

## **Turin Forum on Social Rights in Europe**

Ceremony for the deposit of the instrument of ratification of the Revised European Social Charter by Greece

*Transcription of the speech by:*

**Georgios KATROUGALOS, Minister of Labour, Social Security & Social Solidarity of the Hellenic Republic**

*Check against delivery*

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I am deeply honoured to be here in the native city of the European Social Charter.

As the Secretary General said very cautiously this morning, is it the constitution of Europe for the social rights? As you know, the Cold War has inherited us a legacy of distrust towards social rights. Initially, if they were not considered, purely and simply, fake rights, they were considered as just rights for the poor, and ultimately, poor rights.

Of course, this is a much distorted concept of human rights. All fundamental human rights, including the social ones, are complementary. One cannot undermine one category without harming the others. Bertrand Russell used to say that if you have to choose between democracy and a loaf of bread the only decisive factor is how hungry you are.

Fortunately, we have overpassed this misconception of social rights, at least at the level of international law. After the Vienna Declaration we know that all fundamental rights are indivisible and of equal legal force.

But we have to face now a much more formidable foe – an enemy at the level of the political implementation of these “principles of rights”. And I am speaking of course, of this marriage of the most aggressive ideology of the unleashed markets – neo-liberalism - with the dogma of State which prevails the last decades in Europe.

You know, the new dogma, because it's rather an anachronistic way of thought, not just an ideological one, says that social rights, social expenditure is an impediment to growth. However already this morning Professor Fitoussi said that besides all other things you need to plant glorious the golden era of the welfare state which does not have just high social protection but a range of growth which is much greater than the current stagnation, or very slow growth, that Europe has.

And of course, now the redistribution of wealth is completely different, extremely unequal, compared to the past. We have an explosion of inequalities. It is true that at a global level, due to the rise of India, China, the new economic powers, inequalities are lowering, but within our societies, in Western Europe, inequalities are now at extremes they have never been since the crisis of 1929.

So Pope Francis was right, this ideology kills. This type of economy kills. And it does not just kill the weakest, the poorest, the most vulnerable members of our societies, it kills also democracy. It kills also our way of life. Ultimately, and this is the most dangerous thing, it kills also our values, our identity, what we call European civilisation, not just a European social model. Impoverished societies, eroded with a glass throughout Europe, are trying to find who is guilty for their impoverishment. And as in the mid war they found Jews, now they found immigrants and refugees.

So, it is important for preserving what makes Europe, Europe. The defence of social rights. As Professor de Schutter said this morning, Greece was an extreme case of dismantlement of the social state, and all guarantees of individual and collective labour law, and the European Committee of Social Rights has

been pivotal in addressing this situation. It has said, rightfully so, that we need the social rights, especially in times of crisis. Exactly, because we need an umbrella when we have a rainy day, not during the sunny days.

And in more than six cases it has declared that the policies imposed to Greece by the MoUs - these infamous memoranda - are clearly contrary to the European Social Charter.

Now, the Greek Government is trying to reverse this situation, and in very complicated circumstances, because we have been obliged, to a very painful for us, compromise in July in order to avoid a disorderly default, sensitive to the pressure exerted to us. We have signed a third MoU but we do not intend to continue the way of dismantling the social state.

Quite on the contrary. We want to reverse this vicious road and we consider exactly the ratification of the revised European Social Charter as a first step towards this direction. And we want to work closely with the Council of Europe and the International Labour Organisation so that in the negotiations that are pending to defend our model of society, the European social model.

Because what's happening now in Greece, is not any more tolerable. You know that there is no social dialogue in Greece. The social partners cannot negotiate salaries. The salaries are, in theory, dictated by the State. I say 'in theory' but it is not the Greek State, but our lenders that impose to us these basic - consensual in other countries in the European social model - decisions.

So, we have opted for a social Greece, in a social Europe, and we still believe that the royal road towards this direction is the European Social Charter.

Thank you very much.