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Address by Michael O'Flaherty
Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights

Madame la Présidente, Excellences,

A Reykjavik, les chefs d'État et de gouvernement ont décidé de renforcer l'institution du Commissaire aux droits de l'homme du Conseil de l'Europe, « notamment à la lumière de la nécessité d'une action rapide, et fondée sur des principes pour faire face au recul et aux autres défis évolutifs en matière de droits de l'homme ».

Depuis que j'ai pris mes fonctions au début du mois d'avril, j'ai consacré les ressources supplémentaires mises à la disposition de mon Bureau à la réalisation des domaines prioritaires identifiés par le Sommet.

L'un de ces domaines est la capacité de réagir rapidement aux situations qui nécessitent une attention urgente. Cela correspond à ma vision pour une institution agile et flexible.

Mais la déclaration du Sommet fait également référence au rôle du Commissaire dans trois domaines supplémentaires.

First, on Ukraine: I visited Ukraine immediately after I took office in order to witness first-hand the devastating consequences of the Russian aggression. The Reykjavik Declaration's call to action on the human rights situation of Ukrainian children was my guiding light.

I have returned convinced of the need for all of us to continue to pay close attention to the human rights of Ukrainian children, wherever they are. Every effort must be made to ensure the speedy return of children transferred to Russia and Belarus, and I urge you to keep this issue at the top of your agendas.

There are other things that cannot wait until the war is over. Helping Ukraine to ensure that every child can go to school, in dignity and safety, is another urgent concern where you, as European leaders, have a key role.

The existential threat facing Ukraine is at the same time the supreme challenge for the entire human rights system on our continent. I intend to play my part by offering my voice for the benefit of the victims of Russia's aggression.

Second, on the execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights: their timely and full execution is an unconditional obligation under the European Convention. This international legal obligation should be coupled with political commitment at domestic level. I will engage with member states to sustain or generate such commitment. I will ensure that unexecuted judgments inform the agenda of my country-specific work. I will also support the Committee of Ministers in its supervisory role.

Third, on the protection of the environment: human rights and the environment are interdependent. The recent landmark rulings delivered by the Court confirm that climate change poses an existential risk for humankind and that this triggers a duty for states. I will work to ensure that the green transition is a just one and that it fully respects human rights.

There will be other priority topics, too, with the human rights of Roma and other forgotten people of Europe as paramount. I will also focus on a human rights' respectful regulation of artificial intelligence, and stand up for the rights of women.

Finally, I will accompany and support human rights defenders and National Human Rights Structures so that they are allowed to play their essential role in our societies.

None of this can be achieved without the close cooperation of member states.

I look forward to engaging with you to realise these goals.

Thank you.