

## **Conference of High-ranking representatives of Ministers of Internal Affairs on the police role in a democratic society**

### **Intervention by Gianluca Esposito, Head of the Action against Crime Department, 20 October 2020**

Minister,  
Madame la Défenseure des droits,  
Colleagues, Ladies and Gentlemen,

- Welcome everyone to the Council of Europe and to this Conference of High-ranking representatives of the Ministers of Internal Affairs.
- Along with the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, let me deplore the horrific terrorist attack against a teacher a few days ago in France and express our solidarity with those close to the victim, with the French people and with the French authorities.
- Thank both the Minister and the Défenseure des droits for their inspiring interventions. I am glad to see that this year again, in spite of the online format, we have about 100 senior participants connected from across our membership. This reflects the priority given to this topic by all our member states.
- Once again this year, we have decided to devote this event to the police. Police are the first persons we think of when we have a concern. They are “our best friend in town” when we have a problem. They are very important to ensure respect for Human Rights, democracy and the rule of law in a democratic society. They are therefore a priority for our action against crime work at the CoE.
- Not surprisingly, police activities are dealt with in various parts of the Council of Europe: the European Court of Human Rights, the Social Charter, the committee for the prevention of torture, our monitoring bodies against corruption, money laundering and terrorist financing, human trafficking, violence against women, the Human Rights Commissioner, and many other activities. The police are there to maintain public order and tranquility and to protect and respect the individual’s fundamental rights and freedoms as enshrined, in particular, in the European Convention on Human Rights. As such, police are often

at the core of our work, whether it is monitoring, standard setting, or cooperation activities.

- The Council of Europe Code of Police Ethics may be 20 years old, but it's still a key reference document in the Council of Europe work and in member states. It may need to be updated to take into account technological and societal developments, but its bulk should be preserved. This event is largely structured around the key elements of this Code, so we'll discuss it in detail, and we look forward to your inputs.
- Society evolves. Police activity has to evolve too. Mass demonstrations are increasingly multiform and are often infiltrated by disruptive elements who are more interested in destruction than freedom of expression; social media amplify messages, including when they are fake or abhorrent – we cannot look the other way; dialogue and mutual understanding is too quickly replaced by violent confrontation; trust is too often replaced by mistrust.
- Prevention plays a key role. Establishing a good relation between police and the community they operate in, before there is a problem, is key. Police activities to a large extent are performed in close contact with the public and efficiency is also, although not exclusively, dependent on public support. We need to ensure a good and in-depth understanding by police of the territory and the activities therein, not least to prevent radicalisation. The bottom line: *an effective fight against crime is one which stops more criminals than it helps to recruit.*
- Training: not only initial, but continuous training is essential to any modern police force to adjust to an evolving society. Today's policing is not the same as 20 years ago policing. Police needs to adjust, adapt, and modernise. Whether to do that we need a Police Academy-type structure or anything else is open for discussions and I look forward to your inputs.
- Ultimately, police forces need to lead by example. Society looks at police officers as role models. They should display sound judgment, an open attitude, maturity, fairness, communication skills and, where appropriate, leadership and management skills. They shall possess a

good understanding of social, cultural and community issues. These are key ingredients of a modern and performant police force.

- Thank you for your attention and I wish everyone a good Conference.