



Resolution 1559 (2007)¹

Europe's social dimension: full implementation of the revised European Social Charter and evaluation of new labour regulations and minimum wages

Parliamentary Assembly

1. Fifty years after the signing of the Treaty of Rome, we are still confronted with the task of uniting Europe in social terms. Its countries have successfully overcome many of the challenges they faced in the wake of the Second World War, but they still face many more today, particularly in the field of social security. Global competition, the impact of new technologies and ageing of the population are shaping the political agenda. Various basic problems, such as poor economic growth, high unemployment and growing inequalities, must be tackled without delay.
2. In all the Council of Europe's member states, reform processes are under way aimed at developing and guaranteeing employment, providing legal and social protection for individuals, developing education and health systems, and providing protection against discrimination. The Parliamentary Assembly is convinced that only a comprehensive change of direction in social policy can overcome the growing inequalities in social security at European level. Economic and labour market reforms must contribute to social cohesion and, conversely, social policy must seek to promote growth and employment.
3. Reform efforts cannot focus on economic aspects alone but must also take account of social issues. The only way of making a success of European integration and of globalisation is to give economic and social aspects equal attention.
4. Against this background, the Assembly insists on the need for reforms which create a better balance between flexibility and security on the labour market – the so-called flexicurity approach. It welcomes the efforts to achieve a consensus between policy makers, employers and employees on striking a balance between market requirements and social protection for workers. If Europe really wants to meet these challenges effectively, it must adopt a global approach which combines an active labour market policy, flexible contractual arrangements and social security, emphasises the primary importance of training and qualifications in this context, and seeks to prevent any further decline in employment security.
5. The Assembly points out that, in nearly all areas of reform, the revised European Social Charter (ETS N °. 163) contains provisions which most of the member states accept. Yet the general public and political decision makers are insufficiently aware of its content. The rights it enshrines must be publicised more widely and feed into the process of creating a social Europe.
6. State social provision has developed very differently in the various countries of Europe, which is why their social security standards are also very different. Reforms are normally seen from a national standpoint only, and discussed without reference to the European dimension. Yet the Charter offers ready-made solutions to many of the problems faced by the reformers. The Assembly accordingly calls on member states to ensure that the Charter's relevant key elements are incorporated in future national reforms, with a view to giving them a European character.

1. Assembly debate on 26 June 2007 (21st Sitting) (see [Doc. 11277](#), report of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee, rapporteur: Mr Riester; and [Doc. 11317](#), opinion of the Committee on Economic Affairs and Development, rapporteur: Mr Bjørnstad). Text adopted by the Assembly on 26 June 2007 (21st Sitting).



7. The Assembly proposes that regular social policy debates be held in support of the member states' efforts to give the Charter a more prominent role when social policy instruments are being prepared in an enlarged Europe. These debates can provide a platform for discussing deficits, and also highlighting best practices. In this way, national reform processes could be co-ordinated and coherently brought together with a view to creating a joint European social dimension.

8. The Charter itself, however, does not address certain essential matters, including the increasing freedom of movement for workers, freedom of establishment and freedom to provide services, for which new regulations must be drawn up. This liberalisation is generally seen as a good thing but divergent social standards are becoming a cause of public concern. The anxiety that these questions give rise to in society and the fact that the political authorities have so far been unable to allay this feeling, show that European countries are still insufficiently prepared in this area. Hence the vital need to extend the revised European Social Charter to cover them and define aims and limits which are important in shaping these processes of liberalisation.

9. The Assembly proposes that the Sub-Committee on the European Social Charter and Employment, in collaboration with the European Committee of Social Rights, broaden the scope of the Charter by drafting guidelines to supplement the text, embodying minimum standards to govern opening of the labour, service and location markets.

10. The Assembly is convinced that only a "social reality" which is perceived as an appreciable and sustainable improvement to the daily lives of Europeans can convince them of the need for and benefits of European unification and the revised European Social Charter. The Council of Europe's member states must turn social rights into a political process.

11. The Assembly also believes that Europe must take more account of global developments, and look beyond its own frontiers. It calls on the member states to globalise the European debate and try harder to find ways of improving and promoting social standards in other countries too, thus helping to give globalisation itself a social dimension.

12. Against this background, the Assembly believes that it is urgently necessary for the Council of Europe and the European Union to look beyond their respective borders and work more intensively with other multilateral organisations on giving globalisation a social dimension and setting a European social model against the global "race to the bottom" trend in social standards. In view of its expertise in the social security field – and particularly its Decent Work Agenda of 1999 – the International Labour Organization would be an ideal partner here.