

## OPENING REMARKS

Ms Snežana Jonica, Chairperson of the Sub-Committee on Disability and Inclusion

Distinguished participants

It is an honour and a great pleasure to be with you today. I would like to thank the Ministry of Labour and Social Policy for choosing this topic as priority and for the invitation to participate in the event and look forward to our discussions.

The Sub-Committee on Disability and Inclusion of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe was created at the beginning of 2014, and I am its second chairperson, following a 2-year chairmanship of Ms Rawert (Germany, SOC). The creation of the sub-committee shows the importance given by the Parliamentary Assembly to this topic and its willingness to step up its work in this area.

The sub-committee is a forum of exchange and dialogue. Since its creation, it gave an impetus to the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination for its work on disability. It considers matters relating to discrimination on the ground of disability, equality and inclusion of persons with disabilities and violence against persons with disabilities. It submits its recommendations to the committee, where appropriate in the context of the preparation of a draft report.

The Sub-Committee members have discussed topics such as the political participation of persons with disabilities, violence against women with disabilities and the right to live in society. In January 2015, the Parliamentary Assembly adopted a resolution and a recommendation on « Equality and inclusion for people with disabilities », for which our vice-Chair Ms Carmen Quintanilla (Spain, EPP/CD) was rapporteur.

A report is currently being prepared on the political participation of persons with disabilities: a democratic issue. The first session focusing on participation is therefore of particular interest. I am not the rapporteur for this report but I can assure you that your contributions would be most welcome to the preparation of the draft report.

The rapporteur Ms Rawert will be looking at the right to participate in political and public life, equality in voting and in standing for elections, voting procedures and materials. In 2011, the European Commission for Democracy through Law reiterated that persons with disabilities should not be excluded from universal suffrage and should be able to stand for elections on an equal basis with other citizens. This equality, both in voting and in standing for election, should be ensured by means of reasonable accommodations. Voting procedures, facilities and materials should be appropriate, accessible

and easy to understand and use.

The rapporteur will be looking at what has been done in Council of Europe member States for the political participation of persons with disabilities, and promote best practices when relevant. She will also analyse the question of legal capacity. Still too often, the right to vote is linked to legal capacity, creating de facto second class citizens.

We will have discussions in the Committee, hearings and will try to prepare recommendations on how to better comply with existing international standards.

The Sub-Committee cooperates with the Committee of Experts on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (DECS-RPD), the UN CRPD, the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights, the Fundamental Rights Agency of the EU and NGOs. We are planning to discuss legal capacity, legal protection and legal empowerment of persons with disabilities in the next biennium. We might also do some work specifically on the situation of persons with disabilities in prison, involuntary placement and involuntary treatment of persons with disabilities.

The Committee already held a joint meeting with the Committee of Experts and we look forward to continuing our cooperation.

I would like to wish you a fruitful meeting and look forward to its outcome.

Thank you for your attention.