

**DECISION ON ADMISSIBILITY**

**4 July 2017**

**University Women of Europe v. Sweden**

Complaint No. 138/2016

The European Committee of Social Rights, committee of independent experts established under Article 25 of the European Social Charter (“the Committee”), during its 293<sup>rd</sup> session in the following composition:

Giuseppe PALMISANO, President  
Monika SCHLACHTER, Vice-President  
Karin LUKAS, Vice-President  
Eliane CHEMLA, General Rapporteur  
Birgitta NYSTRÖM  
Petros STANGOS  
József HAJDU  
Raul CANOSA USERA  
Marit FROGNER  
François VANDAMME  
Barbara KRESAL  
Kristine DUPATE  
Aoife NOLAN

Assisted by Henrik KRISTENSEN, Deputy Executive Secretary,

Having regard to the complaint dated 24 August 2016 registered on the same date as number 138/2016, lodged by University Women of Europe (“UWE”) and signed by Ms Anne Nègre, a lawyer appointed by the President of UWE, Ms Edith Lommerse, requesting the Committee to find that the situation in Sweden is not in conformity with Articles 1, 4, 4§3 and 20 of the Revised European Social Charter (“the Charter”), read alone or in conjunction with Article E, as well as with the 1961 Charter and Article 1 of the 1988 Additional Protocol; the complaint was notified to the Government of Sweden (“the Government”) on 27 September 2016;

Having regard to the documents appended to the complaint;

Having regards to the letters of the Government, informing the Committee that there would be no objections to the admissibility of the complaint, registered on 3 November 2016;

Having regard to the Charter, and in particular to Articles 1, 4§1, 4§3, 4§4, 20 and E, which read as follows:

#### **Article 1 – The right to work**

Part I: “Everyone shall have the opportunity to earn his living in an occupation freely entered upon.”

Part II: “With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to work, the Contracting Parties undertake:

1. to accept as one of their primary aims and responsibilities the achievement and maintenance of as high and stable a level of employment as possible, with a view to the attainment of full employment;
2. to protect effectively the right of the worker to earn his living in an occupation freely entered upon;
3. to establish or maintain free employment services for all workers;
4. to provide or promote appropriate vocational guidance, training and rehabilitation.”

#### **Article 4 – Right to a fair remuneration**

Part I: “All workers have the right to a fair remuneration sufficient for a decent standard of living for themselves and their families.”

Part II: “With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to a fair remuneration, the Parties undertake:

1. to recognise the right of workers to a remuneration such as will give them and their families a decent standard of living;  
(...)
3. to recognise the right of men and women workers to equal pay for work of equal value;
4. to recognise the right of all workers to a reasonable period of notice for termination of employment;  
(...)

The exercise of these rights shall be achieved by freely concluded collective agreements, by statutory wage-fixing machinery, or by other means appropriate to national conditions.”

#### **Article 20 – Right to equal opportunities and equal treatment in employment and occupation without sex discrimination**

Part I: "All workers have the right to equal opportunities and equal treatment in matters of employment and occupation without discrimination on the grounds of sex."

Part II: "With a view to ensuring the effective exercise of the right to equal opportunities and equal treatment in matters of employment and occupation without discrimination on the grounds of sex, the Parties undertake to recognise that right and to take appropriate measures to ensure or promote its application in the following fields:

- a. access to employment, protection against dismissal and occupational reintegration;
- b. vocational guidance, training, retraining and rehabilitation;
- c. terms of employment and working conditions, including remuneration;
- d. career development, including promotion."

#### **Article E – Non-discrimination**

"The enjoyment of the rights set forth in this Charter shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national extraction or social origin, health, association with a national minority, birth or other status."

Having regard to the Additional Protocol to the European Social Charter providing for a system of collective complaints ("the Protocol");

Having regard to the Rules of the Committee adopted by the Committee on 29 March 2004 at its 201st session and last revised on 6 July 2016 at its 286th session ("the Rules");

Having deliberated on 4 July 2017;

Delivers the following decision, adopted on the above-mentioned date:

1. UWE alleges that the situation in Sweden constitutes a violation of Articles 1, 4, 4§3 and 20 of the Charter, read alone or in conjunction with Article E, as well as of the 1961 Charter and Article 1 of the 1988 Additional Protocol. UWE invokes the following grounds:

a) The first concerns the wage gap between men and women in Sweden, which still persists and is unfavourable to women. According to UWE, unequal pay is a reality, despite the international obligations entered into and the legislation enacted in this area. In this respect, UWE also alleges that, in practice, the bodies which are responsible for monitoring effective compliance with employment law in relation to equal pay for men and women, have failed to fulfil their task in fighting discrimination, thus rendering existing legislation ineffective. UWE cites the work in particular of the Ombudsman and the labour inspectorate;

b) Secondly, UWE alleges that a very small number of women occupy decision-making positions within private companies. There is no legislation imposing quotas, although there is a Code of good governance which has equality among its objectives.

2. The Government did not object to the admissibility of the complaint.

## THE LAW

3. The Committee observes that, in accordance with Article 4 of the Protocol, which was ratified by Sweden on 29 May 1998 and entered into force for this State on 1 July 1998, the complaint has been submitted in writing and concerns Articles 1, 4, in particular 4§3, and 20 of the Charter, provisions accepted by Sweden when it ratified the Charter on 29 May 1998, as well as Article E. Sweden is bound by these provisions since the entry into force of the treaty in its respect on 1 July 1999. The Committee further observes that UWE also refers to the 1961 Charter and Article 1 of the 1988 Additional Protocol, as well as to all paragraphs of Article 4 of the Charter, although Sweden has only accepted paragraphs 1, 3 and 4 of Article 4. The Committee recalls that only the accepted provisions of the Charter are applicable.

4. As regards the first ground raised by UWE, concerning the wage gap for equal, similar or comparable work, the Committee notes that UWE specifically alleges the violation by Sweden of Article 4§3 and Article 20 of the Charter. Article 4§3 guarantees the right of men and women workers to equal pay for work of equal value. Article 20 of the Charter also concerns matters of employment and occupation without discrimination on grounds of sex, including pay. Concerning the practice of national bodies, UWE alleges also that the ombudsman and the labour inspectorate are not able to fight efficiently against wage discrimination between men and women.

5. As regards the second ground, concerning the representation of women in decision-making posts in private companies, UWE invokes the lack of national provisions imposing a quota and, in support of this allegation and its effects in practice, it also refers to statistical data reported by European and national sources concerning the performance of Sweden in this area. The Committee recalls that the right to equal opportunities is guaranteed by Article 20 of the Charter.

6. Consequently, in light of the above, the Committee holds that the complaint relates to the provisions of the Charter accepted by Sweden. The Committee further observes that UWE has indicated in what respect it considers that Sweden has not ensured the satisfactory application of these provisions. The complaint therefore satisfies Article 4 of the Protocol for the purposes of admissibility.

7. The Committee also observes that, in accordance with Articles 1 b) and 3 of the Protocol, UWE is an international non-governmental organisation with participatory status with the Council of Europe. It is included on the list established by the Governmental Committee of international non-governmental organisations entitled to lodge complaints before the Committee.

8. As regards the particular competence of UWE in the area of the complaint, the Committee notes that, according to Article 2 of its Statute, the social objective of UWE is:

“(a) to promote action consistent with the purpose of IFUW [International Federation of University Women] by encouraging cooperation between its European members at various levels and to enable them to collaborate with European International Organisations as well as to promote in Europe the programme of IFUW,

(b) to participate in the progressive development of European Civil Society, by working to achieve the programmes of the Council of Europe and the European Women’s Lobby and other European governmental and non-governmental organisations as is deemed appropriate by the aims and programmes of UWE,

(c) to promote lifelong education, especially for women and girls.”

9. The Committee considers that these activities fall within the context of actions in favour of gender equality, one of the fundamental criteria of democracy (Recommendation No. R(98)14 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on gender mainstreaming, adopted on 7 October 1988 at the 643<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies). Wage equality for equal work is one of its pillars as well as a major societal challenge. Taking into account the broad scope of UWE’s activities, which are developed in the framework of equality of rights and non-discrimination, the Committee considers that the condition concerning the competence of UWE is fulfilled for the purpose of the instant complaint.

10. Finally, the complaint filed on behalf of UWE is signed by Ms Anne Nègre, a lawyer who, according to the mandate signed by Ms Edith Lommerse, President of UWE, and by Ms Roxana Elena Petrescu, General Secretary of UWE, is authorised to lodge a complaint against the 15 States Parties on behalf of UWE. The Committee considers, consequently, that the complaint complies with Rule 23 of its Rules.

11. For these reasons, on the basis of the report presented by Giuseppe PALMISANO and without prejudice to its decision on the merits of the complaint, the Committee

**DECLARES THE COMPLAINT ADMISSIBLE IN RESPECT OF ARTICLES 1, 4§1, 4§3, 4§4, 20 AND E OF THE CHARTER**

In application of Article 7§1 of the Protocol, requests the Executive Secretary to notify the complainant organisation and the Respondent State of the present decision, to transmit it to the parties to the Protocol and the states having submitted a declaration pursuant to Article D§2 of the Charter, and to make it public.

Requests the Executive Secretary to publish the decision on the Internet site of the Council of Europe.

Invites the Government to make written submissions on the merits of the complaint by 13 October 2017.

Invites the complainant organisation to submit a response to the Government’s submissions by a deadline which it shall determine.

Invites parties to the Protocol and the States having submitted a declaration pursuant to Article D paragraph 2 of the Charter to make comments by 13 October 2017, should they so wish.

In application of Article 7§2 of the Protocol, invites the international organisations of employers or workers mentioned in Article 27§2 of the Charter to make observations by 13 October 2017.



Giuseppe PALMISANO  
President and Rapporteur



Henrik KRISTENSEN  
Deputy Executive Secretary