

**Communication by the President of the  
Committee of Ministers of the Council of  
Europe, Minister of Foreign Affairs of the  
Republic of Lithuania,  
H.E. Mr. Gabrielius Landsbergis,  
to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council  
of Europe**

**Strasbourg, 25 June 2024**

Mr President of the Parliamentary Assembly,  
Madam Secretary General,  
Members of the Parliamentary Assembly,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

I appreciate this opportunity to address the  
Parliamentary Assembly in my capacity as  
President of the Committee of Ministers.

Lithuanian Presidency coincides with the 75<sup>th</sup>  
anniversary of the Council of Europe. The  
Organisation that played a significant role in  
Lithuania's recent history as a key supporter of our  
steps from the ruins of soviet occupation into a  
strong democracy built on the rule of law and  
respect for human dignity.

Today our continent faces the exact threat our Organisation was meant to counter. We are confronted by an adversary:

- who believes that rules are created for the weak, while powerful are entitled to act above the law;
- who thinks he is free to kill and imprison without consequences and has scared or brainwashed his people to submission;
- who is convinced that our response will be timid and inconsequential. That our unity will wither. That if he holds long enough, we will get tired.

Your strong and timely political recommendation to the Committee of Ministers to expel Russia was groundbreaking and – for many of us – brought back faith in our common institutions.

But we have to remain clear-eyed. The Kremlin's regime is not affected by our condemnations and threats. Real action is the only thing that counts and thus we must act.

- First, by making Russia pay compensation for all the damage it inflicts on Ukraine. As Presidency, we will promote steps towards a comprehensive compensation mechanism,

while focusing on expanding the membership of the Register of Damage.

- Second, by ensuring responsibility of political and military leadership of Russia and its accomplice Belarus for aggression against Ukraine. The Special International Tribunal has to be established and equipped to effectively reach and punish those who planned and initiated the aggression. The contribution from the Council of Europe is very welcome if it helps bring the ambition of the draft Statute up to the necessary standard.
- Finally, we must continue taking steps for the protection of Ukrainian children who not just bare the brunt of the war, forced to study in subway stations and underground bunkers, but also face deportations and illegal adoptions, aimed at erasing their national identity.

I call for this Organization to remain the driver of real action against Russia's aggression. Because if we fail, the day after might turn out to be even gloomier than today.

Colleagues,

Now, allow me to cover the main results achieved by the Committee of Ministers since the last part-Session of the Assembly.

The 133<sup>rd</sup> Ministerial Session, organized in Strasbourg, 16-17 May 2024, was attended by 35 ministers and has been the highlight of the last three months of activities. On that occasion, the previous Presidency of Liechtenstein issued a Declaration, supported by 41 Member State, to mark the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of Europe.

At this Session, the Ministers addressed number of issues that also lie at the core of the priorities of the Lithuanian Presidency.

Firstly, the Ministers adopted a set of decisions relating to CoE's support for Ukraine. The Committee of Ministers took further steps in relation to the Register of Damage, as a first component of a comprehensive international compensation mechanism. It also enabled further work towards the establishment of a Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine. The Committee of Ministers also considered steps to provide better protection for the children of Ukraine, and to ensure their immediate release by Russia and safe return to Ukraine.

All these issues related to Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine will remain the key strategic priority of the Council of Europe. As I mentioned earlier, ensuring all possible support to Ukraine, assisting to recovery and reconstruction of Ukraine, as well as ensuring Russia's full accountability for international crimes, including the crime of aggression, is at the top of Lithuanian Presidency priorities.

As for the situation of the children of Ukraine, we need to intensify joint efforts. To help to ensure their safe return home the Council of Europe could become a collective member of the Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children. I welcome the recent appointment of a Focal Point for Ukrainian children and the Secretary General's resolve to initiate such accession.

It is our obligation to also pay maximum attention to the blatant violations of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Russia-occupied territories of Ukraine, including Ukrainian peninsula of Crimea that continue as we speak.

Earlier this month, the Committee of Ministers examined the Secretary General's report on the human rights situation in the territories of Ukraine occupied by the Russian Federation. The

Committee adopted a series of decisions to address the appalling human rights situation on the ground and to call for further action against the aggressor.

On the occasion of the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the deportation of the Crimean Tatar people from the Crimean Peninsula by the soviet totalitarian regime, the Lithuanian Presidency, the President of the Assembly, the Secretary General and the Human Rights Commissioner issued a joint statement. Our joint statement highlighted and condemned the ongoing persecution of Crimean Tatars by the Russian occupational authorities in Ukraine's Crimea. Finally, it is important for the Council of Europe to continue its participation in the International Crimea Platform.

The 133<sup>rd</sup> Session also dealt with the implementation of the Reykjavík Declaration adopted last year at the 4<sup>th</sup> Summit of Heads of State and Government.

The Ministers took stock of what has been achieved so far. They also provided guidance on what should be done in relation to the key issues of the Organisation's mandate, such as strengthening the system of the European Convention on Human Rights, implementing the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy in a context of democratic backsliding,

promoting the abolition of the death penalty, fighting violence against women, reinforcing protection of journalists, developing new standards in the field of human rights and the environment.

The adoption of the Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights is a major outcome of the 133<sup>rd</sup> Session. This new groundbreaking legal instrument will be opened for signature in Vilnius this September, on the margins of the informal Conference of the Ministers of Justice and I invite all countries to sign it. Last week in Vilnius we also hosted the European Dialogue on Internet Governance, where the Secretary General presented this Convention and highlighted issues related to securing human rights and fundamental freedoms online. This digital dimension of freedom is one of priorities for the Lithuanian presidency.

Lithuanian Presidency will ensure continuity and consistent implementation of the Reykjavik Summit Decisions, the execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights and strengthening the Organization to meet the challenges of the future.

We will also ensure continued support to civil society, independent media, and human rights defenders from Belarus and other countries

oppressed by authoritarian regimes, working in their home countries or in exile. In this context, we would be happy to host the Council of Europe Information Point for Belarus in Vilnius.

Lithuania will seek to advance our long-standing horizontal priorities in all international human rights fora; namely, freedom of expression and safety of journalists; fight against disinformation and hate speech. We will continue promoting gender equality and women's rights, good governance and fight against corruption. On the latter, just a week ago in Vilnius, we hosted the IACC International Anti-corruption Conference with Secretary General's participation.

Colleagues,

The Committee of Ministers' activities during the reporting period also include the issue of Kosovo membership, the situation in Georgia, addressing hate crime, preparation for the High-Level Conference on the European Social Charter. Allow me to elaborate on some of them.

Regarding Kosovo membership: On 5 June, at the initiative of the Presidency, the Committee held an exchange of views with Mr Miroslav Lajčák, EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina



Dialogue and other Western Balkan regional issues. This exchange offered a wider horizon and a regional context for the issue at hand. The Presidency stands ready to play its role in the process to achieve mutually beneficial results.

Regarding the situation in Georgia, the Committee continues to closely monitor developments in the country, including in Russia-occupied regions of Georgia. At the Session we took note of the Secretary General's consolidated report on Russia-Georgia conflict, indicating that the human rights situation in the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and Tskhinvali region/South Ossetia continues to deteriorate, underlining Russia's responsibility for this, and reiterating our unequivocal support for Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

While fully supporting Georgia that continues to defend its independence and territorial integrity, as President of the Committee of Ministers, I cannot ignore the worrying developments, including the newly adopted "foreign agents" law and the attacks and intimidation campaign against Georgian civil society actors.

All the attempts to silence Georgian civil society are unacceptable – they are incompatible with the values of the Council of Europe, as well as with the

EU membership perspective of Georgia. This new legislation was strongly criticised by international partners, the Secretary General and myself in the capacity of the President of the Committee of Ministers, and runs counter to European standards as stated by the Venice Commission. I use this opportunity to once again call on Georgian authorities to repel this law.

Another element of the implementation of the Reykjavík Declaration – strengthening of social rights. Next week Vilnius will welcome your Ministers responsible for social affairs at the High-level Conference on the European Social Charter.

The Lithuanian Presidency is also keen to contribute to the good inter-institutional relations within the Council of Europe. We consider smooth inter-institutional dialogue a must for ensuring the coherence of our messages. We also remain firmly committed to promoting cooperation between the statutory bodies of the Council of Europe and all members and observer states to provide the best contribution to preserving and promoting the common values in Europe and beyond.

Dear Colleagues,

allow me to conclude by thanking the Secretary General for all the work achieved during her term at the head of our Organisation and wish every success to the new Secretary General who you are about to elect.

Thank you.