

## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg (France)

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#### CHAIR

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#### CHAIR

Ms Marija PEJČINOVIĆ BURIĆ (Secretary General)

Ms I. ŠIMONYTĖ (Lithuania)

Ms T. FAJON (Slovenia)

Mr M. POPȘOI (Republic of Moldova)

Mr P. SZIJJÁRTÓ (Hungary)

Mr I. CASSIS (Switzerland)

Mr A. SCHALLENBERG (Austria)

Mr L. BECCARI (San Marino)

Mr B. OSMANI (North Macedonia)

Mr A. MIRZOYAN (Armenia)

Ms A. BAERBOCK (Germany)

Ms I. BERRO-AMADEÏ (Monaco)

Mr I. BORG (Malta)

Ms I. TOR FAUS (Andorra)

Ms H. BRUINS SLOT (Netherlands)

Mr I. HASANI (Albania)

Mr G. GUÐBRANDSSON (Iceland)

Mr M. SCHINAS (European Union)

Mr T. ROUSOPOULOS (President of the Parliamentary Assembly)

Mr J-N. BARROT (France)

Ms N. GHANI (United Kingdom)

Ms J.C. MACNEILL (Ireland)

Mr L. DARSALIA (Georgia)

Mr F. RZAYEV (Azerbaijan)

Ms B. SANDKJÆR (Norway)

Mr T.-L. HRISTEA (Romania)

Mr M.K. BOZAY (Türkiye)

Mr J. MARIAN (Czech Republic)

Mr I. KONDOV (Bulgaria)

Mr F.M. SAMPEDRO MARCOS (Spain)

Ms I. BOROSETS (Ukraine)

Mr J. WIŚNIEWSKI (Poland)

Mr N. SAMPAIO (Portugal)

Mr P. RAJALA (Finland)

Ms D. MELBÄRDE (Latvia)

Msgr P.R. GALLAGHER (Holy See)

Mr M. COOLS (President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe)

Mr M. O'FLAHERTY (Commissioner for Human Rights)

Mr G. ERMISCHER (President of the Conference of INGOs)

Ms E. HAMMARSKJÖLD (Sweden)

Mr T. GALLI (Croatia)

Mr P. BEGLITIS (Greece)

Mr R. LUMI (Estonia)

Mr J-C. JANSSENS DE BISTHOVEN (Belgium)

Ms O. TOMOVÁ (Slovak Republic)

Mr P. ENGELBERG (Luxembourg)

Ms B. KRUNIC (Montenegro)

Mr D. HATZIARGYROU (Cyprus)

Mr J. KISLING (Denmark)

Mr R. MARTINI (Italy)

Mr H. BAŠIĆ (Bosnia and Herzegovina)

Ms S. GRUBJEŠIĆ (Serbia)

Mr S. DION (Canada)

Ms D. CAMPBELL BAUER (United States of America)

Mr H. UCHIDA (Japan)

Mr J.A. SUÁREZ DEL REAL Y AGUILERA (Mexico)

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CHAIR

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**CM/PV(2024)133-add**

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**133<sup>rd</sup> SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS**  
**133<sup>e</sup> SESSION DU COMITÉ DES MINISTRES**  
(Strasbourg, 16-17 May / mai 2024)

**LIST OF HEADS OF DELEGATION /  
LISTE DES CHEFS DE DÉLÉGATION**

**ALBANIA / ALBANIE**

Mr Igli HASANI  
Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs /  
Ministre de l'Europe et des Affaires  
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**ANDORRA / ANDORRE**

Ms Imma TOR FAUS  
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Affaires étrangères

**ARMENIA / ARMÉNIE**

Mr Ararat MIRZOYAN  
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Affaires étrangères

**AUSTRIA / AUTRICHE**

Mr Alexander SCHALLENBERG  
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Affairs / Ministre des Affaires européennes  
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**AZERBAIJAN / AZERBAÏDJAN**

Mr Fariz RZAYEV  
Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs / Ministre  
adjoint des Affaires étrangères

**BELGIUM / BELGIQUE**

Ms Hadja LAHBIB  
Minister for Foreign Affairs, European Affairs  
and Foreign Trade and the Federal Cultural  
Institutions / Ministre des Affaires  
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Commerce extérieur, et des Institutions  
culturelles fédérales

**BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA / BOSNIE-HERZÉGOVINE**

Mr Haris BAŠIĆ  
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Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative  
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extraordinaire et plénipotentiaire,  
Représentant permanent auprès du Conseil  
de l'Europe

**BULGARIA / BULGARIE**

Mr Ivan KONDOV Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs / Ministre adjoint des Affaires étrangères

**CROATIA / CROATIE**

Mr Toma GALLI Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative to the Council of Europe / Ambassadeur extraordinaire et plénipotentiaire, Représentant permanent auprès du Conseil de l'Europe

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Mr Pasi RAJALA State Secretary to the Minister for Foreign Affairs / Secrétaire d'État auprès de la Ministre des Affaires étrangères

**FRANCE**

Mr Jean-Noël BARROT Minister Delegate for Europe / Ministre délégué chargé de l'Europe

**GEORGIA / GÉORGIE**

Mr Lasha DARSALIA First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs / Premier Vice-Ministre des Affaires étrangères

**GERMANY / ALLEMAGNE**

Ms Annalena BAERBOCK Minister for Foreign Affairs / Ministre des Affaires étrangères

**GREECE / GRÈCE**

Mr	Panayiotis	BEGLITIS	Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative to the Council of Europe / Ambassadeur extraordinaire et plénipotentiaire, Représentant permanent auprès du Conseil de l'Europe
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**HUNGARY / HONGRIE**

Mr	Péter	SZIJJÁRTÓ	Minister for Foreign Affairs and Trade / Ministre des Affaires étrangères et du Commerce
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**ICELAND / ISLANDE**

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**IRELAND / IRLANDE**

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**LIECHTENSTEIN**

Ms	Dominique	HASLER	Minister for Foreign Affairs, Education and Sport / Ministre des Affaires étrangères, de l'éducation et des sports
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**LITHUANIA / LITUANIE**

Ms	Ingrida	ŠIMONYTĖ	Prime Minister / Première Ministre
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Mr	Patrick	ENGELBERG	Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary, Permanent Representative to the Council of Europe / Ambassadeur extraordinaire et plénipotentiaire, Représentant permanent auprès du Conseil de l'Europe
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**MALTA / MALTE**

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**REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA / RÉPUBLIQUE DE MOLDOVA**

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Mr Bujar OSMANI  
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**NORWAY / NORVÈGE**

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**POLAND / POLOGNE**

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Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs / Ministre adjoint des Affaires étrangères

**PORTUGAL**

Mr Nuno SAMPAIO  
Secretary of State for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation / Secrétaire d'État aux Affaires étrangères et à la Coopération

**ROMANIA / ROUMANIE**

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Secretary of State for Global Affairs and Diplomatic Strategies / Secrétaire d'État aux Affaires étrangères globales et aux Stratégies diplomatiques

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**SWITZERLAND / SUISSE**

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**TÜRKIYE**

Mr Mehmet Kemal BOZAY

Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs / Ministre adjoint des Affaires étrangères

**UKRAINE**

Ms Iryna BOROVETS

Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs/ Ministre adjointe des Affaires étrangères

**UNITED KINGDOM / ROYAUME-UNI**

Ms Nusrat GHANI

Minister of State for Europe / Ministre d'État chargée des Affaires européennes



**EUROPEAN UNION / UNION EUROPÉENNE**

Mr Margaritis SCHINAS

Vice-President of the European Commission / Vice-Président de la Commission européenne

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**CANADA**

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**HOLY SEE / SAINT-SIÈGE**

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**JAPAN / JAPON**

Mr Hiroyuki UCHIDA

Permanent Observer to the Council of Europe / Observateur permanent auprès du Conseil de l'Europe

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Mr José Alfonso SUÁREZ DEL REAL  
Y AGUILERA

Permanent Observer to the Council of Europe / Observateur permanent auprès du Conseil de l'Europe

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Ms Denise CAMPBELL BAUER

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Ms Malgorzata TWARDOWSKA

Head of the External Co-operation Section / Cheffe de la Section coopération extérieure

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**DEVELOPMENT BANK (CEB) /  
BANQUE DE DÉVELOPPEMENT (CEB)**

Mr Tomáš BOČEK

Vice-Governor for Target Group Countries / Vice-Gouverneur « Pays du Groupe Cible »

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**PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY /  
ASSEMBLÉE PARLEMENTAIRE**

Mr Theodoros ROUSOPOULOS President / Président

**CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES /  
CONGRÈS DES POUVOIRS LOCAUX ET RÉGIONAUX**

Mr Marc COOLS President / Président

**EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS /  
COUR EUROPÉENNE DES DROITS DE L'HOMME**

Mr Arnfinn BÅRDSSEN Section President / Président de section

**COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS /  
COMMISSAIRE AUX DROITS DE L'HOMME**

Mr Michael O' FLAHERTY Commissioner / Commissaire

**CONFERENCE OF INGOS /  
CONFÉRENCE DES OING**

Mr Gerhard ERMISCHER President / Président

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**SECRETARIAT /  
SECRETARIAT**

Ms Marija PEJČINOVIĆ BURIĆ Secretary General / Secrétaire Générale

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France

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The CHAIR made the following statement:

“It is my great pleasure to welcome you here today in Strasbourg on the occasion of the 133<sup>rd</sup> Session of the Committee of Ministers, which marks the end of the Liechtenstein Presidency of the Committee.

I have the privilege to chair the first part of our meeting this morning before handing over the presidency to the Prime Minister of Lithuania, Ms Ingrida Šimonytė.

I am pleased that so many of you have responded positively to our invitation.

This meeting coincides with the celebration of the Council of Europe’s 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary. This is a festive occasion, and I believe we all enjoyed the celebration together with youth participants in the Strasbourg Opera yesterday afternoon.

However, this celebration takes place in a context where one of our member States is under constant attack by its aggressive neighbour, a former Council of Europe member State. You are all aware of the gravity of the context in which our Ministerial Session is taking place. The aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine is a terrible crime that brings death and suffering to many innocent people and that we hope to hold its leaders responsible for one day. There can be no impunity for the war crimes directed against Ukraine and its people. Our thoughts are with them as we open this Session.

Russia's aggression against Ukraine and its many human, political, social and economic consequences are certainly the biggest challenge facing our European democracies today. This is the main conclusion to be drawn from our working dinner last night on the theme of “the resilience of the European project in times of multiple threats”. But this is not the only threat facing Europe. For those of you who were not present at the dinner, let me just tell you:

We had an open and frank discussion. Many references were made to the despicable attack on Slovak Prime Minister Fico, which was unanimously condemned. This act of violence is not only an attack on Prime Minister Fico, it is an attack on democracy. Hate and violence have no place in our democracies. Nothing can ever justify such violence.

Together, we highlighted and discussed a number of threats and challenges to our European project and to peace on our continent. With a violent, devastating war raging against Ukraine, we have all taken supportive measures. The discussion showed our unwavering determination to continue this support. In this context, the Register of Damage for Ukraine was referred to as a major achievement, the importance of establishing a Special Tribunal to judge the crime of aggression was also mentioned by many as an important step to ensure accountability. As one of you said: “the moment of justice will come”.

Presently, Europe is facing a number of hybrid threats such as cyberattacks, sometimes carried out by State actors or by non-State actors supported by foreign powers. We are also facing disinformation campaigns, notably in the context of the forthcoming elections, economic coercion, terrorism, organised crime and instrumentalised migration, to name but a few. Different actors seek to exploit vulnerabilities in our political, economic and social systems.

What I brought back from our discussion yesterday, is how important it is that we co-operate in fighting these threats and in reassuring our citizens. In times like this, multilateralism is more important than ever. We must reinforce the resilience of our societies and the resilience and the unity of the Council of Europe.

Many voices also referred to the recommitment to the Council of Europe's values and our capacity to renew them to remain relevant in the future. We must ensure that the Organisation remains strong and resilient to assist member States in meeting the challenges to human rights, the rule of law and democracy.

Our strengths reside in our institutions, such as the European Court of Human Rights, the Commissioner for Human Rights and the Venice Commission. We also have legal instruments and close co-operation in the criminal law field, notably the Cybercrime Convention. New instruments are established to ensure that contemporary challenges are met, including on artificial intelligence, environment and human rights, and migrant smuggling.

I repeat my message from last night: the three most frequently used terms – “values”, “unity” and “resilience” – summarise well the discussion.

It is crucial that we come together to exchange views and to decide on concrete steps to address the challenges facing Europe today. It is only collectively that we will overcome them.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France

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The CHAIR made the following statement:

"I now refer you to the draft agenda of our meeting.

I would remind you that at the same time as we adopt the agenda, we will also be adopting the decisions under items 2.a, 2.b, 3 and 4. These decisions are set out in the annotated agenda which you have before you.

Does any delegation have any comments concerning the agenda?

I see that this is not the case. I therefore declare the agenda and the decisions adopted.

I am particularly pleased that our Committee has been able to adopt a number of decisions concerning Russia's aggression against Ukraine. These decisions reflect our determination to use all means available within the Council of Europe to support Ukraine, as our Heads of State and Government committed to last year in Reykjavík. We also adopted a number of decisions following up on other aspects of the Reykjavík Summit Declaration. Many of these decisions relate to the priorities of our presidency, such as the adoption of the Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law. I will elaborate on our presidency's achievements at the end of our meeting."

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France

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The CHAIR made the following statement:

“Moving on to item 2 on our agenda, I would first like to provide you with a short presentation of the Declaration of the presidency on the occasion of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of Europe which you will find in your file. The Declaration pays tribute to the founding fathers of our Organisation and underlines the attachment of the 46 member States to the Council of Europe and to the system of the European Convention on Human Rights. It also reiterates our joint commitment to human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

In all other respects, the Declaration is inspired by the decisions we have just taken on various issues such as our support for Ukraine, our will to ensure a better environment, to protect social rights or to promote youth participation, to name but a few. This Declaration was prepared by our Deputies, and I would like to take this opportunity to thank all delegations for their active participation in the discussions. Earlier this week, while the Deputies were finalising the Declaration, only one delegation opposed its adoption. We have asked member States to indicate whether they wish to align with the Declaration and I am pleased to inform you that so far at least 41 member States have indicated to us that they support it.

This is very satisfactory and shows that we have a strong message to deliver!

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Moving on with our meeting, I will now open the discussion under items 2 to 4 as a whole. It is now time to hear the views of the 46 member States and listen to their national statements.

I will give the floor in the order of the list of speakers which is on your table. I invite colleagues to respect the three minutes speaking time given to each speaker.

Please forgive me if I am going to be strict with you on this, as I have to make sure that all delegations have the possibility to take the floor. A light and sound signal will indicate when you are about to reach the three minutes at your disposal. I would also like to remind you that our Session will end at 1 p.m.

It is with great pleasure that I first give the floor to the Secretary General, Ms Maria Pejčinović Burić. But before I do so, I would like to thank you, Ms Secretary General, for your comprehensive and enlightening report “Our Rights, Our Future” which has also been distributed here today.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France

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Ms M. PEJČINOVIĆ BURIĆ (Secretary General) made the following statement:

“It is a pleasure to welcome you to the 133<sup>rd</sup> Session of the Committee of Ministers. And, on the occasion of the Council of Europe’s 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations, I can think of no better place to hold it than here in Strasbourg.

Twelve months ago, European leaders met in Reykjavík for our 4<sup>th</sup> Summit of Heads of State and Government. It was one of the largest ever gatherings of our continent’s presidents and prime ministers. And its significance and impact remain clear.

Following the Russian Federation’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine, it was right – it was essential – that leaders should assess what should be done to further support human rights, democracy and the rule of law on our continent. Given that these values are designed to deliver peace and that Russia’s rejection of them has brought war back from history and into the present. The resulting Reykjavík Declaration provided our Organisation with the ideas, energy and impetus needed to reverse the democratic backsliding that exists throughout Europe and deliver positive change.

The recommitment to the values of the Council of Europe was crucial, including the implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights and the execution of the final judgments of the European Court of Human Rights. So too was the adoption of 10 Reykjavík Principles of Democracy by which to measure and address the health of European democracies and whose working parameters are now being set.

There was also agreement on a set of very clear and specific actions. These include work to assess the need for new tools to address the challenges posed by environmental harm and by the terrible, criminal practice of migrant smuggling. Work that is now well underway.

There was a commitment to move forward with plans for a Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence. A first-of-its-kind, global treaty that will ensure that AI upholds people’s rights and which you are invited to adopt today. By including governments, experts, the private sector and civil society in the negotiations, our Committee on Artificial Intelligence has produced a strong, balanced and ground-breaking treaty. And I take this opportunity to thank the Committee’s Chair, Thomas Schneider, who joins us here today, for the excellent work done by him and his colleagues.

Last but not least, for this is a crucial point, the Reykjavík Declaration set out concrete measures to support Ukraine, chief among them the commitment to establish a Register of Damage as a necessary first step towards an international compensation mechanism. The Register became fully operational a few weeks ago, with headquarters in The Hague and a satellite office in Kyiv. We are pleased to report that submissions have been pouring in by the thousands. The aim is to ensure accountability for the crimes committed, as this is essential for justice. And justice is essential for delivering lasting peace.

The same sentiment inspired the call in the Reykjavík Declaration to help Ukrainian children, many of whom were forced to seek refuge elsewhere in Europe. That is why we launched our Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine. It provides a platform for co-operation between the member States, the European Union and the relevant international organisations to co-ordinate action on the ground across the continent. The Group focuses on a number of priority issues including transnational procedures and co-operation, guardianship, psychological support and trauma-informed care. These are all key aspects that deserve our full attention.

At the same time, we are taking other measures to support Ukraine, including of course our Action Plan on Resilience, Recovery and Reconstruction, demonstrating our unwavering commitment to a free, democratic and European future for Ukraine. To this end, we also stand ready to help Ukraine meet the standards required for EU membership, as we have so often done for other countries in the past and will continue to do in the future.

The progress we have made and the decisions you will make today have been driven by the momentum generated in Reykjavík, the kind of momentum that can only come from such a high-level Summit. I hope such events will become a more regular feature in the future. And that together we will go on to achieve even greater things.”



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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France

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Ms I. ŠIMONYTĖ (Lithuania) made the following statement:

“It is a great honour to address you today in Strasbourg.

We are living in uncertain times. First and foremost, I want to express our solidarity with the Slovak Republic.

Times to decide the trajectory of the development for our future generations. Times when the world faces the ambitions of autocrats who seek to sow division among democratic societies, undermine our resilience and challenge our core values of freedom, democracy and the rule of law. We are confronted with Russia's relentless war of aggression against Ukraine, escalating tensions in the Middle East, the alarming rise of authoritarianism and democratic backsliding.

The era of peace dividends that Europe enjoyed prior to 2022 is over. History has a tendency to repeat itself, even as times change, even as the promise of “never again” is repeated. We have realised that reliance on authoritarian regimes, or too much dependency on them, do bear a price. History has taught us that silence and the appeasement of aggressors endangers not only our neighbours' security, but our own as well. This is yet another reminder that we must remain alert and not take our freedom for granted.

Today's Russia poses the greatest threat to European security, to peace on our continent, as well as to our democratic systems. Can we imagine life in Europe once again divided into spheres of influence; with weaponised food, energy, information and cyberspace, where peace is held hostage by the imperial ambition of an autarch?

It is our collective duty, therefore, to support Ukraine, whatever victory takes.

A year ago, in Reykjavík, our Heads of State and Government resolved to unite against Russia's aggression, enhancing efforts to hold Russia accountable. The decisions we adopt today will further contribute towards the commitments made during the 4<sup>th</sup> Summit. I am pleased to note the emphasis on the effective operation of the Register of Damage as a preliminary step toward an international compensation mechanism and progress towards the establishment of a Special International Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression.

I commend the dedication of the Secretary General and the Liechtenstein Presidency to strengthening international efforts to ensure Russia's accountability for its brutal war of aggression against Ukraine.

We welcome the launch of the Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine, as well as the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children. These initiatives aim to protect Ukrainian children and ensure the safe return of those forcibly deported or illegally adopted in Russia.

We are pleased that the Council of Europe has again proved capable of adapting to future challenges, positioning itself as a front-runner and standard setter in novel fields. We welcome the adoption of the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and highly appreciate the decision to open it for signature in Vilnius in September. Our Organisation is also addressing the impacts of the triple planetary crisis: pollution, climate change and loss of biodiversity on human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

As we celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of Europe, I am confident that we will uphold the foundational values of this esteemed Organisation.

In conclusion, I fully support the Presidency's Declaration and decisions and thank you for your attention."

## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France

Ms T. FAJON ([Slovenia](#)) made the following statement:

“Allow me to begin by thanking Minister Dominique Hasler for bringing us together to celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of Europe. Thank you, Madam Secretary General Marija Pejčinović Burić for the presented overview. The values and norms of this Organisation are more relevant than ever. We all must continue to defend human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and human rights.

Having that said, I was shocked hearing the news about the attack on Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico. Such reprehensible and unacceptable acts of violence have no place in our democratic societies and must be condemned in the strongest terms.

The war in Ukraine has been going on for more than two years now. While Putin tramples on our values and norms, Ukraine is tirelessly fighting off Russian attacks. I will repeat – we stand in solidarity with the Ukrainian people and we will continue to help and support Ukraine as long as it takes.

Slovenia welcomes the setting up of the Register of Damage. This important first step towards a comprehensive international compensation mechanism will ensure the accountability for the aggression on Ukraine and its people. I am also pleased that this Organisation plays a key role in setting up the Special Tribunal for the crime of aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine as justice must be served.

Today, in many places around the world, we are witnessing the backsliding of democracy, the rule of law and human rights. Regretfully, our Europe is no exception. As this is our home, we should do everything to reverse this trend, fulfil our obligations and abide by our shared standards.

Along these lines, I wish to emphasise Slovenia's firm commitment to the European Convention on Human Rights and underline that this year we mark 30 years since its entry into force in Slovenia. I am extremely proud to see the Slovenian judge, Marko Bošnjak, serve as the next President of the European Court of Human Rights.

While staying firmly committed to what has already been built, it is equally important to work actively on emerging human rights challenges, such as climate change, new technologies, artificial intelligence – they are already here, shaping our everyday lives.

That is why today's adoption of the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence is an important achievement. The convention will ensure that the Council of Europe's legal standards are upheld also in this new, uncharted area. And when it comes to the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, we should do the same. A new legal instrument awaits us. We owe it to our people – especially to our youth and future generations – and to our planet.

Finally, I would like to congratulate the Liechtenstein Presidency for the excellent work and wish every success to Lithuania. In your efforts, you can always count on the support of my delegation.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France

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Mr M. POPȘOI (Republic of Moldova) made the following statement:

“We gather here to celebrate democracy and peace; the Council of Europe has stood for those values for three-quarters of a century now. The best way to continue to stand up for those values and to promote them is to continue to stand firmly by Ukraine.

The Republic of Moldova is firmly committed to supporting Ukraine and has supported the Register of Damage and will support the establishment of a Special Tribunal for the Crimes of Aggression against Ukraine. Our values that we hold dear are on the front line in Ukraine, so the best way to support them is to be firm in denouncing the Russian aggression against Ukraine.

At the same time, we in the Republic of Moldova have strongly condemned the horrific attack on Prime Minister Fico. Violence should never have any room in politics.

We in the Republic of Moldova have also faced more than our fair share of difficulties when it comes to the Russian Federation. The Transnistrian conflict still remains unsolved and the Russian Federation still maintains troops and munitions in the Republic of Moldova. We have repeatedly called on the Kremlin to withdraw those troops and munitions, and we continue to count on the support of the international community to help us achieve that goal.

At the same time, we are concerned about the human rights situation in the Transnistrian region. Even though yesterday night there was a sign of hope; one of the political prisoners was liberated by the so-called authorities in Tiraspol. But we should also work together to make sure that people are no longer imprisoned just for voicing their opinion, just for voicing their discontent.

We should continue to hold Russia liable for the violations of human rights found by the European Court of Human Rights, despite Russia no longer being a member. All possible avenues consistent with international law aimed at securing the payment by the Russian Federation of just satisfaction awarded by the European Court of Human Rights must be explored.

The Moldovan authorities are firmly determined to counter any attempt to disrupt and destabilise the democracy and stability in the Republic of Moldova through hybrid tactics that the Kremlin is employing against us. But we are growing more resilient and despite the Russian attempts to destabilise us, they will not succeed.

Moldova is getting closer to the European Union. We are working hard to reform and to adapt to European standards, despite the efforts of our adversaries to steer us from this goal.

Madam Secretary General, in the current difficult circumstances, we appreciate the efforts undertaken by the current and previous presidencies and the Secretariat to maintain the vivid role of the Organisation and its unity.

I would like to express our gratitude to the Liechtenstein Presidency, whose efforts kept the Organisation stable and unified and wish every success to the upcoming Lithuanian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers in which solidarity with the values and the role of the Organisation remain truly a cornerstone.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France

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Mr P. SZIJJÁRTÓ (Hungary) made the following statement:

“Madam Chair, I am amazed by the punctuality here. So, I hope you will become a member of the European Union as soon as possible. This kind of approach is necessary there to avoid 30 minutes of delays of Council meetings, so, congratulations on that.

Unfortunately, we are currently living in a world of dangers, and we Hungarians have been living in the shadow of the war in Ukraine for more than two years now. We have been confronted directly with the dramatic impacts of the war. That makes us committed to standing up for peace, as we consider saving the lives of the people is our number one obligation and the way to save the lives of the people comes through a ceasefire and peace talks. The last two years have brought the evidence that there is no solution on the battlefield. What you have on the battlefield is dead people and destruction. Among the dead people, there are many Hungarians. We have a big Hungarian community living in Ukraine, members of which have been mobilised to the Ukrainian army. Many of them have been deployed to the frontlines and, unfortunately, many of them have died. We do not want more people – we do not want more Hungarian people – to die in this war. And the last two years have brought evidence as well that neither of the two parties can win this war. Therefore, we need to use a much more diplomatic toolkit, diplomatic tools. That is why we are against the over-politicisation of international organisations. The Council of Europe could have served as a great platform for making attempts to make peace, but we have made a decision here and we have excluded Russia, which prevents us from being able to confront them directly with our opinions. Of course, it would have demanded some courage as well. I would like to urge you not to continue to make this mistake.

I think that the suspension of the mandates of the Azeri delegation in the Parliamentary Assembly is a huge mistake as well and that can also undermine the legitimacy of the election of the new officials of this Organisation. Therefore, I call upon you to give back the rights of the Azeri delegation to represent their country in our Parliamentary Assembly.

And, last but not least, I would like to underline the importance of the values in the Council of Europe regarding the protection of the rights of national minorities. Whenever it comes to election of the new officials, we will be in a position to give our support only to those officials who consider these rights to be respected as an important matter.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

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of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France

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Mr I. CASSIS (Switzerland) made the following statement:

“The 4<sup>th</sup> Summit of Heads of State and Government in Reykjavík has given the Council of Europe fresh impetus.

It is now up to us to build on this momentum to implement the Reykjavík Declaration, and Switzerland is fully committed to making this happen.

First, my country welcomes the setting up of the Register of Damage for Ukraine. As we all know, there can be no peace without justice and no justice without peace. Our support for Kyiv must continue to be the Council of Europe's priority, just as it is Switzerland's. After hosting the first Ukraine Recovery Conference in Lugano in 2022, Switzerland will hold the first high-level summit on peace for Ukraine next month. We are convinced of the need for a platform for dialogue that brings together stakeholders from all over the world. This is a difficult but necessary first step in launching an inclusive process towards a just and lasting peace in Ukraine. I hope, ladies and gentlemen, that I can count on the participation of your Heads of State and Government.

Second, Switzerland welcomes the Council of Europe's adoption of the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence. All technological advances must be made in ways that respect everyone's fundamental freedoms, rights and responsibilities.

Lastly, my country is determined to strengthen its commitment to and engagement with the Council of Europe. It is in this spirit that we are putting forward former Federal Councillor and President of the Swiss Confederation, Mr Alain Berset, for the post of Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

In so doing, Switzerland hopes to help build a fair and powerful Europe, able to guarantee peace and democracy on the continent and throughout the world. I have no doubt that my former colleague Alain Berset is the ideal person to lead the Council of Europe on this dynamic course, in keeping with the spirit of Reykjavík.

Thank you to Liechtenstein for chairing the Committee of Ministers so well, thank you to Lithuania and thank you to the Secretary General.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France

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Mr A. SCHALLENBERG (Austria) made the following statement:

“This year, we mark 75 years of tireless work for democracy, human rights and the rule of law for over 700 million citizens in our common European home.

I believe we can be proud of this achievement.

I am deeply convinced of the transformative power of this Organisation – in the past, in the present and in the future. The Council of Europe is, as I like to call it, the quiet power of Europe, la force tranquille, with an enormous soft power on our continent and it has changed our citizens' lives for the better.

But as we discussed already yesterday evening, this is definitely not a time to rest on our successes.

At the first Council of Europe Summit in Vienna, back in 1993, Heads of State and Government declared, and I quote:

“This Europe is a source of immense hope which must in no event be destroyed by territorial ambitions, the resurgence of aggressive nationalism, the perpetuation of spheres of influence, intolerance or totalitarian ideologies.”

What is true then, is true today.

Russia's brutal war of aggression against Ukraine has shaken our international rules-based order to the core.

Populists are on the rise all across Europe, intent on dividing our societies with fake news and fearmongering, promising simple answers to complex questions.

And the brutal attack on the Slovakian Prime Minister this week is a shocking reminder of these negative forces in our societies.

Systemic rivals aim to undermine and weaken our free and open societies. Some even consider our very way of life, our model of life, based on individual freedoms, as a threat, as an act of aggression.

Our answer cannot be to pull up the drawbridge and decouple from this reality.

We have to face the challenges before us: boldly, resolutely and with confidence.

Because I do not doubt for a second that the system we have created over the past 75 years – a system based on freedom, pluralism and individual rights – is the best one to guarantee our citizens' rights, security and prosperity. Even if at certain times it seems a daunting task.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France

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Mr L. BECCARI ([San Marino](#)) made the following statement:

“It is an immense pleasure to find ourselves together here in Strasbourg to share and analyse the results of the path we have travelled under the leadership of the skilful rotating presidencies that have succeeded one another since the 4<sup>th</sup> Summit of Heads of State and Government in Reykjavík and whom I thank for the work they have done, and to outline the further objectives we intend to set ourselves.

I would like first to echo the message of solidarity to our friends in the Slovak Republic as a result of the serious attack on the Prime Minister which is an attack on our democratic values and principles in which we all believe and which we all seek to uphold.

As a representative of a small country, I would like to express my heartfelt and sincere appreciation to the outgoing Presidency of Liechtenstein, which has shown in the Council of Europe, as in other multilateral fora, that it can and does work as effectively as a large nation despite its limited human resources.

Your undisputed and acknowledged skills, Madam President, are an example and an incentive for the Republic of San Marino in all contexts and will be even more so in the management of the future Association Agreement with the European Union, whose entry into force is expected early next year.

Also today, first of all, my country wishes to renew its deepest solidarity with Ukraine and its defence in the name of freedom and democracy, the founding values of the Republic of San Marino, as well as to reiterate once again its firm condemnation of the war of aggression still underway, as well as its unconditional commitment and support to the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders.

I am proud that the name of San Marino is counted among the founding countries of the Register of Damage for Ukraine. I can also confirm the full and unwavering support of my country to the realisation of a compensation instrument capable of giving satisfaction to the legitimate claims for damages submitted by the Ukrainian population and to the recognition of the full responsibility of the Russian Federation for the crime of aggression committed, which is why San Marino supports the project of a possible creation of a Special Tribunal.

At the same time, recalling and reaffirming the inspiring principles and values of the founding fathers of our Organisation, San Marino remains strenuously anchored to the hope and the idea that a just and lasting peace is possible and that our actions as States must always take into account such an ultimate goal, failing which the aforesaid values and principles would be inevitably compromised.

One year after the Reykjavík Summit, in the light of the results already achieved and of those still to be achieved and certainly achievable thanks to the increase of the financial means available to our Organisation for the period 2024-2027, we can lucidly and confidently state that the Council of Europe is more relevant than ever and enjoys the highest consideration of its member States, which are able to achieve the greatest successes when they act in a united manner, proving that unity is the real strength of this Organisation.

San Marino's support to the Council of Europe will never wane.”



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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

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Mr B. OSMANI (North Macedonia) made the following statement:

“Let me start by expressing my profound distress as regards the assassination attempt on the Slovak Prime Minister and wish him a speedy recovery.

We have gathered here today, a year after the historic Reykjavík Summit and celebrating our 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, to review the progress achieved and agree on the way forward in respect of the implementation of the obligations our Heads of State and Government strongly committed to in the Reykjavík Declaration.

This is an occasion to reaffirm our unity and commitment to our fellow member State – Ukraine, still facing the unprecedented Russian aggression, in blatant violation of international law and of the fundamental values of our Organisation.

Our solidarity with and support to Ukraine must remain unwavering, as long as needed. Despite the unprecedented challenges, North Macedonia clearly demonstrated its full commitment to the just cause of Ukrainians during our OSCE Chairpersonship last year.

We welcome the operationalisation of the Register of Damage, as the first component of the compensation mechanism.

We also support close involvement of the Council of Europe in the work of the Core Group on the establishment of the Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression.

We are appalled by the heinous practice of deportation of Ukrainian children and highly value the work of the International Coalition for their return.

With all its faults, multilateralism remains the only way to mobilise a collective response to wars, crises, emergencies and unparalleled challenges of various nature. And the Council of Europe remains an essential pillar in that respect.

While we celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, it is worth reminding ourselves that, starting as a peace and reconciliation project in 1949, the Council has developed into the conscience of Europe and a beacon of hope for millions of Europeans through the European Convention of Human Rights. Its norms and standards have contributed to improving lives of our citizens. The Commissioner for Human Rights and the monitoring bodies serve as guardians of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

We have also embarked on tackling the emerging challenges, such as artificial intelligence and the environment and human rights. It is quite rewarding that today we will adopt the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence, Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law.

There is a plethora of issues on our agenda today clearly demonstrating how essential the work we do in Strasbourg is for every individual to live in safety and dignity, in thriving and resilient societies.

In this context, it is of utmost importance not to shy away from embracing new members who share our values and commitments. Therefore, we have consistently supported the bid of Kosovo for membership in the Council of Europe and welcomed the Parliamentary Assembly's opinion recommending the Committee

of Ministers to invite Kosovo to join the Organisation. We believe that the citizens of Kosovo deserve to be protected by the European Convention of Human Rights and other instruments, that an early membership will facilitate the continuation of reforms in Kosovo and that it will also contribute to regional stability and co-operation.

Let me conclude by thanking Minister Hasler and her team for their exceptional presidency and by wishing much success to the incoming Lithuanian Presidency.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France

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Mr A. MIRZOYAN ([Armenia](#)) made the following statement:

“This year we celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our Organisation. Seventy-five years after its establishment, the Council of Europe still remains one of the most important international organisations in protection of human rights and the rule of law.

As we navigate through challenging times, where the threshold for violation of these basic principles, including the use of force, is alarmingly high, it is imperative that we recommit ourselves to the values and ideals that have guided this institution during three-quarters of a century.

Unfortunately, that is not necessarily the case for all the member States, not only in the context of internal democratic institutions, but also in their relations with other States. In this sense, since the Reykjavík Summit, significant human rights and humanitarian developments have unfolded in the geographic area of the Council of Europe, particularly in the South Caucasus.

In September 2023, after nine months of blockade, the world witnessed the forcible displacement of the indigenous Armenian population of Nagorno-Karabakh as a result of Azerbaijan's military attack on the region, as documented by the Commissioner for Human Rights after her fact-finding visit in October 2023.

With the help of the international community, the Armenian Government has taken necessary measures to meet the short-term needs of the refugees. Another pressing humanitarian issue remains the issue of the release of all Armenian prisoners of war and civilians illegally detained in Azerbaijan.

Along with this, we should also note the positive developments. In April, Armenia and Azerbaijan finally started the delimitation process based on the 1991 Alma-Ata Declaration, which was welcomed by many countries and organisations, including the Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

Following my most recent meeting with my Azerbaijani counterpart on 10 to 11 May in Almaty, Armenia reaffirms its commitment to the lasting, stable peace in the South Caucasus based on the mutual recognition of territorial integrity as per the Alma-Ata Declaration, the delimitation of the State border in line with the Alma-Ata Declaration, as well as the unblocking of communications under the sovereignty and jurisdiction of two States, based on the principles of equality and reciprocity.

We believe the Council of Europe, with its conventional system, has an important role to play in contributing to the democratic security of Europe and upholding the rights of all persons living in its geographical area.

Taking this opportunity, I would like to thank Liechtenstein for its dedicated guidance of the work of the Committee of the Ministers and wish all the best to the Lithuanian Chairmanship.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France

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Ms A. BAERBOCK ([Germany](#)) made the following statement:

“Even though the Council of Europe is not the best-known institution in the world, not even in Europe, we are celebrating 75 years of, I would say, the most valuable institution for our democracies.

It doesn't matter how strong our democracies are, without this Council of Europe and all its work, we wouldn't be where we are today.

And therefore, I applaud the theme of our Session today, that we all just walked past, at the entrance: “United around our values”.

This shouldn't just be a theme, it should be a living task for us for the next 75 years. We have to talk about the challenges we are facing.

You addressed some of the challenges in your report, Secretary General, we also discussed these challenges at the Reykjavík Summit last year, and we are grateful for it.

But already at the working dinner last night, we asked ourselves the question what it means to defend our values, not just standing united in our values, but defending them when they are under pressure.

I think it was important that we all together, and especially the Parliamentary Assembly, made it clear: if a country like Putin's Russia violates our values to such an extent, attacking the cornerstones of this Council, we cannot just pretend that we are sitting around a table together as if nothing has happened.

But that obliges us to have no double standards ourselves.

And this is why I would like to underline again: When we discuss the questions the Secretary General put in front of us, for the future of this Council, how can we preserve what makes our continent great? How can we strengthen our Council?

I believe that we have to work on developing these values for the future, too. This also means: we need more money. Without money, this Council cannot work and, especially, the Court cannot work.

This is why Germany will provide more than 10 million euro in voluntary contributions in 2024, and I would like to call on others to follow suit.

We focus especially on the European Court of Human Rights and the Convention on Human Rights.

As I said last night, for us, non-compliance with obligations under the European Convention on Human Rights must have consequences.

Otherwise, it doesn't really make sense to have these conventions. This calls on us to adhere to them, especially in cases at the Court, like the *Ilgar Mammadov* case back in 2017, like the *Osman Kavala* case and the *Selahattin Demirtaş* case.

But this Council can also play a crucial role when it comes to issues related to climate change or refugee rights.

We know that sometimes this is hard for a country – including for us, as Germany –, but we would also never have the idea of saying: if we don't like our national Constitutional Court's judgments, we won't fund it anymore.

In a nutshell, there are many things to do, especially also strengthening institutions like the Venice Commission, living up to the expectations of our young people.

But as we stand united, as we have done in the last two years, I believe we will also grow for the next 75 years.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France

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Ms I. BERRO-AMADEÏ (Monaco) made the following statement:

“Let me first congratulate the Liechtenstein Presidency of the Committee of Ministers on the sterling work it has done, and of course to wish the Lithuanian Presidency every success as it takes over the helm.

Yesterday, we celebrated our Organisation’s 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

The Principality of Monaco firmly believes that the Council of Europe plays a major role in promoting and safeguarding democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights, as enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights.

We are constantly building on this legacy to ensure that human rights are respected and promoted on all occasions and in all fields.

This is demonstrated by the work we are currently doing on artificial intelligence and the related Framework Convention, which is on our agenda.

A year ago, we adopted the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy.

Because we are “united around our values,” Monaco reaffirmed its unwavering support for the Ukrainian authorities by joining the Register of Damage for Ukraine from its inception.

We are delighted that the platform for submitting claims was launched on 2 April.

We will also continue to closely follow the discussions on the possibility of setting up a Special Tribunal for Ukraine and the conclusions of the Core Group, which has been instructed to explore the options available.

The strength of the Council of Europe lies in its ability to provide a forum for dialogue and exchange, even – and especially – in troubled times. Our Organisation can draw on an arsenal of legal standards built up over 75 years to serve human rights.

Throughout this period, the European Court of Human Rights has formed a bulwark against the dilution of the values upheld by the Council of Europe.

In the name of respect for fundamental rights and individual freedoms, the execution of the Court’s judgments must remain our top priority, with no room for exceptions.

On 2 October, Monaco will mark the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its accession to the Council of Europe.

In 2004, H.S.H. Prince Albert II noted that like Monaco’s admission to the UN in 1993, its accession to the Council of Europe was a memorable milestone in the country’s long history.

You can count on our firm determination to promote, with you, our shared values of peace, democracy and the rule of law, in the pursuit of stability and regional co-operation.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

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Mr I. BORG ([Malta](#)) made the following statement:

“I would like to start by expressing my sincere gratitude and congratulations to you – dear Dominique and to the Liechtenstein Presidency – for the excellent organisation of this Ministerial meeting. Together with your dynamic team in Strasbourg – you have shown exceptional leadership in steering the Committee of Ministers in these difficult times and unprecedented ones – and proven yet again that small countries do not equate to small achievements.

This year we commemorate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary since this Organisation was founded.

For three-quarters of a century, the Council of Europe's work has been dedicated to advancing its core values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

As we reflect on our achievements over the past 75 years – of which there were many significant and groundbreaking ones – we must be careful not to fall into the trap of complacency.

We should of course be proud of how far we've come.

Yet we should also acknowledge that the road ahead is still long. And use this reflection on how much we've been able to achieve together, to strengthen our resolve as to how much more we can achieve if we remain united in our values. Let's not take our values for granted, for example the attack on Prime Minister Fico is an attack on democracy, which we not only strongly condemn, but wish him a speedy recovery.

With an ongoing war back on European soil – which has inflicted devastating consequences – we must remain unwavering in our support and solidarity with our brave Ukrainian friends in their fight for peace and freedom against the aggressor, for as long as it takes.

We must seek to ensure the full enjoyment of our citizens' fundamental rights and freedoms as protected by the system of the European Convention on Human Rights which we have all have committed to uphold.

We must seek to eliminate discrimination in all its forms and embrace human diversity in all its richness.

We must seek to address the increasing threat of democratic backsliding and resist the creeping authoritarianism.

We must seek to involve our youth in developing sustainable and forward-looking policies and invest in their civic engagement.

And we must seek also to welcome those who share our values to join us in our important pursuits.

Mindful of the fact that many of the challenges we are facing in Europe today are also being faced elsewhere, we believe that further enhancing our collaboration and co-operation with other international organisations and also neighbouring regions would ensure greater synergies, co-ordination and coherence in addressing our common challenges.

I wish all the very best to Lithuania.

Let us make sure to deliver “Towards a better future for the need of all”.

We owe it to Europe and to our people.”



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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France

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Ms I. TOR FAUS (Andorra) made the following statement:

“I would like to begin by extending my warmest congratulations to Liechtenstein on its presidency and on the able manner in which they planned and prepared for this 133<sup>rd</sup> Session.

The 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of Europe and the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the accession of the Principality of Andorra come at a particularly difficult time, when war has returned to our continent. In this respect, I can only reiterate that we strongly condemn Russia's aggression against Ukraine and reaffirm that the Andorran Government and people stand in solidarity with Ukraine and all its citizens.

The Organisation made crucial decisions at the Reykjavík Summit, foremost among them the decision to set up the Register of Damage, which will be an essential tool for reconstruction and accountability.

At this major Summit, a commitment was also made to hold a high-level conference on the European Social Charter, which will take place in Vilnius on 3 and 4 July.

Andorra is very involved in the preparations for this conference, not least through our Permanent Representative's chairmanship of the dedicated working group. It hopes that the conference will provide an opportunity to address the challenges facing our societies, such as the rising cost of living and the housing crisis, and to find innovative and effective solutions.

In this respect, I would like to express our gratitude to the Secretariat for having swiftly responded to the major issues of our time: artificial intelligence, which is the subject of the framework convention we are formally adopting today and to which my country is proud to have contributed; the environment, on which the European Court of Human Rights has recently issued rulings, with a working group set up to consider a future legal instrument; and the crisis of democracy, with the Steering Committee responsible for developing more effective policies based on the principles that unite us.

The 10 Reykjavík Principles for Democracy recognise the vital role of education, human rights and democratic values and highlight the need for greater youth engagement in decision making. Thanks to the first evaluation of the Council of Europe's Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture in 2023, we have been able to analyse how the framework has been incorporated into formal education in the member States. It has been a valuable source of inspiration for the Principality of Andorra, and we are convinced that we must continue to invest in education to train the citizens of tomorrow.

I wish to thank the Liechtenstein Presidency once again. We fully endorse the Declaration and wish the Lithuanian Presidency every success. It can count on the full support of the Principality of Andorra.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France

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Ms H. BRUINS SLOT (Netherlands) made the following statement:

“For the past 75 years, the Council of Europe has been committed to peace, to freedom and to human dignity. However, Russia’s brutal aggression against Ukraine has presented enormous challenges to our Organisation’s mission. So it was vitally important that our Heads of State and Government gathered in Reykjavík last year and reaffirmed our mission based on shared values. The Council of Europe remains united and has shown that it stands ready to support Ukraine until its territorial integrity is restored.

Today again, we reaffirm that support for Ukraine remains our absolute priority. At the Ministerial Conference “Restoring justice for Ukraine” in The Hague on 2 April, we promised that the Russian perpetrators of aggression would face accountability. I am therefore pleased that the Register of Damage for Ukraine has been launched, as a first step towards a comprehensive compensation mechanism. I urge all those member States that have not yet aligned themselves with this important initiative to do so. I also welcome the progress made towards establishing a Special Tribunal for the investigation and prosecution of the crime of aggression against Ukraine. I would like to take this opportunity to reiterate our conditional offer to host such a tribunal in The Hague.

In standing up for accountability and justice, we need to stand up for the European Court of Human Rights. The Netherlands is awaiting judgment on the merits of the interstate application against the Russian Federation concerning the downing of flight MH17, in which 298 civilians were killed. Let us nurture this system for protecting human rights, especially at a time when our shared values are under increasing pressure. We must never forget that we have an obligation to abide by the Court’s final judgments. Even if we might sometimes find it difficult to reconcile certain judgments with our own national policies.

Today – on the International Day Against Homophobia, Biphobia and Transphobia – the Amsterdam Rainbow Dress is on display in this building. A living work of art made of 68 flags of nations where being LGBTIQ+ is punishable by law. Of course, the dress doesn’t include the flags of any Council of Europe member States, but we know we still have a long way to go before our societies and our laws can truly be regarded as inclusive and equal. This is also the reason why the ‘European IDAHOT+ Forum 2024’ was held yesterday in The Hague to promote human rights, freedom and equality.

We must strive for human dignity for all. That includes dignity for women and girls, who are too often victims of violence. This year will mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the entry into force of the Istanbul Convention. As Chair of the Conference of Parties to the Convention, the Netherlands calls on those countries that have not yet ratified the Istanbul Convention to do so.

Finally, let me join Minister Hasler and other colleagues in strongly condemning the attack on the Prime Minister of Slovakia. I wish him strength and full recovery.

We must keep working to protect and promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Both now and in the future.

I would especially like to thank you, Dominique Hasler and your team for doing an excellent job and I wish Prime Minister Ingrida Šimonytė and Lithuania all the best for the upcoming presidency.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France

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Mr I. HASANI (Albania) made the following statement:

“Let me start by congratulating Liechtenstein and you, dear Dominique, for the excellent chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers during the last six months.

As this Ministerial marks the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of Europe, it is not a simple celebration of a milestone, but also a reaffirmation of our commitment to the principles that have guided us since its foundation.

In this remarkable moment, I would like to extend Albania’s heartfelt gratitude for the Council of Europe’s pivotal role in fortifying these values for my country throughout the 29 years of our membership.

Now, in times of uncertainties, multiple challenges and an aggression at our doorstep, it is our duty to uphold and champion this Organisation’s legacy with the utmost resolve.

The Russian aggression against Ukraine is a grim reminder of why our solidarity is crucial today, more than ever before.

The Council of Europe’s Action Plan for Ukraine and the Register of Damage are more than acts of support – they are a declaration of our collective resolve to humanity and solidarity, but also to accountability for those who undermine our mission. For our part, Albania has reiterated tirelessly that we will support Ukraine for as long as it takes.

We will continue to offer our firm support to the noble mission of the Council of Europe and will continue to contribute to the strengthening of its three pillars.

However, I cannot but bring here a concern, as there is an inconsistency that must be addressed:

The request from Kosova, eager to join our ranks, has been met with hesitation.

With Kosovo’s accession to the Council of Europe in 2024, this important European institution does nothing else but formally conclude a cycle initiated by the major democratic changes that began in the early nineties of the last century. It acknowledges Kosovo and its citizens’ legitimate right to have a place among the democratic countries represented by the Council of Europe.

The Committee of Ministers must act, inspired by the Parliamentary Assembly’s call, which reflects the core mission of our Organisation – to welcome all societies and people that adhere to our values.

While Kosova’s Government should fulfill its undertaken international commitments and listen carefully to its staunchest supporters, but let us not lose any more time and rectify this mistake by holding another Ministerial soon and welcome the people of Kosova in the Council of Europe.

And one last word to Lithuania and Prime Minister Šimonytė wishing you a successful chairmanship. You can count on Albania’s support for the six months to come.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

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Mr G.I. GUÐBRANDSSONS ([Iceland](#)) made the following statement:

“Let me start by expressing our solidarity to Slovakia.

The promise of “never again” has been fundamentally challenged by Russia’s ongoing aggression against Ukraine.

Together, we must stand resolute in unity to ensure that Europe’s violent past does not become its future.

In light of these challenges, European leaders gathered in Reykjavík for the 4<sup>th</sup> Summit of the Council of Europe one year ago.

At the Reykjavík Summit, we recommitted to the values of the Council of Europe and its crucial role in continued freedom, peace, prosperity and security for Europe.

We showed that Europe is united around Ukraine. Iceland continues to strongly support the work of the Register of Damage established at the Reykjavík Summit, actively participates in discussions on possible next steps to towards a Special Tribunal for Ukraine and firmly supports the work for the children of Ukraine.

At home, we also continue our steadfast long-term support for Ukraine with a newly adopted parliamentary resolution on long-term assistance.

The world is facing new and serious challenges to human rights, including those emerging from rapidly developing technologies and rising inequalities.

The greatest challenge we now face is the climate crisis posing a significant threat to human rights globally. I argue that combating climate change is not only the world’s largest environmental issue, but also the world’s largest social issue that we face so far in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. The link between human rights and the environment was a priority of Iceland’s Presidency in the Council and we welcome the renewed focus on environmental issues that should lead the way with decisive action.

Another challenge is increased democratic backsliding, with rising autocratic tendencies. Together, we must fight the discontent and suspicion of the values of democracy that has created the greatest human welfare and economic prosperity in human history.

Let’s continue our work together by inviting new member States to join the Organisation, that are committed to respect our values. Now, lastly, allow me on this International Day against Homophobia, Biphobia, Transphobia and Intersex Phobia to remind us of the importance of our solidarity to respond to the increased discrimination, violence and hatred faced by LGBTI+ people on our continent and beyond. Love will conquer.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France

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Mr M. SCHINAS ([European Union](#)) made the following statement:

"I am honoured to be here, one year after the Reykjavík Summit and 75 years after the Council of Europe started its work in the pursuit of peace, democracy and a better life for Europeans.

We should not spend too much time on the diagnosis of what Europe is facing. We are in sober and dark times. Our society is under attack. In such an unstable geopolitical context, Europe is emerging as an anchor of stability, a contributor for solutions to the world's problems. And Strasbourg is the epicentre of democracy. Just a few weeks before the European elections, this meeting in Strasbourg today is an important signal for our European values.

The Union is committed to continue strengthening its strategic partnership with the Council of Europe in the context of the Reykjavík Summit follow-up process and beyond.

Having joined the Register of Damage for Ukraine last year, the Union launched the procedure to become a fully-fledged participant.

The Union is committed to taking forward discussions in the Core Group on the establishment of a Special Tribunal for the crime of aggression against Ukraine.

The launch, in 2023, of the International Centre for the Prosecution of Crime of Aggression against Ukraine at Eurojust was a crucial step towards full accountability.

Further to the Russian aggression, many Ukrainian citizens, including children, found refuge in member States. I'm proud that the Temporary Protection Directive was activated, helping Ukrainian refugees to get quality education and jobs.

For the reconstruction and recovery of Ukraine, through the Ukraine Facility, the Union can provide up to €50 billion assistance, that will also strengthen the rule of law, democratic institutions and fight against corruption.

Another major development for the Union, is its accession to the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention. This reinforces the Union's human rights legal framework and sends a strong message to all victims of violence against women and domestic violence.

Let me also reiterate that the EU accession to the European Convention on Human Rights remains a priority.

In the context of EU enlargement, recent developments on Ukraine, Moldova, Georgia and Bosnia and Herzegovina represent an opportunity to continue our co-operation through joint programmes. Our co-operation on the enlargement package and the EU Rule of Law reports will certainly continue to benefit from the input from the Council of Europe.

In this year of institutional and political change in Europe, the Union is committed to developing further the political dialogue with the Council of Europe.

In these difficult times, the European Union and the Council of Europe are more necessary than ever. It is vital to join forces to strengthen democracy in Europe, reverse democratic backsliding, promote the rule of law and uphold human rights. This is part of the origins and the mission of both of our organisations. It is in our DNA.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France

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Mr T. ROUSOPOULOS (President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe) made the following statement:

“The initial bet was to build a new Europe and there are, without any doubt, voices asking whether all the progress made over the last decades had been proved to be only a chimera.

With war raging in Ukraine after the full-scale aggression of the Russian Federation, the moment is still a critical one.

But for my part, I still believe that as long as our principles gather us around the same table of mutual understanding, there is still hope, even though the landscape ahead is rocky.

Today we are focusing on how this hope, which inspired the Reykjavík Declaration, has been translated into action over the past year.

I am pleased with the gradual building of comprehensive accountability mechanisms. The Register of Damage is fully functional now. Now we must secure financial assets to compensate those damages. The EU's move to allocate profits from Russian assets to Ukraine is most welcome. This approach needs to be further built. The work of the establishment of an Ad hoc Tribunal for the crime of aggression, which was initiated by our Assembly in April 2022, is also progressing well, and I am very confident it will soon be in place.

But – in the meantime – the war rages on. My fellow colleagues from Ukraine risk their lives every time they have to travel to Strasbourg. In some cases, it takes them two full days of traveling to participate in the work of our Assembly.

In the past weeks, the Russian Federation has multiplied its attacks on critical civil infrastructure in Ukraine. Russian troops are at the gates of Kharkiv, the second largest city in Ukraine.

It is tragic that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, in Europe, we have to think about building up food stockpiles and creating more air raid shelters. Young Europeans, who should be preparing for a bright future, are forced to take up arms and defend their country.

Make no mistake, this war concerns all of us, and we cannot turn our attention away or weaken our resolve. We must emphasise again the importance of increasing military support to Ukraine.

Yes: there are also many other challenges to be met.

Increasing hate in our societies, the most recent victim of hate was the Prime Minister of Slovakia.

The effects of climate change that drastically impact our societies, artificial intelligence that must be used as an instrument and not as a weapon.

And finally: closing one's eyes to clear signals that the democratic space is being gradually reduced in many of our member States, can only lead to calamity. Freedom of assembly and of expression, political and media pluralism, equality of rights, a fully-functioning system of checks and balances such as an independent judiciary – all these must be protected without any compromise.

The Parliamentary Assembly is working intensively and will continue to focus on areas of our responsibility, even if sometimes this bothers some of our members. This is the proof that we act to solve all the problems in our big family of 46 States. I usually say that I am proud as a Greek that my country was the first to be expelled from this Council back in 1969 because of the dictators, and it is the real proof that this Council respects its principles.

The Assembly strongly believes in the Council of Europe as a community of values, which can be a reference for anybody who aspires to democracy, human rights and the rule of law. In this respect, may I recall that, last April, the Assembly took a clear position in support of Kosovo's membership of the Council of Europe.

Please let me finish by expressing my deep respect to the Liechtenstein Presidency of the Council of Europe for its agile and firm leadership over the last six months.

I know too that the Lithuanian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers will build upon these successes and work on the Reykjavík priorities.

Let me assure you of my full support and that of the Parliamentary Assembly in all your endeavours.”



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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France

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Mr J-N. BARROT (France) made the following statement:

“Seventy-five years ago, through the Treaty of London, we created the Council of Europe. Choosing Strasbourg, a city symbolising Franco-German reconciliation, cemented a new unity between the peoples of Europe around the values of peace, human dignity, universal rights and democracy.

For three-quarters of a century, our Organisation has worked to uphold and promote these values, but above all to make them a reality. Together, the member States of the Council of Europe form a genuine legal space based on a system of more than 200 treaties, with the European Convention on Human Rights at its core.

These texts were conceived and exist only because they impose obligations that we must honour: we owe this to the other States Parties and, above all, to our fellow citizens. It is therefore crucial that the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights are executed, one and all.

As well as protecting and implementing our existing framework of international law, it is vital that our Organisation responds to new challenges: the Council of Europe has established itself as an appropriate framework in this respect.

France welcomes the adoption of the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence, the first legally binding international instrument in the field.

Like the global continent of Europe, our Organisation looks beyond its borders on many issues. On the question of gender equality, in particular, with the Istanbul Convention: let us spare no effort and continue to encourage new accessions to this key convention.

For over two years, Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine has continued to produce its share of crimes. We will relentlessly pursue accountability for the crimes committed by Russia against Ukraine and its people.

France welcomes the launch on 2 April of the claims submission platform for the Register of Damage. It is particularly important to work towards universalising the Register, and France is participating in this effort to convince new non-Council of Europe member States to join, which will further boost the Register's legitimacy on the international stage.

As part of the Core Group, we will continue the efforts to support the setting up of a Special Tribunal for Russia's crime of aggression.

I would like to thank the Liechtenstein Presidency for their work, and to wish the incoming Lithuanian Presidency every success. Nothing has dented the clear-eyed optimism of greater Europe's family of democracies. Our Organisation has proved capable of adapting to the emerging challenges of artificial intelligence. It rose to the occasion, at a crucial moment in history when war was making a comeback in Ukraine. The Council of Europe can count on France's support in the years to come.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France

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Ms N. GHANI (United Kingdom) made the following statement:

“First my thoughts are with our Slovakian friends, I too was shocked to see the attack on the Slovakian Prime Minister.

For 75 years, this Council has stood as a beacon of hope, unity and progress.

Those who founded this institution in 1949 had lived through two world wars.

They were the pioneers of a new era of peace in Europe, founded on the values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Today we stand in their shoes. With the burning desire to live up to their legacy of hope.

Yet, once again, war is raging in Europe. An appalling, unjust, brutal war against Ukraine.

Together, we have united in standing up for Ukraine and its people – swiftly suspending and expelling Russia and using all the tools at our disposal to help our Ukrainian friends, including the Register of Damage that will be a crucial means of documenting and preserving evidence of the damage, loss and injury caused by Russia’s invasion.

There are, of course, many other fine examples of our united action to meet the challenges of today. To live up to the hopes of those founding fathers.

From the leading role this Council played in abolishing the death penalty, to improving standards throughout the continent, to adopting our Convention on Artificial Intelligence.

That convention is a perfect example of this Council evolving to tackle 21<sup>st</sup> century problems. But we must not rest on our laurels. We must continue to evolve, to meet head-on the challenges of today – and of course tomorrow.

Like the scourge of people smuggling that drives illegal migration – we must crush the business model of the criminal gangs preying on vulnerable people.

And ensure that the ECHR system – which has protected so many people over so many years – remains fit for purpose.

And we must welcome those who share our ideals to join us in our mission.

The UK has long supported Kosovo’s ambition to join this Council – we continue to support that ambition – and I hope we will be able to welcome them soon.

Because it is clear – the last seven-and-a-half decades have shown us – that there is strength in unity.

As Winston Churchill put it at the founding of this Council: “Our hopes and our work point to an era of peace, prosperity and abundance.”

Yes – it is true – that remains a hope, not a reality right now.

But together, united in purpose and resolve, we can get there.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France

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Ms J.C. MACNEILL (Ireland) made the following statement:

"I am delighted to be among you today on this important occasion, representing Ireland, three-quarters of a century after the signing of the Treaty of London.

As a newly independent State at that time, as an island on the edge of Europe, we were founding members of the Council of Europe before we joined the United Nations. We sat with our European neighbours and we all sketched out a blueprint for a united future based on human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Ireland's representative at that table, Seán MacBride, was responsible for the inclusion in the Council of Europe's mission; the objective of the "pursuit of peace based on justice".

But peace is shattered on our continent today and conflict also rages in the Middle East and the mission statement of the Council of Europe continues to resonate today as we seek to hold accountable those responsible for Russia's unjustified, full-scale aggression against Ukraine and so the Council of Europe remains just as relevant today as it did in 1949. I think that is evidenced by the speed with which it reacted in expelling Russia and indeed in establishing the Register of Damage demonstrates as well the agility of our Organisation as does the rapid convening of the 4<sup>th</sup> Summit of Heads of State and Government in Reykjavík this time last year, again attesting to the unity of our Organisation and confirming new strategic priorities at a difficult time of change.

Finally, of course the adoption today of the first global Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence is proof that the Council of Europe remains not just important but contemporary and changing with the times.

Like the United Kingdom, Ireland has consistently supported Kosovo's bid to become a member of this Organisation, we believe that Kosovo's place is within our European family. Membership of the Council would strengthen human rights, democracy and the rule of law for all of the people living in Kosovo, not least through access to the jewel of our system, the European Court of Human Rights, for all of those in Kosovo's jurisdiction. Last night, I made the point at dinner that the support for the Court is incredibly important, that judicial independence and the effective functioning of the Court is a cornerstone of the work that we do and that the Court must have sufficient financial resources so that it does not have to engage in persistent fundraising, which is both beneath the dignity of the Court, inconsistent with the rule of law and a contradiction in terms of applying judgments against countries from whom it attempts to fundraise. The support for the Court is extremely important, but we must also ensure that we are doing more to support the institutions of and the offices of the Council of Europe, the Secretary General, the Parliamentary Assembly and indeed the Commissioner for Human Rights."

## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France

Mr L. DARSALIA ([Georgia](#)) made the following statement:

“First of all, let me express our solidarity with Slovakia after the brutal attack on Prime Minister Fico.

I am honoured to participate in the Ministerial Session of the Council of Europe which marks the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Organisation and gives us an additional opportunity to recommit ourselves towards advancing the Organisation’s values and assurances made at the Reykjavík Summit last year.

This year, Georgia also celebrates the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of its accession to the Council of Europe. On this occasion, let me emphasise our appreciation for the support of the Organisation to the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia and the democratic reform process, thus assisting us on the European and Euro-Atlantic integration paths.

Today, Europe is going through the most challenging period since the Second World War caused by Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine. Georgia stands with the international community in supporting Ukraine, including as participant member of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on the Register of Damage. Let me reiterate Georgia’s firm support for the Peace Formula and for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within its internationally recognised borders.

Unfortunately, since the very first days of our independence, Georgia has been the target of Russia’s hybrid warfare that resulted in multiple waves of ethnic cleansing of Georgians and left hundreds of thousands of IDPs and refugees displaced from their homes and that culminated with the open military aggression against Georgia in 2008. Up to this day, Russia continues the illegal occupation of Georgia’s Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions. The effective control of Georgia’s Abkhazia and Tskhinvali regions by the Russian Federation and its responsibility for the grave human rights violations therein have been established by numerous judgments of the European Court of Human Rights. It is crucially important to continue examining all available solutions for the execution of the interstate judgments of the ECHR in the light of current challenging context.

Georgia highly values the contribution of the Council of Europe to the peaceful conflict resolution process through its various instruments. In this context, we appreciate the Declaration on the occasion of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of Europe, of this Ministerial.

The Secretary General’s consolidated reports and the annual decisions of the Committee of Ministers’ Deputies are powerful instruments, which bring the dire human rights situation in the Russia-occupied Georgian regions to the attention of the international community.

The firm stance and decisive joint efforts of the international community are essential to counter Russia’s policy of aggression against its sovereign neighbours and to put an end to the continued occupation of Georgia’s regions by Russia.

We will continue to be actively engaged in the work of the Council of Europe on this and other important thematic dimensions, including on environment and human rights, which was among the priorities of Georgia’s Presidency of the Committee of Ministers. We are happy to see the active follow up processes, on the new Convention on the Protection of the Environment through Criminal Law.

In conclusion, let me express our gratitude for the successful Presidency of Liechtenstein. We welcome the incoming Presidency of Lithuania and express our readiness to contribute towards the successful realisation of their priorities.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France

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Mr F. RZAYEV ([Azerbaijan](#)) made the following statement:

“We thank Liechtenstein for the successful completion of its presidency. We congratulate Lithuania on assuming the presidency for next six months. We express solidarity with Slovakia and wish a quick recovery to distinguished Prime Minister Fico.

Today, peace in Europe is shattered by the ongoing war in Ukraine. Azerbaijan stands for the earliest settlement, based on the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine. In the meantime, we provide humanitarian assistance to the people of Ukraine to alleviate the sufferings of civilians.

As former chair of the Non-Aligned Movement and present member of the NAM Troika, we regret to observe the continued practices of neo-colonialism carried out by France, in particular against the population of New Caledonia, in grave violation of the key values and principles of the Council of Europe.

Azerbaijan joined the Council of Europe in 2001. We benefited from the Council's expertise to develop our legislation and standards to better protect the fundamental freedoms and human rights of our citizens. All this time, Azerbaijan has been open to co-operation with the Council bodies, based on dialogue and mutual respect. Against this backdrop, the decision by the Parliamentary Assembly to not ratify the credentials of the Azerbaijani delegation was unjust and unfair. The longer this abnormal situation with our delegation continues, the more damage it would cause to the Assembly, which is supposed to be a platform for dialogue, and the Council in general.

Having put an end to the armed conflict with Armenia back in 2020, Azerbaijan is engaged in the full-scale restoration of 9 cities and more than 300 villages completely devastated by the long-term illegal Armenian military occupation. In parallel, we are dealing with the challenges of around 4 000 missing persons and massive landmine contamination. And the Armenian side does not co-operate on either issue.

At the same time, the two sides are negotiating a draft bilateral agreement to establish the framework of interstate relations based on the mutual recognition of and respect for each other's sovereignty, territorial integrity and the inviolability of State borders. A week ago, the two Ministers of Foreign Affairs met for a new round of talks. The speakers of the parliaments met twice this year. The Border Delimitation Commissions meet at the border on a regular basis and they already agreed on the delimitation of the specific sections of the border line.

Azerbaijan is committed to reaching a sustainable peace and stability in the entire region of the South Caucasus. The normalisation of relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan can pave the way to the full realisation of the region's potential for co-operation.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France

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Ms B. SANDKJÆR (Norway) made the following statement:

“Please, allow me first of all to express our shock for the terrible attack on the Slovak Prime Minister, the day before yesterday. Our thoughts go to him, his family and the Slovak people.

We are gathered here today to commemorate 75 years of the Council of Europe.

As you mentioned, today is also Norway’s national day, where we celebrate our Constitution from 1814.

The Council of Europe was founded with the conviction that a Europe of democratic States, respecting the “rule of law” and safeguarding the human rights of its citizens, is the best defence we have against authoritarian and totalitarian regimes.

The Council of Europe has assisted us in achieving better societies, each day, for the past 75 years.

Still, we must recognise that this 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary falls in difficult and challenging times for Europe. Our values are being threatened by authoritarian regimes and global rivalry. And not far from us is the most dramatic and concrete challenge.

Russia is waging a full-scale war against Ukraine. But this is not just an attack on Ukraine. It is an attack on our European democracies and our values.

I can assure you that Norway will stand with Ukraine for as long as it takes. Because making sure that Russia does not win this war is key to the security of all European nations.

Last year in Reykjavík, we adopted the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy. We all need to work together to counter democratic backsliding and to ensure, along with our commitment to the Istanbul Convention, the rights of women and girls, gender equality and bodily autonomy.

Today, which is also IDAHOT, we must work together to make sure that no one is discriminated against based on their sexual orientation or gender identity.

As a European community, upholding human rights, I would also like to be very clear that it is simply not acceptable that there are political prisoners in Europe in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

We started out as ten countries in London in May 1949. We are now 46 countries. We look forward to soon be welcoming Kosovo as a new member of the Council of Europe.

As we gather here today, our vision of a united Europe living in peace is the same as 75 years ago.

New challenges may arise. But our values of democracy, rule of law and human rights remain.”



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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

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Mr T.-L. HRISTEA (Romania) made the following statement:

“I would first like to thank the Liechtenstein Presidency for their efforts over the past six months. The work on Ukraine deserves special commendation, and I will return to this shortly. Allow me also to wish every possible success to our Lithuanian colleagues who are taking the helm. These are difficult times in Europe, and the task before us – ensuring our 46 member States remain united around our core values – is a daunting one.

Seventy-five years ago, in a victory for democracy, the extension of the rule of law and the advancement of human rights, the Council of Europe began to build lasting peace on a continent ravaged by war.

The Council's 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary should have been a time to celebrate our achievements in building our core values. But the war in Ukraine has cast a long shadow over us all.

Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine is the greatest threat to Europe and our common values yet. How we respond to this threat is what will define us for the next 75 years. From Romania's perspective, the Council of Europe's top priority is to continue to give consistent support to Ukraine. We thank the upcoming presidency for pursuing this objective first among the priorities of their mandate, in line with the Reykjavik Declaration.

We stood united to condemn Russia's aggression and exclude it from our community. The Council of Europe has to develop initiatives to support and engage with human rights defenders, democratic forces, free media and independent civil society in the Russian Federation.

We demanded accountability and, to this end, we have established the Register of Damage. It is important to increase the pace of developing the necessary procedures for submission, processing and recording of claims for the Register to become operational. This compensation mechanism has to serve its purpose and contribute to rendering justice to Ukraine and to the Ukrainian people.

We have pledged to support Ukraine's reconstruction efforts. The Council needs to step up financing and implementing the Council of Europe's Action Plan for Ukraine “Resilience, Recovery and Reconstruction”. We will support the Council of Europe Development Bank's efforts to extend its grants and loans to support Ukraine's recovery, reconstruction and long-term social development.

We welcome the adoption of the first comprehensive instrument on artificial intelligence, thus ensuring the Organisation's leading role in developing standards in the digital era.

European Union leaders have decided to open EU membership talks with Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova and to grant candidate status to Georgia.

The people in these countries chose the path of democracy and prosperity. We want to see the Council of Europe engaged fully with these countries, as well as with Bosnia and Herzegovina, providing the necessary democratic know-how for navigating every single step towards joining the EU.

Before I conclude, as it is the last Ministerial Session in the presence of Secretary General Burić, we would like to praise your work and commitment towards our Organisation, in such challenging times.

In this anniversary, yet complex, year, inspired by our achievements, we remain hopeful for the future generations. However, we need to stay vigilant, individually and as a democracy-protecting Organisation. As such, we strongly condemn the recent attack against the Slovak Prime Minister which is an attack on our principles and values.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

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Mr M.K. BOZAY ([Türkiye](#)) made the following statement:

“Before starting my remarks, I would like to strongly condemn the horrific attack carried out against the Prime Minister of Slovakia. Our thoughts are with his family and the Slovakian people.

This Ministerial Session holds particular significance as it coincides with the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the foundation of the Council of Europe.

The time is for more solidarity and unity against the challenges we are all faced with and discussing here.

Supporting Ukraine in its just cause remains among our strategic priorities.

Türkiye strongly supports Ukraine’s territorial integrity and sovereignty, including Crimea. Although the current dynamics may not be conducive to it yet, Türkiye will continue its endeavours directed to achieving a negotiated solution.

Words fail to express the scale of casualties, devastation and suffering in Gaza due to Israel’s indiscriminate attacks.

It is not possible to turn a blind eye to these atrocities while advocating principles of human rights, democracy and rule of law for all.

At a time when the risk of a spillover is very high, a genuine peace process must be initiated to achieve a just and lasting peace based on a two State solution.

At these turbulent times, “unity” is key within the Council of Europe.

With this understanding, I underline the fact that the Parliamentary Assembly’s decision to exclude the Azerbaijani delegation from its sessions runs not only against the unity needed among members and the organs of the Council of Europe, but also to the goal of peace in the region.

This needs to be corrected before it does further harm to our goals and principles.

Migration is as old as human history. The Council should be able to prove that this challenge can be addressed by fully respecting our principles.

Migrants and refugees should be treated in line with inherent rights of every human being.

International co-operation, addressing root causes and burden-sharing are key in that respect.

The same applies to our fight against racism, xenophobia and discrimination.

Anti-Islam hatred in Europe is rising. Burnings of the Holy Quran and mass expulsion plans by far-right politicians should be duly addressed.

The Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence, a first-ever legal treaty in this area, which is adopted today, is crucial for the protection of human rights and its outreach will make it a pioneer at global level.

Concerning the picked individual court cases previously referred to, let me strongly recall that the principle of subsidiarity requires that domestic judicial process must be allowed to follow its course.

At the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, this is the time for assuming responsibility in unity.

Finally, heartfelt thanks to the outgoing Liechtenstein Presidency and our support to the upcoming Lithuanian one.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France

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Mr J. MARIAN (Czech Republic) made the following statement:

“Allow me to begin by congratulating our Liechtenstein colleagues on their outgoing chairmanship and wishing all the best to their Lithuanian successors.

For Czechia, my country, more than 30 years ago, joining the Council of Europe was a major step in returning to democratic Europe. As we express, we experience, our appreciation of democracy – before we reiterate the need to work against democratic backsliding currently present in Europe. Unfortunately, our hopes for peace and democracy have not fully come through. Russia has launched its war of aggression against Ukraine and demonstrated that peace in Europe is not a given.

In this regard, let me appreciate and commend once again the Council of Europe’s prompt response, which led to the exclusion – which was right, necessary and timely – of Russia, and then to an enormous effort to support Ukraine and hold Russia accountable. I would like to highlight two things, of course, the Register of Damage, which is a first but significant step towards the comprehensive international compensation mechanism and also all the efforts to establish a Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression, to prosecute the political and military leadership of the Russian Federation.

Now, the recent decision of the Deputies gives an important mandate to the Secretary General to contribute to further negotiations on the future Special Tribunal and we welcome this progress. Moreover, let me express full solidarity with other countries where Russian activities continue to undermine the rule of law and democracy. Especially our Moldovan friends and colleagues. Rest assured of our continued support and, of course, words of solidarity and support to our Slovak colleagues in this terrible, difficult situation.

As we already mentioned here and yesterday over the dinner, we have made big progress on the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and the world is looking at us as someone who can now offer the best approach and we will be inspiring others, which is really important as a global approach.

Finally, when it comes to Kosovo's aspiration to join the Council of Europe, we consider it fully justified. Czechia believes that membership will be beneficial for Kosovo, its inhabitants and other member States alike. Until this is dealt with by the Committee of Ministers, Czechia encourages Kosovo to make concrete steps of goodwill towards the Serbian minority. Many of the challenges highlighted by the Reykjavík Summit remain open. We stand ready to tackle them together with you.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

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Mr I. KONDOV ([Bulgaria](#)) made the following statement:

“Let me extend my gratitude to the Liechtenstein Presidency for holding this event and for the excellent presidency. I wish also to extend our full support and solidarity with the Slovak people and Slovak Republic.

This year we mark the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of Europe. Our Organisation is a common project to preserve, consolidate and promote democracy, the rule of law and human rights. These are the foundations on which our predecessors built a peaceful, stable and prosperous Europe.

This is now challenged by the brutal war of aggression of Russia against Ukraine. We have to respond with continued support for Ukraine and for the efforts of the international community to hold Russia accountable for its illegal acts.

Russia must cease its military operations immediately and withdraw unconditionally from all occupied territories.

Bulgaria stands in solidarity with the people of Ukraine and reiterates its unwavering support for Ukraine's territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence. Bulgaria is among the world leaders as regards assistance per capita provided to Ukraine.

The Reykjavík Summit had a key role in defining the response of the Council of Europe to the rising challenges and the Russian aggression against Ukraine in the first place. We have to continue the implementation of the decisions from Reykjavík, in order to uphold democracy, the rule of law and human rights in Europe.

We have to strengthen our strategic co-operation with likeminded partners. For example, with the European Union we share values and principles, work jointly on many projects and achieve synergy of efforts. We should stay in solidarity with our partners in the Western Balkans and the Black Sea – Caucasus regions. The peace, stability and prosperity of these regions are of great significance for Europe. The accession to the Council of Europe of Kosovo will provide all its citizens with extended guarantees for their human rights, by giving them access to the system of the European Convention on Human Rights and the human rights monitoring mechanisms.

The intergovernmental co-operation in the context of the Council of Europe is of paramount importance for the achievement of the goals of our Organisation. Considering the recent substantial increase of the budget of the Organisation, against the backdrop of the large spectrum of economic challenges throughout Europe, we should carefully prioritise and optimise our spending.

Bulgaria attaches great importance to the protection of social rights and looks forward to the upcoming High-level Conference on the European Social Charter. It is equally important to remain vigilant regarding the protection of human rights in newly emerging domains. This is why Bulgaria welcomes the adoption of the Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law.

It is our collective duty to maintain unity and preserve the spirit of the historic decision to establish this Organisation 75 years ago. Working together, we can protect our shared values and further consolidate the role of the Council of Europe as one of our guardians.

I wish every success to the incoming Lithuanian Presidency and would like to underline that it can fully rely on Bulgaria's support."

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

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Mr F.M. SAMPEDRO MARCOS ([Spain](#)) made the following statement:

“Spain condemns the violence against the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic.

In this year of commemorations of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the Council of Europe, Spain wishes to reiterate its firm commitment to the principles of the rule of law, democracy and human rights. Safeguarding and promoting these principles must be a top priority for us all given the way the world is today.

A year has passed since the Reykjavík Summit and the member States' crucial decisions that we must continue to promote. In Reykjavík, we expressed our solidarity with, and our unwavering support for, Ukraine in the face of the tragic war of aggression waged by the Russian Federation. Today, we reaffirm our commitment to helping the country for as long as necessary, and we demand full respect for its sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity under international law, as we do for Georgia and Moldova. Spain welcomes the tangible steps that have been taken to hold the Russia Federation to account for the consequences of its aggression, including the launch of the Register of Damage and the ongoing consultations on setting up a future compensation mechanism. And we welcome the establishment of the Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine and the initiative to set up a Special Tribunal to try the crime of aggression, which we consider to be of vital importance.

In Reykjavík, we also agreed that the Council of Europe should continue to provide a benchmark for human rights protection in the face of new global challenges. We therefore welcome the agreement reached on the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence, which we are to adopt today, as an important milestone and an example of the Organisation's pioneering role. We also commend the study on the feasibility of an instrument on human rights and the environment as a step forward for environmental protection.

Spain supports the European Union's accession to the European Convention on Human Rights and used its recent presidency of the Council of Ministers of the European Union to actively encourage this process. We would also like to stress the importance of complying with the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, the importance of the Council of Europe's conventions in various fields and the importance of the work done by its different bodies, including the Venice Commission. In addition, we will continue to promote vital causes such as democratic memory, gender equality, young people and social rights and combating violence against women. Nor should we forget that the Organisation's principles extend beyond its borders, particularly to neighbouring countries and those that share our values, including Latin America.

The Council of Europe plays a crucial role in these fields. It is our duty and our responsibility to be ambitious in our objectives.

Lastly, I would like to congratulate and thank the Liechtenstein Presidency and the Secretary General for organising this important event, and to lend our full support to the incoming Lithuanian Presidency while wishing them every success.”



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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

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Ms I. BOROEVETS (Ukraine) made the following statement:

"I am pleased to address you today as we meet at this critical moment. I wish to express my deep gratitude for the unwavering support that the Council of Europe, its member States and the Secretary General have shown during these trying times. Your resolute expulsion of Russia from this esteemed body, the establishment of the Register of Damage, your staunch support for President Zelenskyy's Peace Formula, your efforts aimed at protecting the children of Ukraine and your endorsement of the International Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression align closely with the commitments outlined in the Reykjavik Declaration. These actions stand as pillars of hope for every Ukrainian citizen enduring the daily atrocities of this brutal, unprovoked war.

While some voices call on Ukraine to appease the aggressor, using the hypocritical pretext of loving peace and caring for Ukrainian citizens, Ukraine and Switzerland prepare the first Peace Summit for Ukraine that will be held on 15 to 16 June in Switzerland. This summit will kick off the high-level discussion on the framework of the future comprehensive, just and lasting peace for Ukraine. Together with the Swiss hosts, we look forward to welcoming your leaders there.

Our plea is for actions – concrete, decisive actions. We must enhance our mechanisms for documenting the atrocities committed against our people. The world must witness and acknowledge the scope of this suffering to prevent such horrors from ever happening again. Furthermore, we implore this Council to expedite the work of the International Special Tribunal. Justice delayed is justice denied, and the architects of this agony must be held accountable swiftly and effectively, a principle strongly supported by the Reykjavik Declaration.

Ukraine is grateful to all those helping millions of Ukrainians to face sufferings caused by Russia's fully-fledged war, but, also, giving us means to build up our future in the European family. This is exactly what the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine for 2023-2026 is about. Our special thanks go to all donors who made possible the implementation of the projects within this action plan.

In the Reykjavik Declaration, European leaders acknowledged the value of the Council of Europe Development Bank in supporting the reconstruction of Ukraine, too. I would like to thank all States – Bank members – for the remarkable signs of solidarity and confidence in the CEB. We praise the CEB's intention to play its special role in our country's reconstruction.

On 18 May, Ukraine commemorates the victims of the 1944 deportation and genocide of Crimean Tatars – indigenous people of Crimea, oppressed nowadays by the Kremlin regime. We believe that only through Ukraine's victory and the liberation of Crimea can the systematic repression against the Crimean Tatars be brought to end and respect for human rights be restored.

Ukraine commends the excellent Presidency of Liechtenstein and wish all the best to the Lithuanian Presidency. We fully support also the Presidency Declaration and the rest of the decisions that were taken today.

Finally, our thoughts are with our close neighbours and our brotherly nation, the Slovakian people and their Prime Minister in this critical moment."

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

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Mr J. WIŚNIEWSKI (Poland) made the following statement:

“Big thank you to Liechtenstein. Dominique, you have done such a good job. Good luck to our Lithuanian friends. We will support you.

Madam Secretary General, we are grateful for your stewardship. You helped to make the Organisation react quickly and decisively as regards the war in Ukraine. The aggressor has to be named and shamed. But this is, however, not enough.

Russian crimes must be punished and our Register of Damage for Ukraine will provide evidence. Justice will come. The Reykjavík Declaration makes it also clear that there will be no leniency.

In this context, I must comment on the statement of the Hungarian delegation. If the Council of Europe is guilty of over politicisation because it excluded Russia, I am proud of it. The cemetery is full of organisations which ended as talking shops that did not live up to their lofty statements.

As to the words that “no party can win in Ukraine”, should we say this to all victims of crime, be they nations or people facing brutal attack to stop defending themselves and surrender while the world looks the other way?

Please don't tell us that we lack courage if we do not want to mingle with thuggish States.

Nobody mentioned Belarus today, which is suffering under a brutal dictatorship. Some of us forget or overlook it, the Council remembers. It provides a platform for Belarusian democratic forces and civil society. The plight of this country must not be forgotten.

Last but not least, I want to thank the Council of Europe for being our doctor when we, as member States, fall sick with the disease of democratic backsliding and slippage of the rule of law.

In the Polish electoral campaign last October, the opinions of the Venice Commission and the decisions of the Court were heard and listened to. They opened the eyes of many voters where votes were at stake during these elections.

The Council of Europe is the mother of European institutions and the pearl in the crown of European integration.

Now 75 years old, it is alive and kicking. My last remark, dear Slovak friends, in your difficult time we are with you, we feel your pain.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

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Mr N. Sampaio ([Portugal](#)) made the following statement:

"I would like to start by congratulating Liechtenstein for its successful chairmanship and wish Lithuania every success.

After 75 years, the Council of Europe remains the core political organisation on our continent for promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Last year, the Reykjavik Summit provided a renewed impetus to the Organisation.

This is also an occasion to celebrate as we will adopt the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence today. A clear sign that we are attentive to the present and preparing the future.

On the environment,

The climate crisis is an existential threat. Climate change, environmental degradation and the loss of biodiversity have a profound impact on human rights.

It is high time to recognise the human right to a sustainable environment and we fully support a legally binding instrument.

Portugal continues to support the Council's reform process and the priority to be more effective and closer to its citizens.

One year ago, our Heads of State and Government gathered. Now is the time to take stock of the implementation of the commitments.

On Ukraine,

Portugal very much welcomes the progress made in the search for accountability, notably the establishment of the Register of Damage for Ukraine. It is also important that we continue to do our best regarding the children of Ukraine and that the Council continues to have an active role in the discussions towards the establishment of a Special Tribunal for the crime of aggression.

On democracy,

The Council of Europe has played a very important role in consolidating Portuguese democracy.

We commend the initiatives to establish the Steering Committee for Democracy and the launch of the Road map on Civil Society Engagement. They are of paramount importance in countering democratic backsliding.

We must also continue fostering youth participation, as essential in a vibrant democracy.

Portugal salutes the new impetus to the external dimension, which triggered the adoption of a new strategy for the North-South Centre. We fully support the Centre, a platform for dialogue and co-operation with neighbourhood countries. Next week, we will host in Lisbon another ceremony of the North-South Prize. We encourage member States to adhere to this Enlarged Partial Agreement.

We highlight the North-South Centre's contributions to the fight for the universal abolition of the death penalty. We will hold a round table in the margins of the award ceremony.

Finally, we stress the importance of strengthening the strategic partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Union.

We also hope to see many of your Ministers in Porto, in October, where we will host the Conference of Ministers responsible for Sport."

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

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Mr P. RAJALA ([Finland](#)) made the following statement:

“Let me also join colleagues in wishing the Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic a very speedy recovery.

For 75 years, the Council of Europe has proudly stood for the rule of law, human rights and democracy.

Today, as we have heard from colleagues, these values and principles are increasingly contested on various fronts.

The decline of democracy, negligence towards the rule of law and attempts to erode gender equality, or the rights of minorities, are concerning trends.

Our most immediate concern is Russia's brutal and illegal war on Ukraine. In Reykjavík, we reaffirmed our support for Ukraine.

The Council of Europe plays an important role in ensuring that Russia is held accountable for its violations of international law. The establishment of the Register of Damage was an important first step towards that.

Finland also supports the creation of a compensation mechanism and a Special Tribunal to ensure Russia's accountability for the crime of aggression. We support the Council's active role in ensuring accountability for violations of international law and we continue to support the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine.

While we rightly give Ukraine the support and focus it truly deserves, we also have to engage with Georgia, Moldova and the Western Balkans in their efforts to meet the standards of the Council of Europe.

Finland supports Kosovo's membership in the Council of Europe. We welcome the recent steps in this regard and we truly hope to move forward soon.

We should continue our co-operation with the Belarusian democratic forces and civil society.

Russia is also testing existing member States of Council of Europe, including mine, Finland. Russia is ruthlessly instrumentalising asylum-seekers from third countries to undermine the national security of Finland and other nations with a common border with Russia.

This puts us in a very difficult, asymmetric position. While we respect the rule of law, Russia only respects the rule of force. While we are ruled by democracy, Russia is ruled by autocracy and, while we have freedom of information, Russia has disinformation.

To counter all these challenges, we need a strong, efficient and agile Council of Europe, which also recognises these new, asymmetric threats.

We must cherish the valuable institutions and instruments we have, like the Commissioner for Human Rights.

We need full execution of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights.

The EU's accession to the European Convention on Human Rights is an important step towards fortifying individuals' rights. We also need to look forward and address emerging challenges, like artificial intelligence.

So let me conclude by thanking the Liechtenstein Presidency for its excellent work and I express our support to Lithuania for your upcoming presidency.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

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Ms D. MELBĀRDE ([Latvia](#)) made the following statement:

“Today, celebrating the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of Europe, on behalf of my country – Latvia – I confirm our enduring commitment to the values of this Organisation: human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

These are our firm roots that help us withstand the storms in turbulent times.

Let me also extend our sincere appreciation to the outgoing Liechtenstein Presidency for the flawless and elegant chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers.

Liechtenstein's contributions have been instrumental in advancing the agenda set forth by the Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, building upon the foundations laid by the Latvian Presidency.

Latvia remains steadfast in its commitment to supporting Ukraine as Russia continues its brutal war of aggression.

A highlight of our collective efforts has been the establishment of the Register of Damage for Ukraine, guided by the Riga Principles.

Thereby, we stand firm in our pursuit of justice and accountability. Every effort should be made to hold the Russian leadership responsible for the crime of aggression. Latvia will continue advocating for the establishment of a Special International Tribunal. Impunity cannot and will not prevail.

We equally continue to address the issue of forcible transfers and deportations of Ukrainian children. Those are war crimes!

In this context, the idea of restoring Russia's presence at this table, voiced during this debate, reminds me of Orwell's definition of equality.

Moreover, Latvia reiterates that since Russia has been expelled from this Organisation, its citizens, single or dual, should not be employed in its structures. It represents political, reputational and moral risks for this Organisation.

Coming to challenges to democracy and human rights, I have three points to share.

Latvia supports the Council of Europe Platform for the safety of journalists. Last October, Latvia was proud to host the launch of the campaign “Journalists matter” in Riga.

In the digital era, we have to address new emerging challenges related to new technologies. The adoption of the Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law reflects our commitment thereto.

Finally, we must continue to combat intolerance, discrimination and violence. Latvia recently ratified the Istanbul Convention. We will engage constructively with the Council of Europe in implementing it.

In conclusion, I extend a warm welcome to the incoming Lithuanian Presidency. We are confident in Lithuania's ability to lead with vision and integrity.

Dear neighbour, you can count on Latvia's co-operation in every step of this journey.”



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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

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Msgr P. R. Gallagher ([Holy See](#)) made the following statement:

“I extend the warmest greetings of Pope Francis, while expressing my gratitude for the invitation to address the Committee of Ministers in the context of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebrations of this esteemed European intergovernmental organisation.

The Holy See has been closely following the process of European integration since the foundation of this Organisation, consistently expressing its profound interest in its work as a peace project with “the ideal of an inclusive process of growth inspired by a spirit of participation and solidarity”.<sup>1</sup> The visit of two Popes, John Paul II and Francis, to this institution are a tangible sign of this interest.

Pope Francis, during his visit expressed his “profound hope that the foundations will be laid for a new social and economic co-operation, free of ideological pressures, capable of confronting a globalised world while at the same time encouraging that sense of solidarity and mutual charity which has been a distinctive feature of Europe”.<sup>2</sup>

These words of hope and encouragement are still pertinent in the context of the novel and unforeseen challenges currently facing Europe, particularly in the wake of the prolonged conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The Holy See, while continuing its humanitarian efforts, especially in facilitating the return of Ukrainian children to their country, reaffirms its solidarity and prayers for the Ukrainian population.

It is with particular attention that we follow the new Convention on Artificial Intelligence. As Pope Francis underlined “the goal of regulation, of course, should not only be the prevention of harmful practices, but also the encouragement of best practices, stimulating new and creative approaches and contribute to ending wars and conflicts, and to alleviating many forms of suffering that afflict our human family”.<sup>3</sup>

The Holy See reasserts its commitment to continued fruitful collaboration with the Council of Europe, with the conviction that multilateralism can and should be renewed, especially by paying particular attention to the inviolability of the dignity of every human person and the universal human rights.

In light of this, the Holy See would like to express its hope that this 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary will serve as an opportunity to highlight the crucial role of this Council in contributing to the lasting peace so necessary for this beloved Europe.”

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<sup>1</sup> POPE FRANCIS, Address to the members of the Diplomatic corps accredited to the Holy See, 9 January 2020.

<sup>2</sup> POPE FRANCIS, Address to the Council of Europe, 25 November 2014.

<sup>3</sup> POPE FRANCIS, Message for the per la LVII World day of peace, 1 January 2024.

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Mr M. COOLS (President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe) made the following statement:

“Nothing can distort the true picture of conditions and events in this world more than to regard one’s own country as the centre of the universe, and to view all things solely in their relationship to this fixed point”. The opening lines of the “Anatomy of Peace”, a book published in 1945 by the writer and journalist Emery Rêves, seem prescient today. War has returned to Europe with the Russian Federation’s aggression against Ukraine. Russia notwithstanding, one of the main benefits of belonging to the Council of Europe and its various bodies, including the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, is that it helps us to know and understand more about others, about our colleagues in other countries who face situations sometimes different, sometimes similar to our own. It provides a valuable forum for sharing our experiences and working together to promote democracy, the rule of law and human rights across the continent, uniting us around these values.

“Helping Ukraine is helping Europe,” said President Zelenskyy when he began his welcoming address to the Second International Summit of Cities and Regions in Kyiv last week. In the same inaugural session, I reiterated the unwavering commitment of the Congress and the Council of Europe as a whole to support Ukraine, and highlighted the particular contribution of the Congress, which is accompanying the country’s efforts to carry out decentralisation reform and transition from a military to a civilian administration as soon as possible.

I also announced the launch, next month, of our campaign to raise awareness of the international Register of Damage among associations of towns and regions in Ukraine.

As a result of the Reykjavík Summit, the resources of the Congress have been strengthened as part of efforts to counter democratic backsliding. For this, I thank you. We can now carry out more missions to monitor the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and to observe elections. And the Congress’ early warning role on democratic backsliding has been reinforced.

70% of climate change mitigation measures are implemented by cities and regions. That is why we want an additional protocol to the Charter on the environment.

To improve the execution of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights, the Heads of State and Government invited our assembly to step up its dialogue with local authorities. We have begun this work.

Every year for the past 10 years, 46 young people have taken part in the work of the Congress, with the same rights, except for the right to vote, as the members of our assembly. This is a unique initiative that we are going to continue. We are also going to update the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life.

There isn’t enough time to tell you about our other work, such as the co-operation activities of the Centre of Expertise for Good Governance, which has come under the Congress since 1 January.

But as you can see from the recommendations we have made and the actions we have taken, we are determined to play our part in implementing the conclusions of the Reykjavík Summit.”

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Mr M. O'FLAHERTY (Commissioner for Human Rights) made the following statement:

“In Reykjavík, the Heads of State and Government resolved to strengthen the institution of the Council of Europe’s Commissioner for Human Rights, “particularly in light of the need for principled and swift action to address backsliding and other evolving human rights challenges”.

Since I took up my duties at the beginning of April, I have devoted the additional resources provided to my Office to implementing the priority areas identified at the Summit.

One of these areas is the ability to respond quickly to situations that require urgent attention. This is in line with my vision for an agile and flexible institution.

But the Summit Declaration also refers to the Commissioner’s role in three other areas.

First, on Ukraine: I visited Ukraine immediately after I took office in order to witness first-hand the devastating consequences of the Russian aggression. The Reykjavík Declaration’s call to action on the human rights situation of Ukrainian children was my guiding light.

I have returned convinced of the need for all of us to continue to pay close attention to the human rights of Ukrainian children, wherever they are. Every effort must be made to ensure the speedy return of children transferred to Russia and Belarus, and I urge you to keep this issue at the top of your agendas.

There are other things that cannot wait until the war is over. Helping Ukraine to ensure that every child can go to school, in dignity and safety, is another urgent concern where you, as European leaders, have a key role.

The existential threat facing Ukraine is at the same time the supreme challenge for the entire human rights system on our continent. I intend to play my part by offering my voice for the benefit of the victims of Russia’s aggression.

Second, on the execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights: their timely and full execution is an unconditional obligation under the European Convention. This international legal obligation should be coupled with political commitment at domestic level. I will engage with member States to sustain or generate such commitment. I will ensure that unexecuted judgments inform the agenda of my country-specific work. I will also support the Committee of Ministers in its supervisory role.

Third, on the protection of the environment: human rights and the environment are interdependent. The recent landmark rulings delivered by the Court confirm that climate change poses an existential risk for humankind and that this triggers a duty for States. I will work to ensure that the green transition is a just one and that it fully respects human rights.

There will be other priority topics, too, with the human rights of Roma and other forgotten people of Europe as paramount. I will also focus on a human rights respectful regulation of artificial intelligence, and stand up for the rights of women.

Finally, I will accompany and support human rights defenders and national human rights structures so that they are allowed to play their essential role in our societies.

None of this can be achieved without the close co-operation of member States.

I look forward to engaging with you to realise these goals.”

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Mr G. ERMISCHER (President of the Conference of INGOs) made the following statement:

“This Ministerial Conference takes place one year after the Reykjavík Summit at the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of Europe. A given moment for taking stock. In Reykjavík, so many Heads of States pledged to stand united around our values. The Reykjavík Declaration set out a clear framework for defending our liberal democracy. And now these promises must be implemented – the true test comes in the climbing of the summit. Which is a long and strenuous process.

The Council of Europe has managed to implement reforms in the House to be better equipped for this challenge – and we really appreciate that effort. And still, there is frustration in civil society with the outcome of some important processes: a weak reform of the Social Charter System, a Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, a feasibility study on new instruments for the environment and human rights – all started with a strong commitment that was watered down considerably during the drafting process.

The Reykjavík process does promise stronger involvement of civil society and there are quite a few high-level events planned this year which offer the opportunity to re-invigorate that commitment. As civil society, we stand prepared to support these efforts. Which need both a strong and dedicated Council of Europe – and most of all, the commitment of the member States, as pledged in Reykjavík. But unfortunately, two years after Russia had to be expelled from this institution for its outrageous act of aggression in contravention of all our values, anti-democratic and divisive forces are active in many parts of Europe.

We see new laws on so-called “foreign agents” or against independent as well as public media. And we see a new degree of polarisation of our societies, where violence seems to become more and more a means of political expression – police violence against peaceful demonstrators as well as individual violence against politicians or volunteers in election campaigns. We see criminalisation and stigmatisation of civil society organisations and individual activists in so many fields: migration, environment, LBTQI-rights, or just plain defence of our liberal democracy.

This brings the Council of Europe into a difficult situation: an institution that wants to build bridges and heal wounds while defending its core values. This institution is dedicated to non-violent solutions through legal instruments. But in saying this, it has also to be consequential and consistent, when governments continuously flaunt these values and undermine our liberal democracy. When the Venice Commission, or our own Expert Council on NGO Law, must issue similar statements again and again, when judgments of the European Court of Human Rights are persistently not implemented, when recommendations of our core monitoring mechanisms are consequently ignored, there needs to be consequences. An unenviable challenge for the Council of Europe but who else should do it? 75 years after it has been founded its mission has become more important than ever.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

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Ms E. HAMMARSKJÖLD ([Sweden](#)) made the following statement:

“At the Summit in Reykjavík, we sent a clear message of our unrelenting and continued support to Ukraine. This remains our top priority.

With every passing day, Russia’s brutal warfare and destruction of Ukraine continues, in violation of international law. Those responsible must be held to account – and they will be.

Sweden welcomes the contribution of the Council of Europe to the ongoing work to establish a Special Tribunal for the crime of aggression against Ukraine.

The Council of Europe with the Convention system and the European Court of Human Rights constitutes a unique system for the protection of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

A strong regional organisation for these rights and core principles is a vital part of the European security architecture.

It is more important than ever to stand up for the respect for international law and a rules-based world order. In the face of the Russian aggression, we must ensure that Russia does not succeed in its attempt to destroy the European security order – and replace right with might.

Two final words on a couple of issues of key importance to the Council agenda.

Sweden supports and welcomes the adoption of the Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law and its potential to set global benchmarks in this domain.

As a general position, Sweden supports the integration of Kosovo in international organisations and welcomes Kosovo’s application for membership of the Council of Europe to which the Committee of Ministers should return. Membership would contribute to the respect and protection of human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Kosovo.

Before I end, I condemn the brutal attack against Slovakia's Prime Minister Robert Fico.

I would like to thank the Secretary General for her crucial work for this Organisation at a time when we face historic challenges. I would also like to thank Lichtenstein for their excellent leadership during the past six months and wish Lithuania all the best as incoming Chair.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France

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Mr T. GALLI ([Croatia](#)) made the following statement:

“It is a great pleasure to take part in the 133<sup>rd</sup> Session of the Committee of Ministers while we mark the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of our Organisation.

Allow me to make four brief points.

First: the impressive scope of legal instruments and unique mechanisms in promoting European standards in the field of human rights, democracy and the rule of law is a staunch testament to the Council of Europe's indispensable role on our continent.

This remains true especially today, when our fundamental values are under attack, as we witnessed two days ago in the Slovak Republic. With the ongoing challenges and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, it is pivotal to reaffirm our commitments to the treaties of the Council of Europe – most importantly – the European Convention on Human Rights.

Second: Croatia's solidarity with Ukraine remains firm – be it through bilateral humanitarian aid, development co-operation, sheltering Ukrainian refugees, or joining various multilateral initiatives, including the idea of the possible establishment of a Special Tribunal for the crime of aggression against Ukraine.

Croatia, once a victim of a brutal aggression herself, is acutely aware of the impact of the war on civilians, especially the most vulnerable among us – children. We strongly support all initiatives aimed at providing shelter and care for unaccompanied Ukrainian children as well as their return from illegal deportation.

Third: adoption of the Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law is an historic moment. This document has the potential to provide a legal framework in this important area which serves as a beacon on the global level while, once again, proving the Council of Europe as a standard-setter and promoter in many important and current domains.

Fourth: a year has passed since the adoption of the Reykjavik Declaration – our reconfirmed guidance for upholding our fundamental values. Facing today's increasing new and emerging challenges, we must fully comply with this commitment and put special attention and additional efforts on its full and unambiguous implementation.

Let me finish by strongly supporting Kosovo's application to join our Organisation in the shortest possible time, and congratulating the Liechtenstein Presidency for the excellent steering of our Organisation and tangible results achieved and wishes Lithuania all the best in the challenging times ahead.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

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Mr P. BEGLITIS (Greece) made the following statement:

“First of all, we would like to align with all previous statements strongly condemning the ongoing aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. Today's ministerial meeting is an occasion to send a warm message of solidarity to the Ukrainian people, who are fighting bravely for the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of their country.

As regards the Register of Damage, the most important challenges ahead would be first, the expansion of its international outreach and second, the examination of the next steps for an international compensation mechanism.

Concerning the possible establishment of a Special Tribunal for the crime of aggression, we should give, collectively, the most credible responses to two major issues: a) a solid legal basis and b) the broadest possible international legitimacy without undermining the fundamental principles of international law.

Furthermore, we underline the importance of our strategic partnership with the EU. Both organisations should further develop synergies, particularly in the context of EU enlargement strategy. In this framework, we could examine the possibility of revising the 2007 Memorandum of Understanding, which has become, in our view, obsolete.

Concerning the EU accession to the Convention, the EU and its member States must accelerate their efforts to resolve their internal outstanding issues, showing the necessary political will.

Moreover, while we speak about the root-causes of the democratic backsliding, we underestimate the importance of social rights for strengthening democratic security and social cohesion. Social rights cannot become the “poor relative” of the Council of Europe’s human rights architecture; we do hope that the high-level Ministerial Conference in Vilnius, in July, will give a new impetus to the protection of social rights.

We welcome the adoption of the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence; we will support the elaboration of a legal instrument in the field of human rights and the environment; we have particular interest, as a front-line State, in elaborating a legal instrument on the smuggling of migrants.

We commend the references to the role of youth and we support a youth perspective in the Council of Europe; we fully subscribe to the conclusions regarding the implementation of the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy.

Finally, we warmly congratulate Liechtenstein for an excellent presidency and wish all the best to the upcoming Lithuanian Presidency.”



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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

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Mr R. LUMI ([Estonia](#)) made the following statement:

“First of all, allow me to express our sympathy to the Slovak Republic for the attack against the Prime Minister and wish him a speedy recovery.

For 75 years, the Council of Europe has promoted democracy, protected human rights and stood up for the rule of law. We are proud of what the Council of Europe has achieved and that we have managed to demonstrate unity in the darkest of moments.

Looking at other international organisations, this is the kind of positive example multilateralism needs today.

The Russian war of aggression against Ukraine is also a war against the fundamental principles of international law, including territorial integrity and sovereignty. The right to exist as a country is at stake. The premise to our international order, essential for all of us, is at stake.

Therefore, we cannot overlook the importance of accountability. We need a comprehensive international compensation mechanism and a key element for that would be using Russia’s frozen assets for the reconstruction of Ukraine.

To achieve this objective, Estonia has adopted a national mechanism to ensure the financial liability of the aggressor State for damage caused by the most serious violations of international law.

We also have to make sure that the political and military leadership of the Russian Federation is brought to justice. That is why we need to establish a Special Tribunal and I welcome the recent practical steps by the Council of Europe in this regard.

Wars are disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable, in particular women and children. Focusing on protecting the rights of women and children remains one of Estonia’s main priorities.

Human rights and fundamental freedoms must be ensured to all people, including LGBTI individuals. I am happy to say that last year, following decades of debates, Estonia introduced marriage equality, and our society has only gained from this decision.

Please allow me to also underline the importance of today’s decision adopting the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence. It has all the prerequisites to further expand the global outreach of Council of Europe standards.

Finally, Estonia welcomes Kosovo’s application to join the Council of Europe and hopes that it soon moves forward. Shaping a more democratic, just and prosperous future, we must continue making this Organisation stronger.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

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Mr J-C. JANSENS DE BISTHOVEN ([Belgium](#)) made the following statement:

“Last year in Reykjavík, we reaffirmed the Council of Europe’s unique role in the new geopolitical configuration of our continent.

Since then, we have begun to implement the Reykjavík Declaration, while Russia’s heinous, unlawful and large-scale war of aggression against Ukraine continues to rage.

This war, which primarily targets Ukraine and its people, also threatens our shared European values, which we have been protecting and strengthening through the Council of Europe for 75 years. Belgium will stand by the people of Ukraine for as long as it takes.

As we all know, there can be no just and lasting peace without justice. The perpetrators and instigators of Russia’s violations of human rights and international humanitarian law on a massive scale will one day be held to account.

By setting up the Register of Damage caused by Russia’s aggression against Ukraine, the Council of Europe has taken a vital first step towards establishing an international compensation mechanism.

Belgium fully supports this initiative and intends to play an active role in the consultations aimed at developing a coherent and long-term solution for the prosecution of the crime of aggression.

Belgium also shares the widespread concern about the fate of Ukrainian civilians, especially children, who have been unlawfully transferred or deported to the Russian Federation, Belarus or to territories temporarily controlled or occupied by the Russian Federation. These criminal practices must be stopped immediately and all forcibly transferred children must be released and sent home.

On the occasion of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of Europe, Belgium reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the European Convention on Human Rights system.

Recognising the binding nature of the Court’s judgments, my country reiterates its commitment to comply with them. We call on the other member States, without exception, to do the same.

Belgium is also strongly committed to promoting and protecting the human rights of everyone in our societies, including women, children and LGBTI people.

Today, I would like to stress that my country attaches paramount importance to the Istanbul Convention, the most ambitious international instrument for combating violence against women and domestic violence. The implementation of this convention is a political priority for Belgium, both at home and abroad.

Our Committee’s adoption of the Council of Europe Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence demonstrates that the Organisation can help tackle the challenges of our time.

Lastly, Belgium thanks you and your team in Strasbourg for your commitment and your admirable Chair.

I wish the Lithuanian Presidency every success in performing its role and can assure them that they have Belgium’s support.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

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Ms O. TOMOVÁ (Slovak Republic) made the following statement:

“First of all, I would like to express my appreciation of the expressions of solidarity and support which we have received from all of you. The Prime Minister of the Slovak Republic, Robert Fico, was the target of an assassination attempt.

This insidious attack on the Prime Minister is an attack on democracy. In our societies, there is no place for hate crime and hate speech that might lead to the most serious crimes. Mutual respect, peace, dialogue and understanding are the way forward, underpinned by our shared democratic values and respect for human rights.

75 years of the Council of Europe means a determination to fulfil its irreplaceable role in Europe's institutional architecture.

All the Council of Europe's conventions, including today's adoption of the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence, are the proof of its continuing relevance.

The Council of Europe's mission is as urgent today as it was when it was founded. Europe is once again being confronted by war.

Slovakia condemns Russia's aggression against Ukraine. We fully support Ukraine's territorial integrity and sovereignty.

There must be no impunity for those committing these crimes. The establishment of a Register of Damage is an important step in this direction.

We welcome the Peace Conference on Ukraine to be held in Switzerland next month.

The Council of Europe should be as strong as the commitments of its member States to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Slovakia will do its share.

Allow me to conclude by wishing the future Lithuanian Presidency every success and I thank the Liechtenstein Presidency for its extraordinary work over the last six months.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

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Mr P. ENGELBERG (Luxembourg) made the following statement:

“Taking the floor immediately after our Slovak colleague, I would first like to send Prime Minister Fico our best wishes for his recovery. The brutal attack on the Prime Minister was also an affront to the rule of law and democracy, and a reminder of why we need to protect and uphold them.

I would also like to convey Minister Xavier Bettel’s greetings to you. He is sorry that he could not be here with us today.

He is looking forward to welcoming the Committee of Ministers to Luxembourg in May, when our next presidency will come to a close.

As the Council of Europe celebrates its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, and a year after the Reykjavík Summit, today’s ministerial meeting marks a very important milestone for our Organisation.

We congratulate the Liechtenstein Presidency on its outstanding contribution to the Organisation’s work and outreach.

Your Permanent Representation here in Strasbourg, Minister, has worked tirelessly to implement the Reykjavík decisions, and under your leadership, Liechtenstein has contributed to the progress of an organisation that has proved itself capable of rising to the challenges of our time.

We are living in difficult times. Ukraine is still battling a war of aggression. We salute its courage and express our unwavering support and our full solidarity with its people. With multilateralism and the international order under attack and declining interest in democracy and the rule of law, the Council of Europe continues to play a strategic role as a bulwark against these alarming trends that threaten the progress of our societies.

We wish Lithuania, which will be leading our work for the next six months, the best of luck. It can count on the support of all of us, and especially on that of the Presidencies of Luxembourg and Malta who will follow it. This trio will work together to promote and uphold the values of our Organisation.

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Ms B. KRUNIC (Montenegro) made the following statement:

“It is a pleasure and honour to speak on behalf of the Montenegrin delegation this year, when we celebrate a very important anniversary of the Council of Europe, whose standards have had a fundamental impact on Europe's development in the last 75 years. The European Convention on Human Rights, the establishment of the Convention System in general and the case law of the Strasbourg Court have been essential for the creation of the European democratic system.

In spite of all these achievements, the Council of Europe continues to face an unprecedented challenge in the form of the unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine. The war that blatantly violates all the values that this very Organisation stands for. Moreover, democracy and human rights are constantly under pressure, and the brutal attack on the Prime Minister of Slovakia is further proof of this. Therefore, the work of the Council of Europe in safeguarding fundamental democratic values is more important than ever.

In these circumstances, we need to continue to show unity and resolve in responding to the Russian aggression. We have taken necessary action to defend our values in assisting a member State under attack. Montenegro was one of the founding members of the Register of Damage for Ukraine. We will continue to support the efforts of the Council in ensuring full justice for the victims and holding all perpetrators of heinous crimes accountable, including its contribution towards the establishment of a Special Tribunal for the crime of aggression.

We need to continue taking steps to ensure an effective and more visible role of the Organisation, based on the Reykjavik Declaration and Principles of Democracy. We commend the ambitious four-year work programme, which will make the Organisation more resilient and responsive to address existing but also new challenges. We should aim for deeper collaboration with other organisations, first and foremost with the European Union, which share our values. With the adoption of the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence, the Council of Europe will become a reference point in this area. Furthermore, providing youth with more opportunities and raising awareness of the significance of the connections between the environment and human rights should continue to be priorities going forward.

Montenegro's main strategic goal is to become the next member of the European Union. The partnership with the Council of Europe has been significant for promoting democratic values, strengthening the rule of law and improving our domestic institutions and legal framework. In the coming months, we are determined to continue carrying out the necessary reforms and maintain substantive progress in the negotiation process towards EU accession. We hope to receive firm support from our friends who are members of both the EU and the Council of Europe in achieving this goal.

Montenegro is committed to continue to be a reliable and responsible partner to the Council of Europe. In this spirit, we see the presidency of the Committee of Ministers that Montenegro will hold for the first time from November 2026 to May 2027 as an opportunity to more actively contribute towards the fulfillment of the important mandate of the Council of Europe and vision defined at the Reykjavik Summit.

Before concluding, allow me to thank our Secretary General, Ms Marija Pejčinović-Burić, and her team for steering the Organisation in the right direction. We extend our warmest congratulations to Liechtenstein for its successful presidency and express our support and best wishes to Lithuania, the new Chair.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

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Mr D. HATZIARGYROU (Cyprus) made the following statement:

“At the outset, allow me to pay tribute to the work carried out by the Liechtenstein Presidency.

We stand in solidarity with the Slovak Republic and we pray for a speedy recovery of Prime Minister Fico.

Cyprus reaffirms its unwavering commitment to the core values of the Council of Europe – democracy, human rights and the rule of law – with the European Convention on Human Rights as the cornerstone of all our efforts. We strongly support the work of the European Court of Human Rights.

On this 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary, we can proudly observe how our Organisation has increased its relevance and visibility. Our commitment to our core values continues to give tangible results, even against the backdrop of increased instability in the international arena.

The Russian aggression against Ukraine persists. Cyprus unequivocally condemns Russia’s invasion of Ukraine, a flagrant violation of international law. We stand firmly in solidarity with Ukraine and its people.

The protection of territorial integrity, sovereignty and independence of all States constitutes a fundamental principle in international affairs, which we particularly cherish.

We, Cypriots, have our own tragic experiences of foreign aggression as a result of the illegal Turkish military invasion and occupation which has continued for 50 years. It suffices to cite the fourth interstate case *Cyprus v. Turkey* and, in this context, recall the unconditional obligation of all member States to abide by the Court’s judgments.

I would like to conclude by wishing every success to the incoming Lithuanian Presidency, we are sure it will be as exceptional as that of Liechtenstein.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

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Mr J. KISLING (Denmark) made the following statement:

“On behalf of my Foreign Minister, allow me first to congratulate our dear Liechtenstein friends on a successful presidency, culminating in this well organised Ministerial meeting. And to the incoming Lithuanian Presidency. You can count on our support.

The Council of Europe’s role as the guardian of human rights, democracy and rule of law on our continent is more important than ever. Nowhere more so than in Ukraine.

Every day, brave Ukrainians risk their lives in their struggle against a brutal aggressor. It is also a struggle for Ukrainians’ continued access to the rights that this Organisation embodies.

So we fully support that the Council of Europe has Ukraine at the very top of its agenda.

Accountability of Russia is very important here.

We support the active role of the Council of Europe in the discussions on possible models for a Tribunal.

Let me also underline the importance Denmark attaches to the European Court of Human Rights.

The Court is an extremely important institution, with a unique role in protecting the rights of the citizens in its jurisdiction. Therefore, it is essential that all member States implement its judgments.

In line with other member States, we wish to reiterate our support to Kosovo’s membership of the Council of Europe.

Finally, it is essential that the Organisation continue its work to become even more agile, resilient and results-oriented. Here, budgetary prioritisation is key.

At the same time, the Organisation should open more up to the public on its important work.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

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Mr R. MARTINI (Italy) made the following statement:

“First of all, I would like to say that we stand with the Slovak delegation in condemning the attack on their Prime Minister.

Today, Italy is throwing itself into the celebrations to mark the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of Europe, the guardian of European values. Russia’s aggression against Ukraine is also an attack on those values.

The Council of Europe has a long and successful history of safeguarding and promoting human rights, the rule of law, democracy and freedom. As a founding member, Italy has always been at the forefront of this work. The exclusion of Russia during the Italian Presidency in 2022 is one recent example.

The Council of Europe is a pioneer. It was at the forefront of the fight to abolish the death penalty. Italy is convinced that the death penalty must be abolished throughout the world. It is first and foremost a question of human rights and respect for human dignity.

Barely a year on from Reykjavík, a number of key goals have already been or are on the verge of being achieved. The Register of Damage has been set up for Ukraine and progress has been made on co-operation to ensure accountability for Russia. Italy firmly supports these efforts. The Steering Committee on Democracy has been established and human rights protection has been reinforced, through the Istanbul Convention, for example. And lastly, negotiations on the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence, which were initiated during the Italian Presidency, have been concluded.

There is also the European Court of Human Rights and the Venice Commission. And this year, as we take over the presidency of the G7, we are reaffirming our support for multilateralism, as the President of the Republic, Sergio Mattarella, told the United Nations just a few days ago.

We need more not less Council of Europe! Human rights protection can be broadened and strengthened – to uphold our values – in many areas, starting with new measures to protect children, social rights, particularly labour rights, and the fight against hatred on religious grounds, trafficking in human beings and the environment.

Congratulations to the Presidency of Liechtenstein and our best wishes to the Presidency of Lithuania for the hard work ahead of us!”



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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

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Mr H. BAŠIĆ (Bosnia and Herzegovina) made the following statement:

“I would like to first congratulate all of us on three-quarters of a century of the existence of the Organisation and express my pride that Bosnia and Herzegovina is for almost a third of that time a member State on this journey.

To fellow colleagues, because most of us here are my fellow colleagues, I also wish all the best in the future and I must say that Bosnia and Herzegovina has very intense and deep relations with the Council of Europe, although it sometimes does not look like that because I am always alone here. The Council of Europe is part of our constant political, constitutional and media discussions and I bet that most of the population of my country knows about the Council for good reasons, and sometimes for not so good reasons, but since we are celebrating, I won't mention that as I have enough time in June to mention the different judgments of the European Court of Human Rights.

I wish you all the best, but also I congratulate you, Liechtenstein, for the marvellous job done in the last six months. Perhaps some people were doubting whether a small country can run such a good business. We know from our part because, in 2015, we held the presidency of the Committee of Ministers and everybody was a little bit anxious whether my country, with so many issues, could do the job one year after the illegal annexation of Crimea, but we did a good job.

So congratulations and I wish all the best to Lithuania in the upcoming six months because that is a country I hold deep in my heart due to my diplomatic history.”

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Ms S. GRUBJEŠIĆ (Serbia) made the following statement:

“Membership in the Council of Europe is of multiple importance for every country. For more than two decades of its membership, the Republic of Serbia has undergone internal changes, improving the human rights institutional protection, bringing the idea and the awareness of democracy closer to its citizens, and setting a strong imperative for providing the highest level of the rule of law. The Organisation had a significant role in guiding the leadership of Serbia towards the respect of its values and ideals, but the most influential role belongs to Serbian citizens who demand the respect of the democratic values and principles. Their vision of democracy has always been the strongest guideline and the firmest corrective both for our country and society as a whole.

Along with its own interests, Serbia also attaches great importance to the prosperity of the European continent and its neighbourhood, and the situation there is not good at all. By focusing on the finest details of human rights on the political level, we have failed to prevent the endangerment of basic and existential rights. The present situation in Europe takes us back to the period that motivated the founding countries to establish this Organisation. In the year in which we celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of Europe, the member States are facing the greatest challenges in the history of the Organisation.

Serbia and its citizens empathise with the suffering and pain of all people affected by conflicts in Ukraine and the Middle East. We use this opportunity to appeal to all those who have power and influence to end these conflicts as soon as possible and bring peace back.

Today's meeting is historical. As of today, Europe, and soon the rest of the world, starts to defend its values from the detected and dangerous AI elements. Serbia welcomes the adoption of the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence, and I can announce Serbia's accession to the convention in the nearest future.

The Republic of Serbia believes that the full respect of the Council of Europe's values and principles is the best prevention of conflicts and human rights violations. Rule of law is one of the most important principles, both at the national and international level, specifically the respect of the international legally binding documents. Any deviation from this principle creates a threat to regional or world peace and stability. Concrete examples from European history, as well as the current situation, are warning us on this situation.

The Republic of Serbia reiterates its full respect for the territorial integrity of Ukraine, Georgia and Moldova in their internationally recognised borders. By respecting territorial integrity of all countries in accordance with the UN Charter, Serbia at the same time keeps the right and duty to respect and defend its own territorial integrity and sovereignty.

The best way to respect and defend this principle in the Council of Europe is by strict application of rules and principles. Regrettably, the practice has proved that it is hard to achieve this ideal, as recently witnessed in the Parliamentary Assembly by the adoption of the Opinion on one entity's application to accede to the Council of Europe through an unprecedented procedure. In many of the procedural segments, there were clear elements of politisation and political pressure, which ended with a controversial Opinion. We appeal to all member States to consider all deficiencies of the Opinion and the procedure by which it was adopted. We believe that this is of great importance for the Organisation and its future.

Recalling that the Republic of Serbia did not join the Declaration of the Reykjavík Summit, consequently, it disassociates itself from the decisions to be adopted under agenda items 2.a. and 2.b. of this 133<sup>rd</sup> Session

of the Committee of Ministers (as well as from the Declaration on the occasion of the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of Europe).

Serbia remains committed to the Council of Europe values and principles, and it is our wish that this ministerial meeting contributes to the return to statutory principles, thus keeping the much-needed unity of the Organisation.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

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Mr S. DION ([Canada](#)) made the following statement:

“Let me also express, on behalf of Canada, our full solidarity with the Slovak Republic. We hope that the Prime Minister will soon be restored to good health, and we assure you of our friendship with the Slovak people.

As we celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of Europe, let me say, on behalf of Canada, that the very reason the Council was created, namely to defend and promote democracy and peace, and to uphold the rule of law, must inspire us all at a time when war has returned to European soil and Ukraine is valiantly defending itself and deserves our unwavering support a thousand times over.

This horrendous tragedy is unfolding in Europe, but it has universal implications. We need to show the world, once and for all, that countries have nothing to gain from invading their neighbours, and that the crime of aggression does not pay.

Canada welcomes the Council of Europe's suspension of Russia as a member State. This extreme measure was necessary.

Canada is proud to be an associate member of the Register of Damage.

Canada supports efforts on the Special Tribunal on the Crime of Aggression advancing within the Council of Europe.

Canada unwaveringly supports Ukraine and calls on all countries to do the same.

We are increasing our presence in Latvia, where we lead a NATO multinational battle group.

We are also co-chairing the International Coalition for the Return of Missing Children, and encourage all countries present today to join our efforts.

We need the Council of Europe for Ukraine, we also need it as a champion of democracy, while we see, in some European countries, governments weakening checks and balances, curbing media freedom, politicising judicial systems and denigrating minorities and immigrants.

The Council's work to counter these pressures is fundamental in upholding democratic values.

I would like to thank the Liechtenstein Presidency and wish the Lithuanian team every success as they take over.”

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Ms D. CAMPBELL BAUER (United States of America) made the following statement:

“Let me begin by reiterating US condemnation of the horrific attack on the life of Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico. I joined President Biden and first Lady Jill Biden in sharing our hopes and prayers for a quick recovery to Prime Minister Fico and for a time of healing for the Fico family and the people of Slovakia.

I am honoured to be here representing the United States of America and celebrating the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of Europe. In the 28 years since the United States joined the Council of Europe, we are proud to have expanded our collaboration. This includes US Government and civil society experts contributing to many of the Council's bodies.

Our engagement with the Council allows us to share our expertise and to learn from all of you. Following our participation in the Group of States against Corruption evaluation, the United States is taking on board many of the report's recommendations on combating corruption within executive functions and law enforcement agencies.

We frequently refer to GRETA's research on combating trafficking in persons and use it to improve our own evaluations and best practices. Most recently, we were pleased to work with your delegations to help shape efforts to hold Russia accountable and were pleased to join the Register of Damage for Russia's aggression against Ukraine as a founding associate member.

We also appreciated participating in negotiations with the Council's member States to establish a shared vision for approaching AI technologies in a way that respects human rights, democracy and the rule of law through the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence.

In the future, I can only imagine the US partnership with the Council of Europe will grow stronger as we work together to face new threats to human rights and democracy in cyberspace and the environment. To the member States of the Council of Europe and to my fellow observer States, happy 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

The United States of America remains your steadfast partner as we work to make Europe and the world freer and more just for all.”

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Mr H. UCHIDA ([Japan](#)) made the following statement:

“To begin with, Japan also extends its heartfelt solidarity to Slovakia. I would like to extend my warmest congratulations to the Council of Europe on reaching the milestone of its 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

Japan would like to express its deep respect to Minister Dominique Hasler for Liechtenstein’s successful presidency, and to the Secretary General, Marija Pejčinović Burić, the Secretariat as well as all the member States and observer States, who have devoted their efforts to the development of the Council of Europe over the years.

Japan places importance on fundamental values and principles such as human rights, democracy and the rule of law, and has deepened co-operation with the Council of Europe, which has led the rule making of these fields in the international community.

Russia’s aggression against Ukraine is an outrageous act that shakes the very foundation of the international order, and Japan cannot condone any attempts to unilaterally change the status quo by force. The securities of Europe and the Indo-Pacific are inseparable, and the situation in Ukraine is not only the matter of Europe. Japan, therefore, continues strong support for Ukraine. Japan participated in the Register of Damage as an Associate Member, and decided to make a financial contribution to the Register for financial year 2024. These are symbolic co-ordinations between Japan and the Council of Europe, which share values and principles.

In the field of AI, Japan launched the Hiroshima AI Process as the G7 Presidency last year and has been leading the international rule making of advanced AI systems, such as generative AI. Japan has also been actively participating in and contributing to the negotiations of the AI Convention, which was adopted at this Session.

Even when the international community is at history’s turning point, human rights, democracy and the rule of law, which the Council of Europe has advocated since its foundation, remain important. Japan is determined to continue to play an active role in contributing to the development of the Council of Europe.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France

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Mr J.A. SUÁREZ DEL REAL Y AGUILERA (Mexico) made the following statement:

“First of all, we would like to express our support for and solidarity with Slovakia. As a testament to our deep friendship and fraternity with the Spanish people, I will deliver this statement in the language of Cervantes.

75 years ago, the leaders of the countries that uphold the universal values of humanism, the architects of PEACE, as the fraternal goal of humankind, founded the Council of Europe as a multilateral organisation championing democracy, the rule of law and the full enjoyment of human rights.

Throughout these 75 years, the Council of Europe has guided and driven fundamental transformation for the peoples of Europe, setting an example which has inspired other nations around the world.

A quarter of a century ago, Mexico applied to become an observer State of the Organisation, and since then we have shared experiences and forged strong partnerships around various Council of Europe instruments and mechanisms.

On behalf of the Mexican people, its President, Andrés Manuel López Obrador, and on my own behalf, I extend my most sincere congratulations to all Council of Europe member and observer States on the first 75 years of unity around their founding values.”

## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France

The OUTGOING CHAIR made the following statement:

“Liechtenstein took over the presidency of the Committee of Ministers six months ago, in this very room. Six months have certainly passed fast. It was an immense privilege, and at the same time a challenge, to hold the presidency during this time.

Liechtenstein has dedicated its presidency to strengthening the core principles of the Council of Europe and to promoting a future-oriented functioning of this honourable Organisation. In the following minutes, let me highlight a few aspects of our activities during the last six months. For a more comprehensive overview, let me refer to our stocktaking document.

The implementation of the decisions taken by our Heads of State and Government in Reykjavík naturally formed a central pillar of our engagement.

We were proud to take a critical first step with the adoption of the budget for 2024-2027 in the first meeting held under the Liechtenstein Presidency by consensus. The budget reflects the priorities and direction given by the Summit and provides significant additional means for their implementation. It is the first budget in 17 years with a real increase in financing over and above inflation.

The adoption of the report and decisions today is another critical step in the full implementation of the Reykjavík commitments. Both the Reykjavík decisions and our presidency priorities put a strong emphasis on supporting the European Court of Human Rights. The Court acts as the principal safeguard to protect our values and to guarantee that Europe remains a continent of democratic societies, guided by the rule of law. As member States, it is our obligation to ensure the full, effective and prompt execution of all judgments of the Court and to respect its case law. The Liechtenstein Presidency held a high-level conference in March focusing on improving the implementation of judgments of this important body.

In the case of *Kavala v Türkiye*, the Committee adopted a new decision on the matter at its regular meeting on 17 January. A high-level technical meeting in Ankara followed. Osman Kavala, however, remains detained. For the last time in my role as President, I emphasise that the ongoing dialogue must achieve results, and that Mr Kavala is released. There is no step more important for him and for the Convention system.

In Reykjavík, our leaders sent a strong message expressing their unwavering support to Ukraine and firmly condemning the illegal war of aggression launched by the Russian Federation – a commitment that the Liechtenstein Presidency took very seriously. In the face of the many crimes committed and the countless difficulties imposed on them by Russia, Ukraine and its people continue to demonstrate a courage and determination that commands our fullest respect. Together with the Secretary General, I travelled to Kyiv in March to take part in the inauguration ceremony of the Register’s Satellite Office in Ukraine.

This office now liaises with the Ukrainian authorities and plays an important role in co-ordinating the exchange of information with other international organisations, Ukrainian authorities and civil society organisations, including the exchange of evidence. Let me once again use this opportunity to extend my gratitude to the Ukrainian authorities for their hospitality. I am deeply thankful for all the encounters we had while we were in Ukraine. It is unimaginable what the people of Ukraine have had to, and have to continue to, endure. I was deeply moved by their strength and determination.



On 2 April 2024, the Register of Damage officially opened the claims submission process, starting with claims relating to the damage or destruction of residential property. With the establishment of the Register of Damage, the Council of Europe has taken a critical first and important step towards ensuring accountability for the Russian aggression against Ukraine. To date, 44 States and the European Union have joined the Register. Liechtenstein will continue to actively advocate for broader membership in the Register. In this context, we continue to conduct outreach activities on all levels, with which we hope to encourage States outside the Council of Europe to join our important efforts to ensuring justice. A possible role for the Council of Europe's engagement in further efforts to ensure accountability for the Russian aggression is under consideration.

Under the Liechtenstein Presidency, we were able to adopt a mandate to explore the possible establishment of a Special Tribunal on the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine under the auspices of the Council of Europe. This was taken up positively at the last meeting of the Core Group in Vilnius and will be at the centre of the next meeting of the Core Group at the end of June in Bucharest. Liechtenstein will continue its active engagement for a Tribunal able to prosecute the leadership responsible for committing the crime, on the basis of the internationally agreed legal definition.

During the Liechtenstein Presidency, the Committee of Ministers has received the Opinion of the Parliamentary Assembly on "The application by Kosovo for membership of the Council of Europe". A next, very important item during our presidency. The Committee of Ministers has already started discussions on the matter and is currently considering how to proceed.

In the speech I gave here, in this chair, at the start of our presidency, I highlighted the need to make the Council of Europe fit for the future and to ensure that it will be able to perform this immensely important function in the years to come. For this, it is essential for the Council of Europe to adapt to the challenges ahead and to incorporate the next generation into its work. Children and youth form an integral part of our societies and continue to enrich our democracies with new ideas and approaches to tackle future challenges.

In order to encourage youth participation in the work of the Council of Europe, the Liechtenstein Presidency organised, in co-operation with the Youth Department, a large event to enable interested youth from across Europe to add their voice to the work of this Organisation.

The event under the motto "Confidence in Tomorrow" took place this week and brought together more than 100 participants from across Europe. Let me extend my gratitude to all those who took part in the exchange with the youth participants yesterday. I participated as well and I was truly impressed by their innovative spirit.

Of course, we cannot talk about the future without also mentioning new technologies like artificial intelligence. AI is, perhaps, the most important breakthrough technology of this century and it offers both opportunities and challenges to our societies. Safeguarding the protection of human rights, democracy and the rule of law therefore must remain our priority. The Liechtenstein Presidency is proud that the work on the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence has been finalised under our leadership of the Committee of Ministers and I thank you all for your engagement. As the first of its kind, the convention once again underlines the Council of Europe's leading role in developing standards to safeguard human rights, also in the digital era. The Council of Europe's work in this area has attracted the attention of many States far beyond the territory of this Organisation, which increases the likelihood that the future instrument will become an efficient and effective global legal standard.

Visibility through initiatives like these will prove essential to maintaining a strong Council of Europe that is, as mentioned before, fit for the future. To further ensure this, all of our continued efforts are required to raising visibility and awareness of the Council of Europe and its important work also beyond Strasbourg. To this end, we presented the priorities of the Liechtenstein Presidency of the Committee of Ministers in Liechtenstein, Berlin, Bern, Brussels, Vienna and Washington, to name just a few. In addition, we organised an event in New York on the sidelines of the Session of the UN Commission on the Status of Women, in March, promoting the Council of Europe as a standard-setting body, also in the area of combatting violence against women and girls.

Furthermore, we actively used our presidency to raise awareness of the Council of Europe and its work at home, through a broad range of events for the Liechtenstein population. At the same time, it was our firm intention to use this opportunity to also raise Liechtenstein's visibility in the Council of Europe. To this end, we hosted a number of conferences and expert meetings in Liechtenstein, including the biennial Diversity Conference of the Council of Europe's Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport, focusing on the inclusion of child migrants and refugees in and through sport, a meeting of the Group of Experts on Protected Areas

and Ecological Networks and, most recently, a meeting of the Article 10 co-ordination bodies of the Istanbul Convention.

It was of course our particular pleasure to host a meeting of the Ministers' Deputies in Liechtenstein. The meeting marked the start of the preparations for today's Ministerial Session. And I want to thank all Ambassadors who visited Liechtenstein.

To underline Liechtenstein's full commitment to our presidency role, H.S.H. the Hereditary Prince Alois von und zu Liechtenstein and four out of five Liechtenstein Ministers, including our Prime Minister, participated in these and other events, as well as in the sessions of the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe here in Strasbourg.

On my behalf, and I believe on their behalf too, I would once again like to express that this presidency term has been an honour for our country, which we have carried out with a great sense of duty. From the beginning, it was our prerogative to underline our full commitment to our presidency. I would like to reiterate once again that we have carried out this role with a great sense of responsibility but also with a lot of joy, together with you.

At this point, let me already wish the succeeding Lithuanian Presidency all the best for your term. You can certainly count on our support.

Before finally handing over the presidency to Prime Minister Šimonytė, let me express my sincere gratitude to all those involved in making the last six months possible, both back home in Liechtenstein and here in Strasbourg. I would particularly like to thank the Secretariat of the Committee of Ministers and the whole staff of this very impressive Organisation for their commitment and indispensable support. Special thanks, however, is also owed to the Liechtenstein delegation here in Strasbourg, led with competence and great commitment, by Ambassador Wanger."

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France

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The CHAIR made the following statement:

“This now brings us to the handover of the presidency, which will pass from Liechtenstein to Lithuania. Before doing so, I would like to thank once again all delegations for their constructive approach and their support during our presidency. This has enabled our Committee to adopt some important decisions today which once more reflects that the Council of Europe is an effective forum for dialogue and co-operation for the promotion of our shared values.

I would like to give a special thanks to the Secretary General as this is her last Ministerial Session. You have been at the head of this Organisation during difficult times, starting with the pandemic and then, shortly afterwards, the violent aggression by one member State against another. The Organisation has shown resilience and determination in the face of these crises, and I think that I am not wrong to say that it has come out stronger and better equipped to face the future. I would like to thank you for your hard work and in particular for the excellent co-operation during our presidency.

I would also like to thank the representatives of all Council of Europe institutions present here today for the spirit of co-operation which they have displayed throughout our presidency.

Your Excellency, I am honoured to hand over the wooden hammer to you, as the symbol of the presidency. I wish you every success and want to assure you of the full support of Liechtenstein.”

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## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France

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The INCOMING CHAIR made the following statement:

“Firstly, I wish to convey Lithuania's heartfelt gratitude to Minister Dominique Hasler and her team for their exceptional leadership during their presidency. Under their guidance, Liechtenstein has demonstrated profound commitment and generosity.

I extend our deepest sympathy and highest admiration to the valiant defenders of Ukraine, whose bravery allows us to convene peacefully here in Strasbourg and continue our vital mission within the Council of Europe. The sacrifices made by Ukrainians for their freedom and independence are immense. Supporting them, whatever the victory takes, is a moral imperative for every nation. It is a tribute to the freedom of all of us and our respect for fundamental European values, the values that are at the core of this Organisation. To those who are missing Russia in this room, I want to say just one thing: I sincerely believe that there will be soon a room for Russia: in an international tribunal.

As Lithuania assumes the presidency of the Committee of Ministers, I am honoured to outline our priorities. We recognise, however, that the current geopolitical climate may necessitate swift and unforeseen adjustments.

Our unwavering focus during our presidency is to fully support Ukraine in its defence against Russia's severe aggression and work toward ensuring Russia's complete accountability for its international crimes.

We will bolster the efforts of the Council of Europe in strengthening Ukraine's democratic institutions and support the nation's reconstruction endeavours, including the implementation of the “Resilience, Recovery, and Reconstruction” Action Plan.

Lithuania will continue to ensure the efficient operation of the Register of Damage and advocate for its expansion. Russia must be held financially accountable for the damages caused by its war; thus, we will promote further steps towards establishing a comprehensive compensation mechanism, supported by the expertise from the Council of Europe.

We remain dedicated to establishing a Special International Tribunal for the crime of aggression against Ukraine. We appreciate the Council of Europe's leadership in this matter and are pleased to reference the significant outcomes from the recent Core Group meeting in Vilnius on 10 May of this year.

The victims and survivors of Russia's genocidal war deserve justice. The innocent lives taken, the shattered homes of the people of Ukraine, the violence, abuse and desecration of unspeakable brutality cannot go unpunished. The international community should work collectively to mitigate the long-term traumatising effects of Russia's brutal war of aggression, especially on the most vulnerable.

During the Lithuanian Presidency, special attention will also be given to the rights, safety and well-being of Ukrainian children, particularly those forcibly deported or illegally adopted in Russia. Ensuring their safe return and holding the perpetrators accountable will be a priority.

Our presidency will ensure continuity and consistent implementation of the Reykjavik Summit decisions, strengthening the Organisation to face future challenges, while marking the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Council of Europe.

Aligning Secretariat employment with membership of the Council of Europe is crucial for us. With Russia no longer a member, and in light of our principles and your principled leadership in isolating the aggressor Russia and its accomplice Belarus, it is inappropriate for Russian nationals to work at the Council, where their presence could pose potential reputational risks.

Support for Belarus civil society, independent media in exile and human rights defenders from other countries oppressed by authoritarian regimes will be prioritised. We aim to establish a Council of Europe Information Point for Belarus in Vilnius during our presidency.

Implementation of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights will be a high priority, as we strive to lead by example in enforcing human rights.

Other priorities include reinforcing social rights; we look forward to welcoming your Ministers responsible for Social Affairs at the High-level Conference on the European Social Charter in Vilnius. We will also promote gender equality and women's rights, highlighted by an event to mark the 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Istanbul Convention's entry into force, coinciding with the launch of an updated Gender Equality Strategy.

Our horizontal priorities will be vigorously pursued, emphasising freedom of expression, safety of journalists, combating disinformation, hate speech and historical distortion.

We are committed to promoting anti-corruption and good governance; discussions on this topic will be featured at the IACC International Anti-corruption Conference, which we will host in Vilnius this June.

Lastly, addressing the digital dimension of freedom, including artificial intelligence and human rights, is crucial. We highly appreciate the decision to open the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence for signature in Vilnius, on the occasion of the informal Conference of Ministers of Justice.

Moreover, government representatives, relevant experts and the Internet community will have the opportunity to discuss public policy balancing innovation and regulation at the European Dialogue on Internet Governance (EuroDIG) annual meeting, that will also take place in Vilnius this June.

This happens to be Lithuania's second presidency of the Committee of Ministers. Our first presidency occurred more than 20 years ago, and since then, our country has made tremendous progress as a State and as a society. We are a living testament to how respect for democracy, human rights and the rule of law are not just "buzzwords", but are fundamental in actually creating strong and prosperous countries, leaving no one behind. We count on your support and co-operation during our presidency to make a meaningful contribution to preserving and promoting these values across Europe."

## 133<sup>rd</sup> Session, 17 May 2024

### Minutes

of the sitting held at the Palais de l'Europe, Strasbourg, France

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The CHAIR made the following statement:

“We now move to item 7, the last item on our agenda.

The handover of the presidency from Lithuania to Luxembourg will take place in Strasbourg on 13 November 2024.

I would like to thank Luxembourg for its proposal to host our next Session in Luxembourg on 13 to 14 May 2025. I think we can all agree on this.

I thank you and declare the 133<sup>rd</sup> Ministerial Session closed.”

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The Session closed at 1.08 p.m.