(Roma shortened)
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Elements for speech
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Since the last time we met to discuss the Council of Europe's strategy in 2019, there is a sentence that I have often heard: "even in Europe, we cannot take anything for granted".

Well… I believe that there are a few things that we can now take for granted:

1. we keep running towards an environmental disaster
2. A tiny life form -a virus- can put our world upside-down
3. A single man, a man who had allegedly embraced our values, can decide to invade a neighboring country, to destroy its population and have the entire world order hanging by a thread.

Three crisis threatening Europe in the XXI century. And, as we all know, in a world where safety, security and health cannot be granted, children remain the most vulnerable.

Brilliant minds, money and time have been put to work and engineered things that are transforming beyond imagination the way in which we work, live and relate to each other. Not always for the best-if you want my opinion. And sometimes for the worst: let's just take Russian hypersonic missiles or live-streaming of child sexual abuse.

Others before me have referred to the plight of children affected by the war. I am mourning with those children, with their families, with Ukraine and the rest of the Council of Europe family.

Governments, local authorities, international organisations, civil society and volunteers are stepping up efforts to face this humanitarian crises of an extraordinary dimension. That, we can always take for granted : the best of humanity shows when the worst hit. I witnessed that at the railway station in Warsaw and in reception centers near the Ukranian border. And I see it in Strasbourg.

Amid this chaos, many children cross the border with friends or neighbours instead of their parents. Registration of these children, should include information about who they are travelling with and the

country of destination. For all children, including the numerous unaccompanied children, entering biometric data is crucial, if we want to reduce the risk of them going missing and being trafficked and sold. Including for adoption.

An integrated system of child protection connected across border is called for: officers at the border who can detect children's vulnerabilities and refer children to the child protection system.

I cannot emphasise enough the importance of registration : it may mark the difference between life and death, between protection and exploitation, between lost and found.

Sadly, in our over-connected, technology-driven world, right now, we have not yet managed to set up an integrated registration system to protect the children crossing the border.

Discussion with police, tech companies and other experienced reporting mechanisms, will help us to get a better insight into how to improve accessibility to and interconnection between different databases.

By facilitating information sharing and using personal data in a responsible manner, technology can help to save children.

In its new strategy, the Council of Europe rightly continues to be concerned with the protection of children's rights in the online environment.

It is clear that data protection requirements should not be in the way of legitimate efforts to rescue children from harm. A survey carried out by ECPAT in 8 EU MS showed that 76% of the respondents are willing to give up some of their privacy online to allow automated tools to scan and detect child sexual abuse material and other forms of child sexual exploitation.

There is no shortage of knowledge about what Governments need to do, ought to do and can do. The Council of Europe has published a handbook which is in my view is the most comprehensive blueprint for online child protection ever to have been produced by any inter governmental or national government body.

To protect children, we must find a way to ensure the integrity of the systems that companies use. Focussing on transparency, governance and supervision is the way forward.

Better resources and coordination between the various organizations, administrations and volunteers is indispensable to build a proper safety net.

Let me call on all governments to enhance existing tools for coordination and cooperation and to use technology for good, by connecting the dots between border control, law enforcement and child protection across borders.

The war in Ukraine has painfully demonstrated once again how important this is.

So: there is something that I really hope we shall soon be able to take for granted: That children’s rights and wellbeing ALWAYS come first. In Europe and beyond.