



27th CONFERENCE OF EUROPEAN MINISTERS OF JUSTICE

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VICTIMS: PLACE, RIGHTS AND ASSISTANCE

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Prime Minister of the Republic of Armenia,
Ministers,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is an honour and a privilege for me to represent the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe at this important event. I am grateful to the Armenian authorities for their hospitality and for the excellent organisation.

Ministers, I would like to underline that the Committee of Ministers is well aware of the value of your conferences and of the impetus they give to the work and activities of the Council of Europe in the legal field. The five resolutions adopted at your previous conference, held in Helsinki in 2005 with theme “social aspects of justice”, were examined by the Committee of Ministers in May 2005 and a number of decisions concerning their implementation were taken. They were also referred to in the Action Plan adopted by the Heads of State and Government at the Third Summit of the Council of Europe held in Warsaw later in May 2005. As you will have noted from the written report presented by the Secretary General, your work has resulted in concrete action within the Council of Europe in all the fields covered by your resolutions.

The theme of this conference: “The place, rights and assistance to victims of crime”, also relates to social aspects of justice and I must stress that the social mission of the criminal justice system lies at the heart of the Council of Europe activities.

Over the years a number of important instruments intended to assist the criminal justice systems in the member states in fulfilling one of their fundamental objectives, namely contributing to a peaceful and safe society, including by restoring balance and social peace after a crime has been committed, have been elaborated within the Council of Europe.

These instruments deal with issues such as crime prevention, ways of dealing with offenders, including treatment of prisoners and reintegration of offenders, with victims, with juveniles and other vulnerable categories of offenders or victims, with mediation in penal matters and with ways to improve the functioning of the criminal justice systems.

The Committee of Ministers has always considered it important to emphasise the need for restorative justice measures. It adopted the first legal instruments to protect victims of crime in the 1980s. These instruments have been the leading reference texts in this field for a number of years.

However, developments in society as reflected in national legislation and practice, research, and a better understanding of the needs of victims as well as increased criminality, made it necessary, to review the existing texts. In the resolutions adopted at your conferences in 2003 and 2005, in the light of an outbreak of terrorism in Council of Europe member states, you underlined the need in particular to adopt new rules concerning the support of victims of terrorist acts and their families.

The Action Plan adopted at the Third Summit devotes a chapter to strengthening the security of European citizens. It calls on member states to respect human rights and to protect victims, when combating terrorism and refers to the Guidelines on human rights and the fight against terrorism and the Guidelines on the protection of victims of terrorist acts adopted by the Committee of Ministers in 2002 and 2005, respectively. The Action Plan also refers to victims of trafficking, to combating violence against women, including domestic violence, to eradicating all forms of violence against children as well as to elaborating measures to stop sexual exploitation of children.

As the Director General of Legal Affairs, Mr De Vel, has just explained a number of legal instruments, dealing partly or entirely with the protection of victims have been adopted by the Committee of Ministers in recent years. Mr de Vel mentioned in particular the Council of Europe Convention on Action against trafficking in human beings and the Council of Europe Convention on the prevention of terrorism, both opened for signature at the Summit.

For my part, I would like to highlight the importance the Committee of Ministers attaches to an early entry into force of these texts. This was emphasised *inter alia* in the follow up decisions to the 116th Ministerial Session held in Strasbourg in May this year. Moreover, the Committee recently welcomed the conclusions of a thematic review on the implementation of Council of Europe conventions against terrorism, made by the Committee of Experts on Terrorism, according to which the ratification threshold for the entry into force of the Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism is expected to be reached by the end of this year.

Trafficking is one of the worst human rights violations we know and also one of the most lucrative organised crime activities. It feeds on the prosperity of the countries of destination and at the same time on economic hardship in the countries of origin, where it finds fertile ground because of poverty and lack of information. We are all aware that trafficking in human beings has become a major problem in Europe and that the Council of Europe member states include countries of origin, transit and destination.

As a step in the fight against this scourge, a campaign was launched by the Council of Europe at the beginning of the year aiming to promote the ratification of the Convention on action against trafficking in human beings, in order that it may enter into force as soon as possible. This campaign is the outcome of a collective effort by all Council of Europe bodies.

Furthermore, in June this year, the Committee of Ministers approved the Blueprint for the Council of Europe Campaign to combat violence against women, including domestic violence that had been prepared by the task force set up following a decision taken at the Warsaw Summit. I am pleased to be able to inform you that this campaign will be launched in Madrid in November and I would like to encourage you to put your full weight behind it, which calls for strong commitment at national level.

The Council of Europe three-year action programme “Building a Europe for and with Children” (2006-2008), was launched at a conference organised in Monaco in April this year. This programme aims, *inter alia*, at combating all forms of violence against

children. Given that the member states of the Council of Europe have entered into numerous commitments under general human rights conventions and specific conventions on children's rights, which require states to prohibit and fight all forms of violence and ill-treatment of children, the programme will assist member states in fulfilling their obligations under such treaties.

This will be done in particular by implementing integrated prevention policies and alerting professional circles and the general public to the problem. The programme will address all forms of violence, wherever it takes place with a special attention to fighting sexual abuse and corporal punishment. It will also focus on new forms of violence stemming from the use of the new information technologies, namely child pornography and grooming via Internet and mobile phones.

Within the framework of this programme, the Committee of Ministers has earlier this year given terms of reference to an expert committee, reporting to the European Committee on Crime Problems (CDPC), for the elaboration of a new instrument on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and abuse. The new instrument will aim to reinforce national measures and cross-border cooperation in this field.

Last but not least, I shall refer to the Recommendation on assistance to crime victims adopted by the Committee of Ministers in June this year, which was referred to more extensively by Mr De Vel. This is a modern text, which puts emphasis on matters such as the need for international cooperation to assist victims of terrorism and other forms of transnational crimes and the need to prevent repeat victimisation, in particular for victims belonging to vulnerable groups. It also emphasises the responsibility of the state to ensure that victims are given appropriate assistance. This text will certainly been an important tool for member states in drawing up their national policies in this field.

Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

I would like to conclude by saying that I believe that although a lot has been achieved as regards the protection of victims in recent years, a great deal of work remains to be done, in particular as concerns the implementation of the recently adopted Council of Europe instruments. I will transmit any conclusions this Conference may reach on future action for the protection of victims to the Committee of Ministers, in order that they be given thorough consideration and, as you know, the Committee of Ministers did not hesitate to act upon the Resolutions of your previous Conference.

On this note, I will conclude by wishing you a most excellent conference, with worthwhile exchanges and good results.

Thank you.