

Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Social Cohesion,  
Moscow (Russian Federation), 26-27 February 2009

Norwegian intervention by Head of Delegation, State Secretary Laila Gustavsen

**INVESTING IN SOCIAL COHESION: INVESTING IN STABILITY AND  
THE WELL-BEING OF SOCIETY.**

Honoured Chair, distinguished ministers and delegates, the Council of Europe has a long tradition of working for human rights and democracy in a pan-European framework. Norway will continue to support the Council's position as an important part of the European cooperative architecture.

Making social cohesion a guiding idea for the social goals and achievements of Europe is no easy task. I am grateful to our hosts for taking the initiative and the first step to elaborate how stability and well-being of society is an integral part of social cohesion. In the light of globalisation and the ongoing profound changes and financial crisis, stability and well-being of society have gotten a new actuality and the Russian choice of theme is in the frontline of the international discussion.

ILO has introduced a concept, "the social dimension of globalisation". This connects directly to the relation between the actual financial crisis and the need for a more socially cohesive society. The latest development have shown that globalisation makes us more vulnerable.

Social rights can suddenly be considered as something of a luxury when economies struggle to adjust to globalisation and when issues of security loom

large. It is of utmost importance to build awareness of the ways in which an economic downturn may affect the lives of people, as well as welfare spending, employment and social services.

Not only globalisation and financial crisis, but other profound changes such as demographic change and migration are also affecting social cohesion. Norway has met these challenges by various political measures focussing on a cross-disciplinary approach by coordinating the various areas of policy such as anti-poverty and inclusion, migration, employment and education. The main purpose of these reforms is to underpin high labour force participation, allowing parents to combine work and family, to make a sustainable welfare system, and to provide income security and welfare to all people. The cornerstone of this broad strategy in Norway is the notion of the Nordic welfare model, characterized by an a tripartite and corporative consensus policy, public responsibility, an active labour market policy, equality and universal Social Insurance Schemes.

The financial crisis puts social cohesion under stress and makes it more challenging and more important than ever before to include those in the outskirts of the labour market, and to prevent the development of poverty. We are now witnessing a strong rise in the unemployment rate. And we know from history that economic downturns may increase the possibilities for social unrest. The situation calls for concerted efforts, flexible strategies and a mix of policy measures – for instant actions as well as long term measures. That means more social cohesion and not less.

This conference will be a hallmark in the Council of Europe approach: to treat access to rights for all as an essential reference for a cohesive society, and the elaboration of social cohesion as integrally linked to the organisation's fundamental goals: realisation of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.

By doing so, it facilitates participation and opens up governance procedures for the purpose of consensus-building, which constitute a major contribution to social cohesion.

The strength of the Council of Europe lies in its transnational character – the large membership covering all parts of Europe - its legal instruments and expertise. In the context of its core objectives and the Revised Strategy for Social Cohesion, the Council is a very competent player in Europe to promote social rights, democratic decision making, civic dialogue and building confidence.

Like the nation states in promoting social cohesion, the approach and working methods on cross-national level should promote cross-disciplinary activity. I notice with great interest the call in the report for a stronger internal integration and synergies between issues and activities of common interest within the Council itself, and stronger linkages with other international organisations such as EU, OECD and ILO.

As for Norway's relations to the Council of Europe, I want to emphasize the achievements of the Council of Europe in the field of social cohesion resting fundamentally on its legal instruments, but also deriving from the sharing of activities of good practice.

The Ministry of Labour and Social inclusion in Norway has within its responsibility the reporting of Revised Social charter and European Code of Social Security and its protocols, and the European Convention on Social Security.

It is a stated political goal of my Government that everyone living in Norway shall have equal opportunities to contribute to and participate in Norwegian society. The most important arena for social inclusion is participation in the labour market.

Coming back to the title of the Ministerial Conference here in Moscow: Investing In Social Cohesion: Investing in Stability and the Well-Being of Society, I would like to make the expression of Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly mine: “more ownership and the practical implementation and application of the European Social Charter at national level are essential. I will do my best in our implementation of this instrument, which is so essential in the overall implementation of Social Cohesion Policy.

Honoured Chair, in closing, I will like to reiterate my government’s support for the Council of Europe in general and, in particular, the Council’s valuable efforts on social cohesion.