Turin process to ensure that the challenges and arguments provided be addressed in a debate by the Parliamentary Assembly. I also encourage us all to pursue our interparliamentary exchanges on the European Social Charter by continuing to involve the Presidents of social rights and social affairs committees of national parliaments, members of the Parliamentary Assembly as well as members of the European parliament, so I sincerely hope to see you all again at an upcoming meeting.

As members of the Council of Europe, we have a major responsibility. Promote all human rights in their indivisibility and interdependence, and ensure that they become a reality, thus protecting the dignity of all European citizens. The defense of social rights will remain essential to democracy, and for strengthening social cohesion both at national and European level.