



Ministry of Foreign Affairs
of the Czech Republic

Priorities of the Czech Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe

May 2017



Chairmanship of the Czech Republic
Council of Europe
May – November 2017

Présidence de la République tchèque
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For the second time in its history, the Czech Republic is assuming the chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, an international organisation established in 1949 to promote European values and the principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law that form the basis for today's European cooperation. In the early nineties, prior to the first Czech Chairmanship, many Czechs and other nations came to see the Council of Europe as a symbol of the democratic Europe to which they were returning. Ever since, we have felt that being part of the Council of Europe means belonging to the family of European democracies and sharing the values that lie at the heart of every free society.

Democracy, human rights and the rule of law are the enduring values which the Czech Republic wants to advance, building on the results of the successful preceding chairmanships. During its six-month Chairmanship term, the Czech Republic will seek to further promote and strengthen international human rights mechanisms, especially the European Court of Human Rights. The Czech Chairmanship will also actively support efforts to further strengthen the rule of law, as one of the three fundamental pillars of the Council of Europe.

To the Czech Republic, promoting human rights necessarily involves overcoming the historical, social, cultural, religious, as well as ideological, obstacles to equality. Promoting gender equality, eliminating discrimination and safeguarding the rights of persons belonging to vulnerable or disadvantaged groups, such as persons belonging to national and ethnic minorities or migrant children, are therefore topics of key importance for the Czech Chairmanship.

One of the necessary safeguards of democracy is the broadest possible participation in public affairs at all levels of governance. The Czech Chairmanship therefore intends to encourage activities contributing to local democracy and to the development of participatory democracy and stronger democratic institutions. Specific focus will also be given to education for equipping young people and adults to play an active part in democratic life and exercise their rights and responsibilities in society.

1. Protecting the Human Rights of Persons Belonging to Vulnerable or Disadvantaged Groups and Promoting Gender Equality

The Czech Chairmanship's priority is to secure human rights for all people, including those potentially disadvantaged in obtaining full and equal access to human rights. The disadvantages may be due to the social status attached to some groups or minorities, or to attitudes still persistent in society. Working for their human rights which includes tackling their social exclusion or extreme poverty, will also contribute to democracy as the persons belonging to these groups would become increasingly empowered to participate in social life, including political life, at the central and local levels. In this context, it is essential to strengthen the rights of all persons without discrimination through the implementation of the recommendations of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) and the implementation of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) and the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages (ECRML).

The Czech Chairmanship plans to hold several conferences on the rights of persons belonging to vulnerable or disadvantaged groups.

The Roma are one of Europe's most disadvantaged groups, as documented in the country reports of ECRI, opinions of the Advisory Committee on the FCNM and reports of the Expert Committee on the ECRML. Overcoming the barriers to full enjoyment of the civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights of persons belonging to the Roma community is one of the Czech Republic's long-standing priorities, in line with the Strasbourg Declaration on Roma adopted by the Committee of Ministers in 2010. In this spirit, the Czech Chairmanship will host a meeting of the Ad hoc Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues (CAHROM) at the turn of May and June 2017.

Europe has lived with and been dependent upon migration since time immemorial; nonetheless, the phenomenon can still evoke strong feelings and gives rise to many challenges which, for a large part, do not fall strictly within the remit of the Council of Europe. The member States of this Organisation are committed, first and foremost, to international human rights standards, including and primarily the European Convention on Human Rights. In this respect, the migration crisis has raised the sensitive question of the human rights of migrants, especially migrant children. An international expert conference to be organised by the Czech Chairmanship in Prague in September 2017 will look at the legal and practical aspects of detention of migrant children and its alternatives, a topic recently much discussed in the Council of Europe.

The conference will, inter alia, draw on the work of the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees and build upon the new Council of Europe Action Plan on protecting refugees and migrant children.

The Czech Chairmanship is aware that protection of the rights of the child and support for families is a key component for the development and functioning of society, as illustrated by the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016-2021), adopted by the Committee of Ministers in March 2016. The international expert conference organised in September 2017 in Prague will be dedicated to the so far relatively marginalised topic of the use of measures leading to the detentions of children in institutions, not only within the criminal justice system but also in the social welfare system with the aim of ensuring protection of the child. The conference will assess such a practice against the background of human rights obligations, and will present examples of good practice implemented in some of Council of Europe Member States.

The Czech Chairmanship will also take steps to encourage the broadest possible ratification and implementation of the Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention), as well as to secure the effective implementation of the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child. A conference will mark the 10th anniversary of the opening for signature of the Lanzarote Convention in October 2017.

The current challenges faced by European youth will be discussed at a European symposium in Prague in June 2017, bringing together representatives of governments and non-governmental organisations from Council of Europe member States. The discussion will focus also on understanding and inspiring ways in which youth policy can address these challenges.

A conference to mark the 20th anniversary of the opening for signature of the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine (Oviedo Convention) will meet in Strasbourg in October 2017. The focus will be on the relevance of the Oviedo Convention principles and possible challenges raised by developments in the biomedical field. Particular attention will be paid to children's rights in this context.

In addition, the Czech Chairmanship intends to further strengthen the work of the Council of Europe in promoting gender equality. Gender equality is a core European value, and yet there are so many challenges involved in making it a reality. An international expert conference on the collection of gender

equality data, to be held in Prague in November 2017, will draw attention to this issue, in line with the Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017. The focus will be on victimisation statistics and the role of statistical data in the implementation of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. The conference will be followed by an off-site meeting of the Council of Europe Gender Equality Commission.

2. Strengthening the Rule of Law

The Czech Republic's policy to promote human rights and democracy is built around the existing international commitments that form the universal framework for the protection of all internationally recognised human rights. Putting an emphasis on the fulfilment of the commitments of States is the way to really improve human rights protection worldwide. In other words, a State's readiness to protect human rights and respect the principles of democracy and the rule of law should be measured not only by the number of international human rights conventions the State has ratified or acceded to, but also by the consistency with which the State fulfils its commitments, openly and effectively co-operates with international monitoring mechanisms and complies with their recommendations.

Since its establishment, the Council of Europe has developed a range of highly efficient human rights mechanisms that play a pivotal role in the European human rights protection system. Attention is chiefly focused on the European Court of Human Rights which safeguards full implementation of the commitments arising from the European Convention on Human Rights and its Protocols. There has been a series of high- and expert-level conferences in Interlaken, Izmir, Brighton and Brussels to discuss the Court's situation and consider how to streamline and speed up the processing of its cases and clear the backlog. Many of the measures are already in place, following decisions taken by the Committee of Ministers and other stakeholders, including the Court itself. The Czech Republic's support of the European Court of Human Rights will reflect the results of these conferences wherever they are most relevant to the future functioning of this unique mechanism.

The States Parties to the European Convention on Human Rights have agreed to abide by the Court's judgments. The extent to which the judgments are treated as binding and executed is one of the criteria against which the rule of law is measured. A conference of Supreme Court Presidents on the binding force of the judicial decisions will be organised by the Czech Chairmanship in Brno in June 2017. Government agents representing their States before the

Court will discuss the Court's situation at an informal meeting in Prague. Full national implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights is the key to strengthening the Court's subsidiary role and overall operational capacity. Education on the Convention system plays a crucial role in achieving this aim. The annual conference of the European Programme for Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (HELP) will meet in Strasbourg in June 2017 under the auspices of the Czech Chairmanship.

The rule of law is recognised as one of the pillars of the political and legal system. As such, it needs to be supported by mechanisms serving to prevent the abuse of power, exclude undue political or economic influences and corruption, and to detect, punish and remedy such violations. An international conference to discuss the outcomes of the Fourth Evaluation Round of the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO), dedicated to the prevention of corruption in relation to parliamentarians, judges and prosecutors, will take place in Prague in November 2017.

The Czech Chairmanship intends to support the finalisation of the modernisation of the Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data (ETS No. 108) as a means to strengthen the protection of the rights to private life and data protection in the digital era.

3. Supporting Local and Regional Democracy and Public Administration Reforms

The Czech Republic will support the development of local and regional democracy as one of the core components of the democracy pillar. The focus will be on the development of good local and regional governance, and on the innovation tools that would facilitate an effective response of municipalities and regions to today's challenges. The Czech Chairmanship will in particular encourage the sharing of experience and knowledge on public administration reforms. Another important area will be participatory democracy as the vital basis for citizens' engagement in local and regional public life. Last but not least, the Czech Chairmanship will encourage close co-operation with the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe ("Congress") and non-governmental organisations in addressing shared problems.

In the context of seeking common solutions to the main problems facing European society, the European Landscape Convention plays a specific role.

In this context, the 19th Meeting of the Workshops for the implementation of the European Landscape Convention will take place in September 2017 in the city of Brno with a special emphasis on local democracy.

The Congress plays an important role in promoting local and regional democracy and improving local and regional government. The Congress Bureau will meet in the Czech Republic in June 2017 under the auspices of the Czech Chairmanship. In September 2017, the Czech Chairmanship will organise an international expert conference on “Improving the Quality of Public Administration at the Local and Regional Level” in Prague in co-operation with the European Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG).

The Czech Chairmanship refers to the important role of civil society for the development of democracy. It will further support building partnerships with NGOs in the process of promoting active citizenship at local as well as national level.

4. Promoting Human Rights Education and Linguistic Skills

Promotion of human rights and democracy through education is an important building block of democracy. A Conference on the State of Citizenship and Human Rights Education in Europe, to be held in Strasbourg in June 2017 under the auspices of the Czech Chairmanship, should result in more intensive dialogue on experience and challenges in education for human rights, democracy and the rule of law in different national education systems. The conference will bring together representatives of the government sector, educational institutions, and non-governmental organisations with the aim to improve implementation of the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights, an effective tool for advancing human rights and democracy through education. A Prague Forum conference on the implementation of the Council of Europe Reference Framework for Competences for Democratic Citizenship, to be held in October 2017, will significantly contribute to the promotion of this reference framework.

The Czech Republic continuously develops and improves tools for linguistic and cultural inclusion at Czech schools to help them deal with the increasing number of pupils whose mother tongue is different from the language of instruction. In this connection, the Czech Chairmanship will actively co-operate with the European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe (ECML) on promoting teachers' and other language professionals' capacities to develop linguistic skills and intercultural competences of learners, as a prerequisite for their successful education. In the

framework of the ECML's four-year programme 2016-2019, this co-operation will involve preparation and organisation of mediation skills as well as dissemination of the results of projects focused on the work in multilingual classrooms and establishment of European standards specifying proficiency levels of sign languages. The cooperation will proceed through the membership of the Czech representative in the ECML Governing Board and through the involvement of Czech experts in the project teams and networks.

5. Co-operation and Co-ordination with Other International Organisations

The Czech Chairmanship supports the Council of Europe's close co-operation with the European Union, the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe, the United Nations and other international organisations, including through the participation in important meetings of partner organisations, the sharing of information and with regard to the need to co-ordinate the response to challenges facing today's Europe.

On-going conflicts in Europe and beyond pose an exceptional challenge to democracy and our shared values. Extremism and radicalism is on the rise in many member States. The Czech Chairmanship, in co-operation with the Austrian OSCE Chairmanship, will hold a high-level roundtable to discuss the activities undertaken by the two organisations in combating extremism and radicalism. An important reference framework in this respect is the 2015-2017 Council of Europe Action Plan on the fight against violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism adopted at the 125th session of the Committee of Ministers in Brussels in May 2015.

The Czech Chairmanship will take an active part in a joint conference on "Internet Freedom and the Role of Internet Intermediaries", organized in co-operation with the Austrian Chairmanship of the OSCE and the OSCE Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media in October 2017 in Vienna.

The close co-operation and partnership with the European Union is essential, and today the European Union is co-financing a large number of Council of Europe activities in the field. The Czech Chairmanship will endeavour to further strengthen such co-operation. Co-ordination and working-contacts at all levels between Strasbourg and Brussels have over the last years significantly improved.

Annex

Czech Chairmanship Calendar of Events

| Date Venue | Event Responsible Czech authority |
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| 19 May 2017 Nicosia | Takeover of the chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe Ministry of Foreign Affairs |
| 23 May 2017 Strasbourg | Opening of the exhibition 'Charter 77' by the Czech Minister of Culture in the Palace of Europe; the official launch of the Czech Chairmanship cultural program Permanent Mission |
| 24-26 May 2017 Brno | Expert conference "Plagiarism Across Europe and Beyond 2017" Mendel University |
| 30 May 2017 Prague | Meeting of the Bureau and Standing Committee of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Parliament |
| 31 May-3 June 2017 Prague | Meeting of the Ad-Hoc Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller issues (CAHROM) Government Office, Minister for Human Rights, Equal Opportunities and Legislation |
| 1 June 2017 Vienna | Presentation of the chairmanship's priorities to the OSCE Permanent Council by the Chairman of the Committee of Ministers Ministry of Foreign Affairs |
| 9 June 2017 Strasbourg | Council of Europe CDDH high-level seminar "Human Rights and Business" Ministry of Foreign Affairs |
| 12-14 June 2017 Prague | European symposium "Youth Policy Responses to the Contemporary Challenges Faced by Young People" Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports |
| 14 June 2017 Prague | Roundtable of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers' Chairmanship and the OSCE Chairmanship on radicalisation Ministry of Foreign Affairs |
| 15-16 June 2017 Brno | Meeting of the Bureau of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and seminar on Integration Policies Ministry of the Interior, Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic |
| 19-21 June 2017 Brno | Conference "Binding force of judicial decisions" Supreme Court, Ministry of Justice |

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| 20-22 June 2017 Strasbourg | Conference on the state of citizenship and human rights education in Europe Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports |
| 22-23 June 2017 Strasbourg | Annual conference of the European Programme for Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (HELP Network Conference) Ministry of Justice |
| 26-30 June 2017 Strasbourg | Third part of the 2017 session of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Permanent Delegation of the Parliament, Ministry of Foreign Affairs |
| 5-7 September 2017 Brno, Křtiny | 19th Council of Europe Meeting of the Workshops for the implementation of the European Landscape Convention “The implementation of the European Landscape Convention at local level: the local democracy” Ministry for the Environment, Mendel University |
| 11-12 September 2017 Prague | Expert conference – detention of children in child welfare institutions Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs |
| 19-20 September 2017 Prague | International conference on the Procedure of Certification of Suitability to the Monographs of the European Pharmacopoeia Ministry of Health |
| 20-21 September 2017 Prague | Conference “Improving the Quality of Public Administration at the Local and Regional Level” Ministry of the Interior |
| 25-26 September 2017 Prague | Conference on current human rights issues – detention of migrant children and its alternatives Ministry of Justice |
| 9-13 October 2017 Strasbourg | Fourth part of the 2017 session of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Permanent Delegation of the Parliament, Ministry of Foreign Affairs |
| 13 October 2017 Vienna | Conference on “Internet Freedom and the Role of Internet Intermediaries”, in cooperation with the Austrian Chairmanship of the OSCE and the OSCE Office of the Representative on Freedom of the Media Ministry of Foreign Affairs |
| 18-20 October 2017 Strasbourg | 34 th Session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe – presentation of Czech towns and regions Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic, Association of Regions of the Czech Republic, Ministry of the Interior |

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| 24-25 October 2017 Strasbourg | Conference to mark the 20th anniversary of the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine Ministry of Health |
| 26-27 October 2017 Prague | 8 th Prague Forum on the Council of Europe Education Policies Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports |
| October 2017 Prague | Experts' Assembly of the Compendium of Cultural Policies & Trends in Europe Ministry of Culture |
| October 2017 Prague | Meeting of government agents representing States before the European Court of Human Rights Ministry of Justice |
| 9-10 November 2017 Prague | Conference on the results of the Fourth Evaluation Round of the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) Ministry of Justice |
| 14 November 2017 Prague | Conference on gender equality statistics Government Office, Minister for Human Rights, Equal Opportunities and Legislation |
| 15-16 November 2017 Prague | Off-site meeting Council of Europe Gender Equality Commission Government Office, Minister for Human Rights, Equal Opportunities and Legislation |
| 15 November 2017 Strasbourg | Handover of the chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe Ministry of Foreign Affairs |

