

Thank you Chair,

Your excellencies, ministers, colleagues, ladies and gentlemen,

I am honored to speak to you in capacity of holding the presidency of the Pompidou Group.

This conference has shown us the value of the Pompidou Group. The results of the group's work in the past four years have been presented to us, and we have endorsed the plans for the years to come. Furthermore, we have met, interacted and discussed – freely and openly.

From a Norwegian perspective, it is quite clear that good dialogue between the states is a prerequisite if we are to reduce the damage caused by drugs. Trafficking, crime and addiction causes enormous amounts of damage on individuals and on society. The drug problem is the definition of an international challenge. We must face this challenge together, define the different aspects of the problem together, and find the answers together. At the same time we know, and need to understand and respect that the problem shows different faces in different countries, regions and continents. We must discuss – open mindedly and without prejudice – what that implies for what kind of measures we chose in our stride towards reducing the problems.

Norway believes that dialogue can only happen if we facilitate arenas for it. Norway has strong confidence that the Pompidou Group is such an arena. The Council of Europe setting, built and based on human rights and democracy, creates an advantageous climate for debate.

In 2016 we will gather in New York for the UNGASS 2016 on narcotic drugs. As we all know, the international debate is often quite polarized and this is a hindrance for open and constructive debate. I would like to invite you all, the members of the Pompidou Group, to continue to grasp the opportunity for open debate that lies within the setting of the Pompidou Group. In my view, this in itself contributes to depolarization and a more constructive debate.

We commend the French presidency for the results of their presidency of the Pompidou Group, exemplified by their work in consolidating a policy paper on preventing risks and

reducing harm linked to the use of psychoactive substances. This work showed us where we are on this topic and most likely contributed to better understanding of the different views of the matter.

From the view of Norway, as your presidency for the remaining time before the UNGASS, we will do our utmost to facilitate constructive preparation of the UNGASS 2016 by inviting to open debate on difficult topics and discussing these here in the Pompidou Group.

A topic Norway would like to invite the Pompidou Group to discuss, is the topic of drug policy costs, or control costs as it is sometimes referred to. We know that there are costs to individuals and to society associated with criminalization of drugs. These are sometimes held up against the benefits – or the lack of benefits of drug policy measures. This is an important debate. However, as it is unclear what is covered by the term drug policy costs, it is difficult to discuss their size and impact. Norway would therefore like to invite to a discussion on this in the Pompidou Group, with the aim of providing a definition paper on what drug policy costs are.

I would like to emphasize that Norway will make it a priority to follow up and support Pompidou Group activities that are ongoing. The Airports Group will hold its' 30<sup>th</sup> annual meeting next year, a longstanding cooperation of great direct and practical value. Of newer initiatives, I will mention the precursor network – an ad hoc working group that showed merit and has now been turned into an annual event. The expert group on drug related cybercrime is another promising activity.

Also, I would like to mention the different capacity building projects of the Pompidou Group. Facility supporting development, implementation and review of national drug policies upon request is a very concrete way of working, made possible by the open atmosphere of the group. The MedNet activities and the Drug Policy Cooperation in South East Europe are other examples of successful activities that the Norwegian chairmanship would like to continue to support.

Furthermore, Norway remains at your disposal for topics or projects you would like to rise within the context of the Pompidou Group and the work plan we adapted in this conference.

The good thing about this group is that it – the way we have been working over the last years – is able to adapt to changing needs of the member states. The humanitarian and medical mission to Ukraine together with the project on supporting displaced opiate substitution treatment patients in Ukraine are good examples of this.

As your presidency, I would like to invite you all to make use of this opportunity.

Before I close, I would like to take the opportunity to again thank the French presidency and the Maltese vice presidency for their excellent work. Their eminent leadership and results have created a solid base for the work ahead.

I would also like to take this opportunity to welcome Bosnia and Herzegovina as member of the Pompidou Group, and Mexico as an observer of the group. As regards Mexico, I would like to take the opportunity to congratulate the Centros de Integración Juvenil, a Mexican organization which this year celebrates 45 years of excellent work in the field of drugs. Their results are impressive, and they serve as an inspiration for us all, among other things when it comes to cooperation between government and civil society.

Furthermore, I would like to take the opportunity to thank the secretariat for their assistance in arranging this excellent conference. A special thank you goes to the executive secretary Patrick Penninckx who will move on to other tasks in the Council of Europe after this conference. Thank you for your devoted and skilled work. Also, a warm welcome to the incoming executive secretary, Mr. Jan Malinowski – we look forward to working with you.

Again, I thank you for your trust and we will – working closely together with the vice chairmanship and the rest of the bureau members – work for a prosperous and meaningful period of the Pompidou Group.

Colleagues, thank you for an excellent conference. Good luck on the future work. I look forward to working for and with you all.

Thank you for your attention.