



COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS
COMMISSAIRE AUX DROITS DE L'HOMME



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“Ensuring human rights protection for everybody in Europe”

Intervention of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights,
Thomas Hammarberg,

119th Session of the Committee of Ministers,
Madrid, 12 May 2009

The Council of Europe is celebrating its 60th anniversary. This provides an opportunity for us all to reflect not only on what our Organisation has achieved up until now, but also on what remains to be done.

How can we make better use of the arsenal of existing mechanisms to ensure the full respect of agreed standards?

How can we face up to the new challenges with a long-term approach based on human rights?

The improvement of the procedures of the European Court of Human Rights is essential. All of the measures necessary to ensure the full execution of its judgements must also be taken.

However, we all know that human rights problems should first and foremost be addressed at national level. Our efforts to make human rights more effective cannot pass over this reality.

My contribution to these efforts is constructed through regular dialogue with each country. Open and frank dialogue, based on solid facts, and free from any prejudice.

I can underline that so far, this dialogue has always taken place within a constructive atmosphere of mutual trust.

Even though respect for human rights is deeply anchored in our European experience, there is still an important gap between the commitments made and daily reality.

Full implementation must be our constant road map for the years to come.

I will spare no effort following this road with you. We must thoroughly commit ourselves to this implementation. In this context, continual monitoring in each country is essential.

Today, no country in Europe is free from racism and discrimination. Roma, and also many other ethnic or religious minorities, as well as migrants, refugees or asylum seekers are confronted with serious obstacles in their daily lives.

The negative impact of the global economic crisis will hit vulnerable groups considerably harder. There is a major risk that it will be the weakest who will suffer the most. And we must prevent this for if not, desperation will overcome our region, and we do not want this.

We must not be complacent. The promotion of human rights is far too serious a question to be approached with half-measures.

It must be tackled with a wide, all-encompassing vision. It must include even the most difficult points. It deserves to be rolled out and cover all situations. Including politically disputed areas, and post-conflict situations.

The people living in these areas are ordinary people who have become victimised in their daily lives by political disputes concerning the status of these zones.

It is of the utmost importance that efforts to assist the people in these situations be facilitated rather than hampered by the parties to the conflict. I have already stressed this strongly and will continue to do so. My contacts with these areas do not signal political or diplomatic recognition and should be accepted by all political actors concerned. Here, the Council of Europe has a particularly important mission.

Ensuring the protection of human rights for all, and throughout all of Europe must remain the motto of this Organisation.

The whole of the Council of Europe and each member State must be fully invested by this mission.