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## **Expert seminar on reinforcing social rights protection in Europe to achieve greater unity and equality**

*Organised by the Secretariat of the European Social Charter of the Council of Europe  
under the auspices of the French Presidency of the Committee of Ministers  
19 September 2019 – Agora, Room G03*

### **Opening address by Jean-Baptiste Mattei, French Ambassador to the Council of Europe**

Deputy Secretary General,  
Excellencies,  
Mr President of the European Committee of Social Rights,  
Mr Chairman of the Governmental Committee,  
Dear experts and representatives of different international organisations,  
Professors,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I am very pleased to join you this morning at the opening of this seminar on the subject of reinforcing social rights protection in Europe.

In Helsinki, in May, the Committee of Ministers unequivocally reaffirmed its commitment to social rights throughout Europe and invited member states which had not already done so to sign and ratify the Revised European Social Charter and its Additional Protocol providing for a system of collective complaints.

The French Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe has made reinforcing social rights in Europe one of its priorities.

Traditionally, as you know, France sets great store by the idea of a social Europe. Along with Portugal, it is the state that is the most committed to the European social rights protection system: it has ratified all the paragraphs of the Revised European Social Charter and the Additional Protocol of 1995 providing for a system of collective complaints.

A Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe only lasts six months so we decided not to waste time and to work as quickly as possible towards modernising the mechanisms for monitoring and supervising the effectiveness of social rights in Europe.

To be efficient, this strategy will have to be a long-term one and I earnestly hope that the Chairmanships that come after us will be able to continue this work.

The aim of this expert seminar is to encourage discussion on ways of bringing about concrete improvements in existing procedures and dialogue between member states and the European Committee of Social Rights.

Everyone must do their part.

In France, at national level, we have reviewed our working and operating methods to ensure that all the ministries concerned are involved, and we promise to deal promptly and concretely with the criticism that is sometimes levelled at us.

At the Council of Europe, we intend to improve the functioning of the ECSR so as to produce reports and decisions of the highest quality.

We welcome the reform proposals in the report adopted by the Steering Committee for Human Rights in June. We have worked with the Chair of GR-SOC to ensure that the report was approved by the Committee of Ministers in July and that the Department of the European Social Charter was tasked with making specific reform proposals at the end of September. We hope that they will be ambitious.

Without prejudging these proposals, we consider that thorough application of the admissibility criteria for collective complaints, improvements to the national reporting mechanism and the establishment of a panel to give an opinion on the applications for membership of the European Committee of Social Rights, similar to the system for selecting the judges of the European Court of Human Rights, are possible lines of enquiry, although there will undoubtedly be other suggestions.

What should motivate us is the fact that although there has been progress, only 15 states have ratified the Additional Protocol of 1995 on collective complaints. The last ratification dates back to 2012.

The insufficient number of accessions by Council of Europe member states should encourage us more than ever to be a force for ideas and progress.

In this connection I welcome the call made this week by the Delegates of the 15 member states of the Governmental Committee that have accepted the Additional Protocol of 1995 for as many countries as possible to ratify the existing mechanisms and to support the Turin Process launched in 2014.

I would like to make one last point: I think that it is very important for the Council of Europe and the European Union to work together as closely as possible on the basis of the Turin Process and, if possible, to see to it that the European Social Charter is regarded as Europe's Social Constitution.

I know that the dialogue between the two organisations is at a very advanced stage, and France, as a member of both, will do everything possible to be involved in this dialogue and to strengthen it even further.

Thank you.