



MINISTERIO
DE EDUCACIÓN,
POLÍTICA SOCIAL Y DEPORTE

**INTERVENCIÓN DE LA MINISTRA MERCEDES CABRERA EN LA
*1st CONFERENCE OF COUNCIL OF EUROPE MINISTERS RESPONSIBLE
FOR SOCIAL COHESION,***

26-27 Febrero 2009

Opening Statement: 26 February, 9.30 a.m.



Dear Ministers,
Secretary General,
Ladies and Gentleman,...

It is with great pleasure that I am here with you today at this first Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Social Cohesion.

Working together towards an inclusive and cohesive Europe is a priority of the Spanish Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers.

The Heads of State and Government, at the Third Council of Europe Summit in Warsaw in 2005, declared their determination to build cohesive societies by ensuring fair access to social rights, fighting exclusion and protecting vulnerable social groups.

Governments need to aim not only at making the economy work but also at making society work, is all the more relevant in these times of the global economic crisis when the fabric of our societies is under intense pressure. Unemployment is rising, poverty is exacerbated. Those who face difficult times lose confidence. The population at risk becomes even more vulnerable.

At the same time, we also have to face other national and international challenges brought by a changing world, including the effects of migration flows and aging European societies. The tapestry of our societies will continue to change, due to new influences in a more and more globalised world. We will need, especially in times of crisis, to adapt to the changing world and strive towards creating the type of society to which we all aspire, united, tolerant and where each and every person is treated equally and can enjoy a feeling of well-being.



The message of the Warsaw Summit is that social cohesion can only be built around shared values – and more particularly human rights, democracy and the rule of law. But also that human rights, democracy and the rule of law cannot be built or sustained without social cohesion. [In the circumstances of the global economic crisis, provide to the citizens of Europe guaranteed social rights and social protection is one of the most important factors of social cohesion.]

The central task defined at the Warsaw Summit is to jointly define remedies and solutions which could be effective in fighting poverty and exclusion, ensuring equitable access to social rights and protecting vulnerable groups.

The Council of Europe has privileged a rights based approach to social cohesion. The European Convention on Human Rights guarantees civil and political human rights for the citizens of 47 member states. The European Social Charter, its natural complement, guarantees social and economic human rights. [We welcome the fact that the Russian Federation will soon ratify the Revised European Social Charter.]

Social exclusion directly affects individuals' capacity to enjoy their full rights as citizens, as well as their full participation in the social life, and thus also has an impact on the universal and effective application of the fundamental values of the Council of Europe.

The Council of Europe has already undertaken a wide range of activities aiming at reinforcing policies which promote social cohesion, prevent and fight social exclusion, with a particular reference to vulnerable groups.



The topics covered over the last 10 years, which have led to guidelines and recommendations for member States of the Council of Europe, are diverse and cover, amongst others, access to social rights, low-income workers, people experiencing extreme poverty, over-indebtedness, policies for families and children, co-responsibility for social cohesion, improving the situation of Roma and travellers, and promoting the rights and full participation of people with disabilities in particular through the Council of Europe 10 year Disability Action Plan (2006-2015).

This conference offers a good opportunity to define together what we wish to attain in the coming years and how the Council of Europe can build on its achievements and help us in our task.

The Council of Europe's Social Cohesion Strategy, and the report by the High-Level Task Force, both constitute excellent instruments for continuing to advance in an area in which the Organisation can contribute a great deal of added value in terms of the construction of Europe.

Ms Mary Daly, Chair of the High Level Task Force, will present its report, "Towards an active, fair and socially cohesive Europe" which was initiated by 2005 Warsaw Summit of Heads of States and Governments. It will provide valuable guidance for our future work.

In line with that report, we need to focus on measures that intensify the achievement of social rights, increase all actors' sense of shared social responsibility, improve democratic participation among all sectors and engender a sense of security and confidence in the future.



This is of course a very tall order, particularly in the current economic climate. As we all know, the question of providing responses to the various challenges facing our societies is not an easy job. It is complex. It is transversal. It relates to wide panoply of issues such as health, aging populations, migration, education, employment, housing and democratic participation. It involves many different stakeholders, different levels of government. And it does not happen overnight.

Working towards social cohesion is an investment. Investing in stability and the well-being of society is, as mentioned in the Task Force report, a major contribution to fostering economic and social progress and peaceful co-existence. And it is a constant process. It also requires commitment and method. The obligation of member states to protect and promote the human rights of their citizens needs to be accompanied by social and economic policy measures, to provide and facilitate effective access to those rights, by all, including the more vulnerable.

I am sure this Conference here today is very welcome. It gives us the opportunity to debate on the conclusions and recommendations of the High Level Task Force and to exchange vision and good practices. I very much hope that it brings interesting and innovative discussions and that all who are here today, may go away richer in ideas and experiences.

Ladies and gentleman, time is short and speakers are many so I shall not prolong these introductory words. Before closing, I would just like to underline the crucial role of the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and indeed of non-governmental organisations, in this mission. From their different dimensions, their work in the relevant fields brings a valuable input to the work of the Council of Europe in this field and



helps both to complete what is a very complex picture and to advance towards our common goals.

I wish you a very successful and rewarding two days. The Committee of Ministers will examine with interest the outcome of the Conference.

Thank you for your attention.