|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **MINISTERS’ DEPUTIES** | CM Documents | **CM(2024)74-final** | 17 May 2024 |

|  |
| --- |
| **133rd Session of the Committee of Ministers****(Strasbourg, 16-17 May 2024)****Declaration by the Presidency of the Committee of Ministers[[1]](#footnote-1) on the occasion of the** **75th anniversary of the Council of Europe** |

In 1949, as Europe emerged from the ashes of World War II, visionary leaders signed the Statute of the Council of Europe in London to launch the project of a united Europe guided by democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

In the course of our seventy-five-year history, member States have developed effective co-operation mechanisms culminating in the establishment of an unparalleled common legal space based on the system of the European Convention on Human Rights. Today, the Council of Europe stands as the continent’s preeminent human rights organisation, uniting around 700 million people and enabling them to live with dignity in free and democratic societies whilst holding their governments accountable for upholding their human rights obligations.

In May 2023, our Heads of State and Government met in Reykjavík at the 4th Council of Europe Summit to condemn Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine which constitutes a flagrant violation of international law and of the fundamental values shared by the member States. They set out the collective action we needed to take in response to Russia’s illegal action. The Heads of State and Government also strongly reaffirmed their deep and unwavering commitment to the Statute of the Council of Europe and the European Convention on Human Rights, including the unconditional obligation to abide by the final judgments of the European Court in any case to which member States are parties. They affirmed the need for a co-operative and inclusive approach, based on dialogue, in the process of supervising the execution of judgments. They also underlined the importance of countering democratic backsliding and adopted the Reykjavík Principles for Democracy to promote, protect and strengthen democracy, human rights and the rule of law throughout our member States. Furthermore, they committed to strengthening work towards ensuring inclusive societies without marginalisation, exclusion, racism, discrimination or intolerance.

We gather today in Strasbourg for our 133rd Session to focus on the way forward to implement the commitments made in Reykjavík and to provide additional guidance to our Deputies and the Organisation as required. For that purpose, we have adopted a series of decisions (see *link to decisions*).

In particular, we would like to highlight the decisions we have taken in relation to the Register of Damage Caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine, which is intended to constitute the first component of a comprehensive international compensation mechanism. The Register, which is open for all States and international organisations to join, is already operating successfully and, on 2nd April 2024, launched a platform for the submission of claims. Further decisions in support of Ukraine include progress towards the possible establishment of a Special Tribunal for the crime of aggression and relate notably to the Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine, as well as the International Coalition for the Return of Ukrainian Children. Until there is a just and lasting peace in line with the principles of the Charter of the United Nations and respect for Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity, which constitute the foundation of President Zelenskyy’s Peace Formula, addressing the Russian Federation's aggression against Ukraine will remain our strategic priority. We are determined to continue supporting Ukraine and its people.

Our unwavering commitment to the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine, as well as of Georgia and the Republic of Moldova, within their internationally recognised borders remains resolute. We call on Russia to immediately, completely, and unconditionally withdraw its forces and military equipment from the entire territory of Ukraine, Georgia and the Republic of Moldova.

We have also started to meet the pledges of Reykjavík by adopting today the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence, which will be opened for signature in Vilnius next September, marking a historic milestone as the first global international instrument of its kind.

To counter the triple planetary crisis of pollution, climate change and loss of biodiversity, we are currently preparing a new Convention on Protection of the Environment through Criminal Law and examining the need for and feasibility of possible new legal instruments in the field of human rights and the environment.

To strengthen the protection of human rights in Europe, we have reiterated our commitment to the timely adoption of the revised instruments for the accession of the European Union to the European Convention on Human Rights, recalling that such accession is of central importance for the coherence of the European human rights protection system.

To promote social justice and the protection of social rights, which are crucial for democratic stability and security across the continent, we remain committed to the European Social Charter system and welcome the high-level conference to be held next July.

To strengthen the rule of law, we have notably reinforced the Venice Commission and have called for a rapid finalisation of the draft Convention on the protection of the profession of lawyer. We will continue our collective efforts for the promotion of freedom of expression and the safety of journalists and other media actors.

To support and enhance youth participation in democratic life and decision-making processes, we are preparing next year’s Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth and will follow-up on the youth event “Confidence in tomorrow” which took place on the eve of our 133rd Session. This bears witness to the importance that we attach to the invaluable contribution by young people to the work and mission of the Organisation. We are also supporting the activities related to the education for democratic citizenship and to culture and heritage as an important investment in democratic participation.

To ensure that the Council of Europe delivers its ambitious agenda effectively and efficiently, we are accelerating the reform process, including with respect to transparency and openness, and have increased, for the first time in 17 years, the financial resources of our Organisation in real terms for the period 2024-2027.

We recognise the importance of maintaining a robust political community where member States can come together to address shared challenges and pursue common goals. In this spirit, we are committed to enhancing co-operation with the Parliamentary Assembly as the other statutory body of the Council of Europe and as a unique pan-European forum for interparliamentary dialogue, as well as with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the voice of Europe's municipalities, towns and regions. We are committed to further strengthening our meaningful cooperation with civil society.

As we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Council of Europe, we reaffirm our dedication to the pursuit of peace, advancing the principles of multilateralism and fostering co-operation on the European and global stage. We are also committed to reinforcing our co-operation with other international organisations, notably with the European Union, the OSCE and the United Nations. Furthermore, we will continue strengthening our collaboration with observer States and non-member States which share our values, in particular those covered by our neighbourhood policy, and increasing awareness of our instruments, standards, and tools beyond Europe.

At 75 years old, our pan-European organisation remains our guiding light for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. As we look to the years to come, we will continue to strive for the Council of Europe to adapt and remain at the forefront of the development of our democracies in meeting the evolving challenges of the future.

1. Supported by the following member States: Albania, Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Republic of Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Ukraine and United Kingdom. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)