Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
https://pace.coe.int

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Doc. 14370
29 June 2017

The "Turin process": reinforcing social rights in Europe

Committee Opinion[1]
Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy
Rapporteur: Mr Jordi XUCLÀ, Spain, Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe

A. Conclusions of the committee

1. The Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy welcomes the report by the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development on "The 'Turin process': reinforcing social rights in Europe".

2. It wishes to point to the current context of rising populism and to stress that a healthy democracy is inextricably linked to economic and social policies which respond to the need of the people. By ignoring social rights, policy makers prepare the ground for populist movements and betray the principles of the indivisibility, interdependence and interrelatedness of human rights.

B. Proposed amendments

Amendment A (to the draft resolution)

After paragraph 1, insert the following paragraph:

"The Assembly stresses that a healthy democracy is inextricably linked to economic, educational and social policies; these should respond to the needs of the people and aim at reducing social inequalities that breed political disaffection, distrust and resentment against the political establishment and lead to populism and sometimes violent reactions."

Amendment B (to the draft resolution)

Before paragraph 6.1.1, insert the following paragraph:

"reaffirming the principles of the indivisibility and interdependence of human rights in the public discourse and in legislative and policy papers;"

C. Explanatory memorandum by Mr Jordi Xuclà, rapporteur for opinion

1. The report prepared by Ms Sílvia Eloïsa Bonet for the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development is a timely response to the current economic, social and democracy crisis which impacts our member States in various degrees.

---

1. Reference to Committee: Doc. 13569, Reference 4077 of 3 October 2014. Reporting Committee: Committee on Social Affairs, Health and sustainable Development. See Doc. 14343. Opinion approved by the committee on 29 June 2017.

2. I strongly believe that governments that dissociate social rights from political and economic freedoms cannot endure and prosper over the long term. The principles of the indivisibility, interdependence and interrelatedness of human rights have been constantly reaffirmed by the United Nations and the Council of Europe, including at the Interparliamentary Conference on the European Social Charter, which took place on 17 and 18 March 2016 in Turin.[2]

3. In the past, democratisation processes have been promoted, among others, through economic support that allowed the States to implement fundamental rights like housing, education, health and social protection. After the Second World War, governments grasped that human rights are needed as safeguards, not only against authoritarianism, but also against the causes of authoritarianism. Remembering the 1920s and 30s, they understood that financial crisis, poverty and widening inequality provided fertile ground for the right-wing populism which led to war. However, in the era of unregulated globalisation, governments forgot history and their international obligation to take all reasonable measures to deliver economic, social and cultural rights for everyone.[3]

4. If democracy has to be revived, a very first requirement is indeed, as the "Turin process" shows, a strengthening of social rights as human rights, with a reduction of the increasing social inequalities that are at the basis of political disaffection.[4]

5. Distrust and resentment towards the political establishment as well as globalisation are often presented as the reason for a shift towards far-right and populist parties. However, this can also be seen as a backlash against liberal democracy for weakening and marginalising social rights.

6. In some countries, political elites seem to ignore this form of dissatisfaction and agree on, or surrender to the necessity of unfair economic policies which further marginalise social rights. As a result, part of the electorate turn towards extremist leaders who may seem to offer alternative solutions to people's everyday problems. As stressed by Secretary General Thorbjørn Jagland in his 2017 report on the state of democracy, human rights, and the rule of law, populists "tend to be anti-establishment, respond to widespread public grievances and appeal to emotions".

7. Democratic leaders must regain credibility in the social and economic area and use social rights instruments and mechanisms to their full potential, chiefly the European Social Charter treaty system, if they want to stop populist and extremist politics. They must embrace and assert economic and social rights as human rights rather than as mere "welfare" or "development" objectives.[5]

8. Finally, the 2017 World Forum for Democracy, which will take place from 8 to 10 November 2017 in Strasbourg, will focus on the role of political parties and media in the context of rising populism. I hope that the "Turin Process" will influence the Forum's discussions and I can only encourage the Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable Development to raise the profile of the European Social Charter treaty system at this event.

---

2. Official speeches and interventions available at https://rm.coe.int/16806c6b12.
3. Ruth Lister and Paul Hunt, To combat right-wing populism, we need to reclaim human rights, 12 December 2016.
4. Donatella della Porta, Democracy and the quest for social rights, European University Institute, 2015.
5. Philip Alston, The populist challenge to human rights, *Journal of Human Rights Practice*, 9, 2017, 1-15, 27 April 2017.