



---

## Priorities of the Icelandic Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (9 November 2022 – 17 May 2023)

---

### Introduction by the Icelandic Minister for Foreign Affairs, Thórdís Kolbrún Reykfjörð Gylfadóttir

Iceland takes over the presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe at a critical time in History. It is a duty that we take seriously and approach with a sense of humility.

War has returned to Europe with Russia's brutal invasion in Ukraine – a blatant violation of international law. It is our common duty to make sure that the fortunes of the past decades do not lead us into dangerous complacency. We must advocate for the multilateral system at every opportunity and convince the peoples of the world, that despite its flaws, it is vastly and completely superior to any other method of resolving issues and disputes between States.

The effort of every country is needed to safeguard the multilateral system and Iceland is convinced that the Council of Europe – the continent's oldest and leading pan-European organisation – has a critical role to play as the region's guardian of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.

Together, we must continue to ensure that our Organisation is fit for purpose to meet current and future challenges as well as the expectations of future generations. We look forward to welcoming the Council's member States to the 4th Council of Europe Summit of Heads of State and Government to "unite around our values" in Reykjavik next spring.

Our presidency will build on openness, transparency, and inclusiveness, and we look forward to working closely with all delegations and statutory bodies to promote the vision of a strong and effective Council of Europe.

### Priorities of the Icelandic Presidency

Iceland takes over the presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe for the third time since it became a member on 7 March 1950.

During our presidency, in addition to ensuring that the 4th Summit delivers on expectations of the Council's many stakeholders, Iceland will focus on four main themes and the interlinkages between them, namely:

1. Council of Europe core principles of human rights, democracy, and rule of law
2. Environment
3. Equality
4. Children and Youth

### Human rights, democracy, and the rule of law: United around our values

As the world faces one of the greatest challenges ever to the global peace architecture – with Russia's war of aggression against a democratic sovereign state in the heart of Europe – we must return to fundamental principles and the framework that has kept us together.

Enhanced co-operation between democracies to further strengthen the crucial work of the Council of Europe in advancing its core principles - human rights, democracy, and rule of law – is needed to combat the growing challenges to many of the basic rights we may have thought to be secured.

The Council's core principles are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. In a time of democratic backsliding and rising authoritarianism, democracy cannot be considered in isolation from the rule of law and human rights. Democracy needs transparent and accountable institutions, and the legitimacy of those institutions depends on compliance with rule of law and respect for human rights.

We are at a critical juncture. As member States we have a choice, and for Iceland, that choice is clear. We must unite around the Council's core principles and the 4th Summit of the Council of Europe will be an opportunity for our leaders to reaffirm their common commitment to the values that have proven to be such a blessing for the people of the world.

We must put human rights, democracy and rule of law front and center and throughout our presidency, Iceland will strive to do just that. As an example, the handover of the presidency from Ireland to Iceland is held in connection with the World Forum for Democracy – a unique platform for political decision-makers and activists to debate solutions to key challenges facing democracies worldwide.

## **Environment**

The negative effects of environmental degradation and climate change on the enjoyment of human rights across the globe is increasing. Many questions about the relationship between human rights and the environment remain unanswered and require further examination.

All through Iceland's presidency there will be a green theme to promote the interrelationship between human rights and the environment. This will be done by, for example, looking at the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, that some States have incorporated in their legislation, but also by promoting the need for green public administration and green solutions.

As children and youth are the most impacted by today's global environmental crisis and are the most threatened by our current trajectory, Iceland will also support a consultative meeting on young people and climate change.

## **Equality**

The principle of equality is at the very heart of human rights and a core principle embedded in Iceland's foreign policy.

Iceland is steadfast in its commitment to gender equality and the protection of the hard-earned progress concerning the human rights of women and girls around the world. While important gains in the fight against gender-based violence have been made over decades of activism, it is clear that new forms of violence have emerged. During our presidency, Iceland will focus specifically on action against digital violence and the role of men and boys in gender equality policies.

Iceland is also strongly committed to promoting and protecting the rights of LGBTI individuals and to create a safe, inclusive, and enabling environment for the promotion of human rights and equality for all. During our presidency, Iceland will proudly host the 10th IDAHOT+ Forum in Reykjavik and organise events in Strasbourg related to the advancement of LGBTI rights and preventing and combating violence and discrimination against LBQ women.

## **Children and Youth**

Every child has the right to grow to adulthood in health, peace and dignity and it is imperative for all States to ensure the rights of children.

During our presidency, Iceland will promote placing the child at the centre of policy making through integrating services and protection systems for children. The Barnahús (Children's house) is an early model of this approach, a child-friendly, interdisciplinary, and multiagency centre where different professionals work under one roof on investigations of suspected child abuse cases and provide appropriate support for child victims. Parts of Iceland's cultural programme during our presidency will also be geared towards children.

Young people should be respected as active democratic citizens and be included in all decision-making processes, not only in decisions concerning them. During our presidency, Iceland will support the follow-up to the Council of Europe's popular Democracy Here | Democracy Now youth campaign for revitalising democracy and strengthening mutual trust between young people and democratic institutions and processes. Iceland will also organise consultative meetings on young people and climate change as well as on migrant and refugee children transitioning to adulthood.

Furthermore, Iceland will ensure that the voice of young people is heard in the leadup to and during the 4th Summit of the Council of Europe.

### **Policy Programme**

**7-9 November, Strasbourg:** World Forum for Democracy, handover of the Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe from Ireland to Iceland and keynote address by the Prime Minister of Iceland.

**9 November, Strasbourg:** Beginning of Iceland's Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, inauguration of the Icelandic presidency tram and opening ceremony at Strasbourg City Hall with reception.

**16 November, Strasbourg:** Special focus at the 1448<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Ministers' Deputies on Barnahus (Children's House) with the participation of the Icelandic Minister of Education and Children to mark the European Day on Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse.

**16 November, Strasbourg:** High-level event "Towards Barnahus in All European States; Ensuring the Rights of Every Child" organised jointly with the Council of Europe's Children's Rights Division.

**24 November, Reykjavik:** Symposium on "Human rights protection in challenging times: the role of the Council of Europe" with the participation of Council of Europe's Secretary General, Marija Pejčinović Burić, and the Prime Minister of Iceland organised jointly with the Institute of International Affairs of the University of Iceland.

**24-25 November, Reykjavik:** Meeting of the Bureau and Standing Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) with the participation of the Prime Minister and Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland. A special event will be organised on the side-lines to discuss action against digital violence against women.

**25 November, Strasbourg:** Launch of social media campaign to mark the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence together with the Council of Europe and Permanent Representations to the Council of Europe.

**TBC November, New York:** Adoption of the General Assembly resolution on the co-operation between the Council of Europe and the United Nations.

**6 December, Strasbourg:** Conference on "Joining forces: applying the cybercrime frame to digital violence against women" with the participation of the President of Iceland organised jointly with the Council of Europe's Violence against Women Division and Cybercrime Division.

**9 December, Reykjavik:** Symposium on "The situation in Ukraine in light of Russia's aggression and the role of the Council of Europe" with the participation of the Icelandic Minister for Foreign Affairs and Ambassador Borys Tarasyuk, Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the Council of Europe and former Minister for Foreign Affairs of Ukraine, organised jointly with the Institute of International Affairs of the University of Iceland.

**19 January, Vienna:** The Icelandic Minister for Foreign Affairs presents the priorities of the Icelandic Presidency of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

**23-27 January, Strasbourg:** Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) with address by the Prime Minister of Iceland.

**26 January, Strasbourg:** International conference on "Advancing the Human Rights of Intersex People" with the participation of the Prime Minister of Iceland organised jointly with the Council of Europe's SOGI unit and the Parliamentary Assembly's Parliamentary Platform for the rights of LGBTI people in Europe.

**30-31 January, Strasbourg:** Conference on the occasion of the 20th Anniversary of the First Additional Protocol to the Budapest Convention organised jointly with the Council of Europe's Octopus Project.

**31 January-2 February, Strasbourg:** Conference on the follow-up to the Democracy Here | Democracy Now campaign organised jointly with the Council of Europe's Youth Department.

**9 February, Strasbourg:** Annual exchange of views with the United Nations with a proposed focus on "Accountability for human rights violations as a result of the Russian Federation aggression against Ukraine: role of the international community" organised jointly with the Chair of the Rapporteur Group on Human Rights (GR-H).

**22-23 February, Strasbourg:** Consultative meeting on young people and climate change with the participation of the Icelandic Minister for Foreign Affairs organised jointly with the Council of Europe's Youth Department.

**24 February, Strasbourg:** The Icelandic Minister for Foreign Affairs addresses the *ad hoc* working party on the preparation of a 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe (GT-SOM4).

**TBC, Strasbourg:** Launch of the guidelines "Turning 18 with confidence: supporting migrant and refugee children transitioning to adulthood" with the participation of the Icelandic Minister of Education and Children organised jointly with the Council of Europe's Special Representative on migration and refugees and the Youth Department.

**2-3 March, The Hague:** Meeting of the Bureau and Standing Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) with the participation of the Icelandic Permanent Secretary of State.

**6-8 March, New York:** Side event during the sixty-seventh session of the Commission on the Status of Women (CSW) on "Nordic solutions to online gender-based violence" organised jointly with the other Nordic countries. Iceland will also organise a side event together with the Council of Europe's Division for Gender Equality.

**8 March, Strasbourg:** Launch of a digital calendar on International Women's Day organised jointly with the Council of Europe's Division for Gender Equality. The Prime Minister of Iceland will deliver a special message on social media to highlight the Icelandic entry in the calendar and invite other Council of Europe members States to do the same.

**21-23 March, Strasbourg:** 44<sup>th</sup> session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities with an address by the Minister of Infrastructure of Iceland – An event will be organised to highlight the contribution of the regional authorities to the priorities of the Icelandic Presidency.

**23 March, Strasbourg:** Seminar on "Binding force: Institutional dialogue between the European Court of Human Rights and the Committee of Ministers under Article 46 of the European Convention on Human Rights" organized jointly with the European Court of Human Rights and the Council of Europe Department for the Execution of the Judgments of the European Court of Human Rights

**28 March, Reykjavik:** Conference on an "Integrated child protection system to combat violence against children and providing children with access to services" with the participation of the Icelandic Minister of Education and Children organised jointly with the Council of Europe's Division for Children's Rights.

**29-30 March, Reykjavik:** Meeting of the Council of Europe's Steering Committee for the Rights of the Child (CDENF) organised jointly with the Council of Europe's Division for Children's Rights.

**5 April, Strasbourg:** Special focus at the 1462<sup>nd</sup> meeting of the Ministers' Deputies on the abolition of the death penalty organised jointly with the Permanent Representation of France to the Council of Europe.

**24-28 April, Strasbourg:** Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) with address by the Icelandic Minister for Foreign Affairs.

**24-28 April, Strasbourg:** Events related to preventing and combating violence and discrimination against LBQ women in Europe with the participation of the Icelandic Minister for Foreign Affairs organised jointly with the Council of Europe's SOGI unit and the Parliamentary Assembly's Parliamentary Platform for the rights of LGBTI people in Europe.

**26 April, Strasbourg:** Conference on “The Need for Green Public Administration in the Context of Good Democratic Governance: Exchange of best European practice” with the participation of the Icelandic Minister for Foreign Affairs organised in connection with the meeting of the Council of Europe’s European Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG).

**27-28 April, Strasbourg:** Annual conference of the Council of Europe’s Gender Equality Commission (GEC) with a focus on the role of men and boys in gender equality policies and in policies to combat violence against women with the participation of the Icelandic Minister for Foreign Affairs. The Icelandic Barbershop concept will be introduced in relation to the conference.

**3 May, Strasbourg:** Conference on “The right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment in practice” with the participation of the Icelandic Minister of the Environment, Energy and Climate organised in connection with the meeting of the Council of Europe’s Drafting Group on Human Rights and Environment (CDDH-ENV).

**3 May, Strasbourg:** Special focus at the 1465<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Ministers' Deputies on Media Freedom to mark World Press Freedom Day with the participation of the Icelandic Minister of the Environment, Energy and Climate.

**4 May, Strasbourg:** Conference on the “Subsidiarity Principle: National implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights” organised jointly with the Council of Europe’s Department for the Implementation of Human Rights, Justice and Legal Co-operation Standards.

**5 May, Kristiansand:** European Conference on Democracy and Human Rights organised by the Council of Europe, the University of Agder, Kilden Performing Arts Centre, Sørlandets Kunstmuseum (SKMU), Arkivet Peace and Human Rights Centre, Cultiva Foundation, and Agder County Council.

**11 May, Reykjavik:** 2023 IDAHOT+ Forum organised jointly with the Council of Europe’s SOGI unit and the European Governmental LGBTI Focal Points Network (EFPN).

**16-17 May, Reykjavik:** 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe.

**17 May, Reykjavik:** Handover of the presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to Latvia.

**Summer 2024, Reykjavik:** As a follow-up to the environmental focus of the Icelandic Presidency, the Annual Joint Meeting of the Governing Board and the Administrative Council of the Council of Europe Development Bank will be held in Iceland with a proposed special focus on the environment.

### **Cultural Programme**

**9 November, Église Saint-Guillaume, Strasbourg:** Concert with Icelandic ensemble Umbra.

**5 December, Star Saint-Exupéry Strasbourg:** Avant-première of the Icelandic film Godland followed by a meeting with the director, Hlynur Pálmason.

**8 December, Librairie Kléber, Strasbourg:** Icelandic Christmas book flood.

**8 December, Council of Europe, Strasbourg:** Charity market in solidarity with Ukraine organised jointly with the Ukrainian Section of the Amicale.

**8 December, La Laiterie, Strasbourg:** Concert with Icelandic metal band Skálmöld.

**26 January to 5 February, Strasbourg:** Icelandic restaurant week at four restaurants in the city (The Drunky Stork Social Club, Mademoiselle 10, La Casserole and Halle du Marché Gare

**24 February, Opéra National du Rhin, Strasbourg:** Opera night - The Human Voice by Francis Poulenc/Anna Þorvaldsdóttir.

**21 March, Strasbourg Cathedral:** Johannespassion à trois, concert with Icelandic tenor Benedikt Kristjánsson, Italian musician Philipp Lamprecht and German harpsichordist Elina Albach.

**26-27 April, Médiathèque André Malraux, Strasbourg:** Children’s performance show, Manndýr, with Icelandic/French artist Aude Busson.

**6 May, Strasbourg:** Iceland day with a taste of Iceland for the whole family.