

HELP speech – Ambassador Jānis KĀRKLIŅŠ

Ladies and gentlemen,

Dear Colleagues,

It is with great pleasure that I stand before you today as the Chair of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. We have gathered here to participate in the annual HELP conference, after yet another eventful and busy year. However, this conference is also held during a time of crisis in Europe, as the Russian Federation is continuing its brutal and unprovoked aggression against Ukraine. I am delighted to see that one of the thematic debates will be around the Council of Europe's efforts to support Ukraine. I can inform you that the operationalization of the Register of Damage is underway. It will be launched during the Conference of Justice Ministers of the Member States of the Council of Europe on the 11th of September in Riga, Latvia.

As the conference falls under the Latvian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, I would like to share with you some insights into the priorities of the Latvian Presidency and their alignment with the work of HELP.

Within the framework of our presidency, we have highlighted three key priorities:

1. **Strengthening democracy and the rule of law.** We are focusing on the execution of the European Court of Human Rights judgments, promoting education for democratic values, strengthening good governance at the municipal level, and combating corruption.

2. **Promoting freedom of expression, the safety of journalists, and the digital agenda of the Council of Europe.** Free media is a crucial pillar of democracy, but challenges to it have persisted. We have prioritized protecting journalists and promoting media literacy. Moreover, the impact of new technologies and artificial intelligence on human rights and democracy will be addressed. The Latvian Presidency supports Council of Europe's work on an Artificial Intelligence Framework Convention.
3. **Lastly, advancing reforms within the Council of Europe through the implementation of the decisions taken at the Summit in Reykjavik.** We recognize the need for a strong and effective response in today's geopolitical landscape. With a focus on modernizing operational practices, increasing transparency, and engaging civil society and youth, the Presidency aims to enhance the Council's impact and visibility. Through ongoing efforts to improve staff mobility and communication, the Latvian Presidency is committed to making the Council of Europe more resilient and responsive to external challenges.

I commend the efforts of the HELP program, as we share the idea of education being the focal point to strengthening democracy. This program plays a vital role in promoting the values of the Council of Europe by providing human rights education to justice professionals. Through comprehensive training, legal professionals are equipped to uphold the rule of law. HELP has also developed courses on media freedom, the protection of journalists, as well as the freedom of speech. Additionally, as technology advances, HELP has been educating on the human rights implications linked to the increased use of artificial intelligence and other cyber tools. Lastly, HELP continuously contributes to the advancement of the Council of Europe by providing high-quality education, fostering cooperation, and supporting the promotion of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.

I am honored to share that HELP has been active in Latvia, hosting the launch of the course on *Data Protection and Privacy Rights* in Riga in February. Moreover, Latvia stands as an example of successful cooperation with our national partners, particularly the Judicial Training Centre. The integration of HELP courses into their curricula demonstrates their commitment to human rights education within the national judiciary. It is worth mentioning that the Latvian Judicial Training Centre has even offered to launch a second edition of the HELP course on Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence in October. It is an inspiring example that highlights the importance of national ownership and can serve as a guiding light for other Council of Europe member states.

I believe we can all agree that HELP has made great strides towards advancing the values of the Council of Europe. I congratulate the team behind this program for having completed yet another productive and educational year. I hope to see it grow even bigger as time goes on.

I wish you all a day full of fruitful discussions and productive debates. Thank you.