

**Speech of Gerhard Ermischer, President of CINGO
at the 135th session of the Committee of Ministers
Chisinau, Republic of Moldova, 15 May 2026**

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[Minister
Secretary General
Ministers and Excellencies
Ladies and Gentlemen]

We face many challenges to our liberal democracy today, which is reflected in the many decisions taken at this ministerial conference. Of course, we support all efforts to defend and strengthen our democratic system, especially in support of Ukraine and the Special Tribunal.

Nevertheless there is one document that raises many concerns with us – the Chisinau Declaration. Although it starts with strong commitments to the independence of the Court of Human Rights and the integrity of the Convention System, these seem hollow when reading further down attempts to relativise Article 3 and recommendations that indeed interfere with the independence of the court.

The declaration speaks rightfully about the many hybrid attacks on Europe, including inter alia the cynical and inhumane use of migrants to destabilise our democratic system. But the link between problems with migration and the Court seems redundant when one looks at the few cases actually brought to the Court in this field and the number of verdicts in favour of states. The declaration speaks about the instrumentalisation of migrants, but we see here another instrumentalisation, to use the emotional theme of migration as a can opener to rip into the Convention System and the independence of the Court of Human Rights, in fact into the judicial system in general.

The real problems we are facing are not of a juridical but of a political nature; they need strong and common strategic answers, which will be complex and difficult and pose risks of their own. The discussion around a convention to combat foreign influence is a good example. We need instruments to fight back against the rising hybrid attacks which become more and more diversified and vicious. At the same time we must avoid collateral damage to the values and principles we want and need to defend. We need all our strength and cooperation to achieve these goals. We need a strong pact for democracy and a smart strategy to strengthen the belief in our liberal democracy within and combat threats from outside.

So we should avoid shadow fights and concentrate on the defence of our principles – which includes acknowledging that they are demanding and not always easy to explain. But there cannot be a better place to find a common strategy than the Council of Europe. And as CINGO we stand ready to support any effort to win this battle against the authoritarian backlash, while staying critical and holding up these values also in the measures we take to protect them. Because if we give up on our values in defending them, what then is left to defend?

As President Maia Sandu said this morning: this institution was not founded for comfort, but as a line of defence.