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## Priorities of the French Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (17 May – 27 November 2019)

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The French Presidency will be marked by the official celebration of the Council of Europe's 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary in Strasbourg, on the margins of the Parliamentary Assembly October part-Session, as well as the taking of office of a new Secretary General.

France will ensure that the Organisation's cohesion is maintained. With its 47 member States, the Council of Europe forms the main platform for dialogue and co-operation on the scale of the European continent and has contributed to the creation of a shared legal space. Confronted with the rise of populism and extremism, we must gather around common values, build on the foundation of the European Convention on Human Rights and uphold the authority of the Court that guarantees compliance with the Convention.

The French Presidency will work in a spirit of trust and dialogue with the Parliamentary Assembly to overcome the difficulties of the last few years and boost the capacity of those two bodies to act jointly in crisis situations, within the framework of the principles that guide our Organisation.

France wishes to use the opportunity afforded by its Presidency to help build the Council of Europe of tomorrow. This means consolidating the achievements of the past 70 years and responding to new challenges linked to the development of technologies and of societies.

The Council of Europe has always demonstrated its ability to innovate and anticipate, devising new instruments to protect rights and freedoms. It must continue in this pioneering role for the benefit of our continent's 830 million inhabitants. This also presupposes that the Organisation's financial sustainability is guaranteed.

With all this in mind, France has selected three priorities for its Presidency: 1) preserving and consolidating the European system of human rights protection, 2) promoting equality and living together, 3) meeting the new challenges facing human rights and the rule of law.

### 1. Preserving and consolidating the European system of human rights protection

The French Presidency will pursue the work embarked upon by the previous chairmanships to uphold the independence and authority of the European Court of Human Rights and give it the means to function ever more effectively. It will place emphasis on the implementation of the Convention and the Court's judgments by member States and on dialogue between judges enabling national courts to play their rightful role, in accordance with the principle of subsidiarity. This dialogue has made great strides in recent years, partly thanks to the superior courts network and the entry into force of Protocol No. 16. At the invitation of the *Conseil constitutionnel*, the *Conseil d'État* and the *Cour de Cassation*, the supreme courts of the member States will meet in Paris on 12 and 13 September to debate on relations with the European Court of Human Rights and proposals for strengthening dialogue between judges at European level.

The Presidency will provide an opportunity to reiterate a number of crucial advances resulting from the action of the Council of Europe, such as the prohibition of the death penalty, which we will highlight in conjunction with the city of Strasbourg.

With its traditional attachment to a Social Europe, France will highlight during its presidency the European Social Charter, the revised Social Charter and the collective complaints mechanism supporting it. These texts guarantee Europeans the possibility of leading a dignified and decent life by asserting their rights in areas such as housing, health, education or professional life. The Presidency will help to promote ratification of the Council of Europe's instruments and also cooperation with the European Union. It will further encourage discussion on how to improve existing procedures and dialogue between the European Committee of Social Rights and the member States.

Finally, the French Presidency will focus on children's rights, when the year 2019 marks the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child's 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary. A conference will give the opportunity to discuss the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016-2021) adopted in Sofia.

## **2. Promoting equality and living together**

The surge in phenomena linked to racism, intolerance and all forms of discrimination is a recurrent feature across our societies. The propagation of hate speech through digital media exacerbates friction and fault lines. Working alongside the States and other international organisations, the Council of Europe must promote the values of equality and living together, which are enshrined in its Statute, the European Convention on Human Rights and the Court's case law.

First and foremost, this requires action promoting equality between women and men and combating violence against women. France, together with Norway and other member States, has launched a campaign aiming to promote ratification of the Istanbul Convention, which is an international benchmark, both within the Council of Europe and for outside partners. While 34 member States have ratified this Convention already, further efforts are needed to clear up misunderstandings regarding the text. A meeting of all the international mechanisms which aim to combat violence against women will be held in Strasbourg on 23 and 24 May, followed by a conference on women's rights, and will provide an opportunity to send out a signal of unity and determination. France also wishes to highlight the important role played by the police in combating violence against women.

The celebration of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) in Paris on 26 and 27 September will be a time to take stock of progress made in this field as well as the new challenges to be taken up, and to emphasise two main themes: the inclusion in society of people exposed to racism and intolerance because they belong or are presumed to belong to a group; managing the opportunities and threats presented by new technologies and the internet regarding equality, racism, intolerance and discrimination. There will also be a segment featuring the rights of LGBTI persons.

The French Presidency will furthermore encourage discussion on the teaching of history in Europe. The way in which history is taught has a direct impact on relations between the peoples of Europe. Rather than nurturing antagonisms, it must foster a feeling of shared belonging. Following on from the task entrusted by the French Prime Minister to Alain Lamassoure, the Presidency will seek to network academic circles and education ministries in order to pool thoughts potentially leading to the setting up of an Observatory for History Teaching.

In the area of culture, the Presidency will focus on the question of heritage and on co-operation in the sphere of cinematographic production, including the celebration of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Eurimages, currently headed by Catherine Trautmann. In the health field, it will underline the major role played by the Council of Europe in the quality of medicines throughout the continent, including through the 10<sup>th</sup> edition of the European Pharmacopoeia. The Presidency is also keen to make the continent's young people more aware of what the Council of Europe does ("Enter"! Youth week).

## **3. Meeting the new challenges facing human rights and the rule of law**

The technological and societal upheavals confronting us raise many issues and call for adaptations of the instruments at our disposal.

Digital tools and the development of artificial intelligence are opening up new possibilities for citizens and court users. But they are also a potential threat to the exercise of rights and freedoms, forcing us to take all necessary precautions. The Council of Europe is committed to action in this field, thanks, in particular, to the adoption of an ethics charter.

Following on from the Helsinki conference on artificial intelligence, the French Presidency wishes to further explore the link between access to justice and the law on the one hand and digital tools on the other, as well as the implications of technological developments for criminal justice. To that end, it will organise a Conference of Justice Ministers of the Council of Europe in Strasbourg on 14 and 15 October.

Another key challenge in the digital sphere is protecting users. Accordingly, the Presidency intends to promote and encourage the Council of Europe's crucial activities in the area of personal data protection (Convention No. 108) and action against cybercrime (Budapest Convention), including by organising dedicated events.

France will also highlight the connection between democracy and information at the World Forum for Democracy to be held from 6 to 8 November. With input from civil society and the professional spheres concerned, the Forum will provide an opportunity to air the issues linked to reliable and high-quality information, and also the protection of journalists and the defence of freedom of expression and the media.

Finally, the French Presidency will emphasise the importance of fighting corruption when the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) marks its 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary. In particular, it will strive to promote co-operation between national authorities responsible for transparency in public life.

### **List of the Presidency's main events**

- 17 May: Start of the French Presidency of the Committee of Ministers, handover at the Ministerial meeting in Helsinki
- 23-24 May (Strasbourg): Conference "At the crossroads of women's rights: strengthening international co-operation to eliminate gaps between legal frameworks and their implementation"
- 4 June (Strasbourg): Seminar of the Committee on Bioethics, focusing on public debate
- 11-14 June (Toulouse): Meeting of the Ad hoc Committee of Experts on Roma and Traveller Issues (CAHROM)
- 12-14 June (Strasbourg): Conference on the globalisation of the Convention on Data Protection
- 17 June (Strasbourg): Conference on fighting corruption in Europe and celebration of the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO)
- 19-20 June (Strasbourg): Conference on the 10<sup>th</sup> edition of *European Pharmacopoeia*
- 20 June (Strasbourg): Workshop on terrorism victims (on the margin of the meeting of the Steering Committee for Human Rights – CDDH)
- 1 July (Paris): Meeting on fighting corruption in sport (IPACS)
- 4-5 July (Strasbourg): Conference HELP
- 8-12 July (Strasbourg): Enter ! Youth Week
- 12-13 September (Paris): Conference of the Heads of the Supreme Courts of the Council of Europe member States on dialogue between judges
- 18 September (Strasbourg): Commemoration of the first Committee of Ministers' meeting
- 19 September (Strasbourg): Seminar on the protection of social rights
- 24-25 September (Strasbourg): Conference of high-level representatives of interior ministers on the role of police in fighting violence against women
- 26-27 September (Paris): Conference on fighting racism and discrimination and celebration of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), seminar on hate speech and homophobic and transphobic violence

- 10 October (Strasbourg): Conference on fighting the death penalty
- 14-15 October (Strasbourg): Conference of Ministers of Justice on digital challenges for justice
- 17 October (Strasbourg): Celebration of the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of Eurimages
- 28-29 October (Strasbourg): Venice Commission intercultural workshop on high councils of magistrates and judicial independence
- 6-8 November (Strasbourg): The 2019 World Forum for Democracy, focusing on information and democracy
- 13-14 November: Conference on children's rights
- 14 November (Paris): Conference on human rights in the digital age, organised by the French National Assembly and Senate
- 19 November (Paris): Conference on the teaching of history in Europe
- 20-22 November (Strasbourg): Octopus Conference on cybercrime
- 25 or 26 November (Paris): Meeting of Ministers for Education
- 27 November (Strasbourg): End of the French Presidency – handover to Georgia