



**Introductory speaking points
on behalf of the Czech Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers
of the Council of Europe**

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OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna

June 1, 2017

/as delivered/

- Mr Chairman, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,
- It is indeed my pleasure to discuss the priorities of the Czech Republic's Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.
- We find ourselves in Europe at a difficult time when many established European standards turn out to be just as fragile as democratic society can ever be, and existing security safeguards begin to crumble. Through our Chairmanship we do not seek to find a universal cure for all diseases but we are well aware of these challenges and ready to contribute to their solutions.
- The Czech Chairmanship wishes to continue the tradition of the fruitful cooperation with the OSCE. Although the core mandates of our two organisations are distinct, there are number of areas where we can work together and complement each other.
- Our mutual areas of interest are well illustrated by the themes for the regular meetings of the Council of Europe / OSCE Co-ordination Group. The Czech Chairmanship is preparing its next meeting in Vienna in November, where we shall discuss the important priorities in the fight against terrorism and trafficking in human beings.
- I would like to emphasize the cooperation in the field of election observations, where we have established institutional links between the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and ODIHR, as well as OSCE Parliamentary



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Assembly. This cooperation proved to be effective and contributes to upholding democratic standards in the election procedures throughout Europe.

- Last but not least, allow me to stress the importance of freedom of media, which remains in the focus of the Council of Europe, and the key role played by the OSCE Representative for Freedom of the Media. We do hope that our joint efforts in this area will guarantee that the media will be able to perform their crucial role in a democratic society, namely providing objective, relevant and up-to-date information to the citizens and thus enable them to actively participate in strengthening our democratic societies.
- And now I would like to present to you the priorities of the Czech Chairmanship in the Committee of Ministers, in which we also bear in mind the continuity of cooperation with the OSCE.
- We have identified five priorities that, we believe, build upon the core objectives of the Council of Europe and at the same time enable us to share our very own experience and know-how. The priorities of our Chairmanship have been defined in response to challenges in all three areas of the Council of Europe's mission – human rights, democracy and the rule of law. We have worked intensely with other ministries and of course the Council's secretariat over the last year and a half to identify the areas of common interest.
- Our Chairmanship will focus on: (1) protecting the human rights of persons belonging to vulnerable or disadvantaged groups and promoting gender equality; (2) strengthening the rule of law; (3) promotion of human rights education and linguistic skills; (4) supporting local and regional democracy and public administration reforms, and (5) cooperation with other international organizations.
- Over 20 expert conferences and meetings dealing with the priorities will be held during our Chairmanship, mostly in Prague and Strasbourg but also in Brno in the Czech Republic.
- With regard to our first priority *Protecting the human rights of persons belonging to vulnerable or disadvantaged groups and promoting gender equality*, we believe that in order to genuinely respect, promote and protect human rights we have to guarantee equal access to human rights for all people including vulnerable groups. Exclusion, poverty or discrimination are challenges that cannot be unanswered. We will pay particular attention to migrants and children migrants, the Roma, children and women.
- Within our second priority, *Strengthening the rule of law*, we would like to put special emphasis on effective implementation of international commitments and the Court's judgements. Czech Chairmanship attaches great importance to the binding force of the Courts' judgements. We will organize a major international conference on the binding force of the judicial decisions in the framework of our Chairmanship in June. Each state has obligation to guarantee to everyone the right to have a binding and enforceable judicial decision. Also particular focus will be given to the fight against corruption.
- Our third priority, *Supporting local and regional democracy and public administration reforms*, is a fundamental element of the democracy pillar. The Czech Chairmanship will focus on good governance practices and on the



promotion of active citizenship. The Member States may provide many invaluable insights and we would like to facilitate their sharing as much as possible.

- Our fourth priority *Promoting human rights education and linguistic skills* is another important building block of human rights and democracy promotion. This priority chapter includes dialogue on experience and challenges in education for human rights, democracy and the rule of law in different national education systems. We will continue to develop and improve tools for linguistic and cultural inclusion.
- Our last priority area is defined as *Cooperation and coordination with other international organizations*. Given the magnitude of the challenges ahead of us, we attach particular importance to cooperation and coordination with other international stakeholders.
- The Czech Republic supports the Council of Europe's close co-operation with the OSCE, the European Union and the United Nations as well as 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.
- As you are probably aware, we plan joint projects with the Austrian Chairmanship of the OSCE. A round-table which should build on the activities undertaken by both organizations in regard to the fight against extremism and radicalization will be organized in mid-June in Prague.
- Later in fall, our two organizations will cooperate again in the form of a joint conference on "Internet Freedom and the Role of Internet Intermediaries".
- Mr Chairman, Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,
- Allow me to reiterate the full determination of the Czech Chairmanship to work relentlessly in the next six months in close co-operation with you, the participating States and the team of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe. Our aim is to further promote and enhance the common values and objectives of our both organizations.
- I hope we can count on your support as we push this agenda forward with all our strength.
- Thank you very much.

