

1. Presentation of the priorities of the Danish Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers

Mr A. Samuelsen, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Denmark, made the following statement:

“It is a great honour for me – and for Denmark – to assume the chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers.

The Council of Europe plays an essential role in promoting democracy, rule of law and human rights. The importance of this Organisation as a guardian of these values and its role as a forum for dialogue between European countries should not be underestimated.

Since the very beginning we have been closely involved in supporting, strengthening and promoting the work and the further development of the Organisation. We are deeply committed to the Convention and the Court.

We will continue in that tradition with increased intensity and commitment over the coming six months. We will do our best to support the Council of Europe in continuing being an organisation with strong values that protects human rights, democracy, gender equality and the rule of law.

Our continent faces many challenges: extremism, terrorism and organised crime are creating insecurity and fear, which are reinforced by other developments like migration.

The Council of Europe is not immune to these challenges. We must address them openly and in honest dialogue with each other. We must preserve and protect the Organisation and make sure that it remains strong and relevant in the future. And we must stand firm in our values.

The Convention system has done a remarkable job in promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law, all over Europe. Yet, at the same time, the system is not perfect. The enormous caseload of the Court is deeply troubling.

And it is equally troubling that many of its decisions and judgments are not being implemented. It is also a problem if the practice of the Court does not always resonate with the understanding by the general public of human rights.

We need to find ways to deal with these challenges affecting the convention system. We need to engage in a constructive, open and honest dialogue on how to deal with them.

This is why the main priority of our chairmanship is the continued reform of the European human rights system. Our focus will be, first of all, to ensure that the reforms agreed already are put into effect. This requires, among other things, that all member States ratify Protocol No. 15, agreed in Brighton.

We also want to explore new tools on how to ensure a closer dialogue between the European and national level, ensuring that member States have a fair say on the interpretation of the Convention. Making it easier for member States to intervene in cases before the Court – and argue their case – will be one specific priority for us.

We also have a number of other ideas we want to discuss to address the challenges for the system. We have therefore invited member States and experts to a high-level expert conference in Denmark next week.

Based on the discussions at that conference, we will host a ministerial meeting in Denmark, in April next year, with the purpose of adopting a political declaration that will contribute to the process of future-proofing the Convention system. That is our ambition and we hope for your support.

During the chairmanship, we will furthermore focus on equal opportunities, both gender equality and equal opportunities for LGBTI persons. The new Gender Equality Strategy of the Council of Europe will be launched at a conference in Denmark in May 2018.

In addition we will – in close co-operation with the Parliamentary Assembly – organise a conference focusing on good practices and inclusive policies on marriage and adoption in same-sex families.

The education of democratic citizens and the creation of inclusive communities are crucial in combating radicalisation and extremism. It is important to involve children and young people in democracy.

We wish to build on the Council of Europe's reference framework and strengthen democratic competencies such as mutual understanding, reflection, critical thinking and knowledge of freedoms and solidarity among people in Europe.

Denmark wants to strengthen co-operation between member States on disability rights and with particular focus on changing attitudes. The aim is to further real enjoyment of human rights by persons with disabilities including prevention of violence and abuse of particularly girls and women with disabilities.

For many years, the fight against torture has been a key priority for Denmark. Torture is often committed in the early stages of police custody and pre-trial detention.

Therefore, we wish to give special attention to the prevention of torture in that regard. We will host a conference on this issue in March 2018 in Copenhagen. The aim will be to share and develop best practices.

Allow me to draw your attention to the biggest event during Danish Chairmanship: The meeting of the Committee of Ministers in Elsinore on 17 and 18 May 2018. I look forward to welcoming your Foreign Ministers there as my guests.

It is my ambition that during the Danish Chairmanship we find solutions and craft compromises that contribute to the strengthening of this great Organisation.

Some of the difficult issues that we will have on our agenda over the next six months must be handled with great care. I can assure you that we stand ready to listen to you and that we will always perform our duties with an open and constructive attitude.

Let me finally express my appreciation to the previous two chairmanships, the Secretary General and the Secretariat for the valuable and very important support offered to us in the preparation of our chairmanship.