



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

Présidence de la République tchèque
Conseil de l'Europe
Mai – Novembre 2017

COMMITTEE
OF MINISTERS
COMITÉ
DES MINISTRES



MINISTERS' DEPUTIES

Information documents

CM/Inf(2017)21

10 November 2017¹

Stocktaking of the Czech Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (19 May-15 November 2017)

Introduction

On 19 May 2017, the Czech Republic assumed its second Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe since its accession to the Council of Europe in 1993. With respect to the important role that the Council of Europe has played in shaping the Czech Republic's path back into the family of European democracies, the chairmanship was a prestigious and challenging task.

The past six months have been framed not only by a series of turbulent political changes in some European countries, but also by terrorist attacks that have again sought to undermine the values that are common to all Europeans. The Chairmanship expressed solidarity to all those affected by these hideous crimes and reiterated its determination to fight against terrorism in all its forms. During its chairmanship, the Czech Republic ratified the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism (CETS No. 196) and its Additional Protocol (CETS No. 217) concerning foreign terrorist fighters which has been in force since 1 July 2017.

From the very beginning the Czech Chairmanship emphasised its commitment to the principles and goals that have guided the Council of Europe since its foundation. With this in mind, the priorities which were prepared focused 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) supporting local and regional democracy and public administration reforms, (4) promoting human rights education and linguistic skills and (5) co-operation and co-ordination with other international organizations.

The proper functioning of the Organisation is certainly a main priority for all. The Czech Chairmanship therefore expressed its strong regret at the decision of the Russian Federation to suspend payment of its remaining contribution to the 2017 Council of Europe budget. This decision, in breach of an unconditional obligation of all member States arising from Article 39 of the Statute of the Council of Europe, presents a serious challenge to the overall functioning of the Organisation. In his letter to the Minister for Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, the Chair of the Committee of Ministers expressed his sincere hope that, on the basis of mutual understanding and constructive dialogue, this unfortunate situation will be resolved as soon as possible.

During the six months of the Czech Chairmanship more than 20 events have been organised, devoted mostly to issues of current concern to the Council of Europe. A number of these topics will continue to retain the attention of the Committee of Ministers beyond the Czech Chairmanship. The priorities and concerns of the Chairmanship have also been raised during numerous bilateral meetings between the Chair of the Committee of Ministers and his European counterparts.

During its term, the Czech Chairmanship continued to strengthen the relationship between the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly. The Chair of the Committee of Ministers addressed the members of the Assembly during its summer and autumn part sessions and updated them on the work done in the Committee. He also had the opportunity to host the meeting of the Standing Committee in Prague in May. The President of the Czech Republic addressed the Assembly in October.

¹ This document has been classified restricted until examination by the Committee of Ministers.
Site internet : www.coe.int/cm

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

The Czech Chairmanship held several conferences where the commitments to respecting, protecting and promoting human rights with particular emphasis on gender equality, the protection of migrant children, as well as the rights of minorities and marginalized groups were reiterated.

The situation of Roma was among the most relevant issues addressed within this priority chapter. **The Ad-Hoc Committee of Experts on Roma and Travellers' issues met in Prague from 31 May to 3 June** to discuss some topical issues concerning the situation of Roma in Europe, with particular emphasis on the situation in the Czech Republic. On this occasion the Czech Chairmanship was able to present some of the successful projects implemented in support of Roma culture, such as the unique Museum of Romani Culture in Brno or the world Roma music festival Khamoro taking place in Prague, which are both the result of many years of cooperation between public institutions and civil society.

Children are particularly vulnerable and can face greater risks to their lives and well-being. The Chairmanship hosted several events which were devoted to young people and children's rights.

On 12-14 June, the Symposium "Youth Policy Responses to the Contemporary Challenges Faced by Young People" took place in Prague, as part of the Czech Chairmanship programme. The symposium was organised by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic in cooperation with the Erasmus+ National Agency of the Czech Republic and in partnership with the Council of Europe and the European Commission. The event gathered practitioners, researchers, policy makers and representatives of different European, national or local youth organisations to discuss the most compelling challenges that young people are facing, as well as current and possible policy responses to these challenges. In preparation for the symposium, participants were asked to submit examples of effective youth policy responses that have had a material impact on the lives of young people, in order to establish a compendium of youth policy practice for wider dissemination. Over 30 examples from 18 different countries, encompassing a wide range of initiatives, were submitted and a selection of these was published in *Compendium of Contemporary Youth Policy Responses*.

On 11 - 12 September, an expert conference on the detention of children in institutional care facilities within the system of social protection of children was held in Prague, with the participation of the Czech Minister of Labour and Social Affairs. The conference brought together leading experts representing the governments of Council of Europe member States, civil society, non-governmental organisations, social care facilities, municipalities, public administration as well as justice. It provided a valuable opportunity to discuss and assess a number of practical issues against the background of human rights obligations in this area. Examples of good practices in Council of Europe member States were presented and an open debate concerning particular social welfare systems round the world was initiated.

The Ministry of Justice, in cooperation with the Council of Europe, organised a two-day **international expert conference entitled "Immigration Detention of Children: Coming to a Close?" which took place in Prague on 25 - 26 September**. It served as an exchange of best practices in a number of areas including existing international human rights standards, views and approaches of regional and universal monitoring, judicial and quasi-judicial bodies, current actions promoting an end to the immigration detention of children, efforts in implementing effective alternatives to immigration detention, and other relevant experiences from the field. It brought together high-level stakeholders, representatives of international organisations, policy makers, governmental experts and civil society. The conference also contributed to the on-going work within the Council of Europe related to the immigration detention of children and efforts of States to seek effective alternatives to detention. Among the key messages was an extremely narrow space in international law for the immigration detention of children and a strong call on States to end this practice, while using less severe alternative measures. Particular attention was also drawn to the Council of Europe Action Plan on Protecting Refugee and Migrant Children adopted by the Committee of Ministers in Nicosia.

Gender equality and the prevention of violence against women was also given a major focus within this priority area, with an expert **conference on the collection of gender equality data** and the Council of Europe **Gender Equality Commission's meeting** taking place in Prague **on 14 and 15 November respectively**. Data collection and research are essential for effective policy making to prevent and combat violence against women and protect its victims. The conference facilitated the exchange and sharing of knowledge and examples of good practices in the field of research and data collection on violence against women and promoted networking among policy makers and experts. It provided a useful platform for discussion on the requirements on data collection set by the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. The draft Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy for 2018-2023 was discussed in detail during

the Gender Equality Commission's meeting. The meeting also allowed for work to continue on the draft Committee of Ministers recommendation to prevent and combat sexism. The Commission also held a debate on the situation of migrant women and families and agreed to further address the situation of women facing multiple discrimination.

2. Strengthening the rule of law

The Czech Chairmanship chose strengthening the rule of law as a priority line of action in its determination to promote values which we all defend within the Council of Europe.

A well-functioning judiciary is among the most important components of the rule of law. The Supreme Court of the Czech Republic, in co-operation with the Council of Europe and the Czech Ministry of Justice, organised a high-level international **conference "The binding effect of judicial decisions" in Brno, the capital of the Czech judiciary, on 19 – 21 June**. The conference, opened by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, the Prime Minister of the Czech Republic and the Czech Minister of Justice, provided an impressive forum for a discussion with Presidents of the Supreme and Constitutional Courts of the member States of the Council of Europe, as well as judges of European Courts and leading academics. The topic of the binding effect of judicial decisions of the European Court of Human Rights, the Court of Justice of the European Union and the national courts was discussed from many perspectives, including that of the execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights. The Conference offered a unique opportunity for a mutual exchange of views concerning the impact of judicial decisions of various judicial institutions on the development of case-law.

On 13 October, the Office of the Czech Government Agent, acting under the auspices of the Czech Ministry of Justice, organised an informal meeting of Government Agents representing their States before the European Court of Human Rights. The participants discussed various procedural aspects of treatment of applications lodged with the Court, including the enforcement of formal requirements for the submission of a valid application, immediate simplified communication procedures as well as the expansion of the notion of well-established case law, which are amongst the measures taken to tackle the Court's backlog of cases. This meeting aimed to prepare the Government Agents' biennial gathering with the Court scheduled for December 2017 and was therefore part of an on-going dialogue between the States and the Court within the concept of "shared responsibility".

In its day to day business, the Council of Europe contributes to the rule of law at the international level in various ways and the Czech Republic actively participates in these endeavours. A practical example may be the Declaration on Jurisdictional Immunities of State Owned Cultural Property. In this connection, a **seminar on "State Immunity under International Law and Current Challenges" was organised on 20 September 2017** on the occasion of the 54th meeting of the CAHDI. The Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs opened the seminar on behalf of the Czech Chairmanship. Legal experts from member States and from the Secretariat were among the speakers. All of them presented views on State Immunity from different perspectives and touched upon topical issues in this area, including the contribution of the Council of Europe on issues related to State Immunity, selected recent case law of national courts concerning State Immunity from jurisdiction and execution, as well as the origins and relevance of the Declaration on Jurisdictional Immunities of State Owned Cultural Property.

The Ministry of Justice of the Czech Republic together with the Group of States against Corruption of the Council of Europe (GRECO) organised a **high-level international conference entitled "Prevention of Corruption in Respect of Parliamentarians, Judges and Prosecutors: Main Trends and Lessons Learned from GRECO Fourth Evaluation Round"**. The conference took place **on 9-10 November 2017 in Prague** and brought together GRECO members as well as other international experts. In addition to taking stock of the main trends and lessons learned in the prevention of corruption in respect of members of parliament, judges and prosecutors, the Conference provided an opportunity to present and discuss the main achievements and good practices of the GRECO fourth evaluation round as well as challenges in the implementation of its recommendations. At the beginning of the conference, **the Czech Republic signed the Additional Protocol to the Criminal Law Convention on Corruption (CETS No. 191).**

3. Supporting Local and Regional Democracy and Public Administration Reforms

As another priority line of action, the Czech Chairmanship aimed to contribute to the Council of Europe's activities in support of local and regional democracy.

The meeting of the Bureau of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities took place in Brno on 15 – 16 June, under the aegis of the Mayor of the Statutory City of Brno. The Chair of the Committee of Ministers shared his views on current challenges faced by local and regional authorities in Europe with the President of the Congress who paid an official visit to the Czech Republic on this particular occasion. The President of the Congress met for bilateral talks also with the Vice-Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Chamber of Deputies of the Czech Parliament and with the Deputy Minister of the Interior.

An international seminar “Integration Policies at Local and Regional level” preceded the meeting of the Bureau of the Congress on 15 June in Brno. It was organised by the Union of Towns and Municipalities of the Czech Republic. A seminar open to the public was divided into two blocks, where both the Czech and foreign experts debated. The first block focused on the exchange of experience and the identification of the tools that local and regional authorities use to integrate groups at risk of social exclusion. The second panel dealt with the issue of integration of foreigners and immigrants.

The 19th Council of Europe Meeting of the Workshops for the implementation of the European Landscape Convention on “The implementation of the European Landscape Convention at local level: local democracy” was held in Brno on 5-6 September. The aim of the workshop was to support the implementation of democratic principles in the context of the regular upkeep of a landscape which consequently results in improvement of the quality of life at local level. The Czech Ministry of the Environment organised this event in co-operation with the Secretariat of the European Landscape Convention and various Czech institutions. The South Moravian Region and the City of Brno provided their patronage. The meeting was attended by representatives of member States and experts on sustainable landscape management, who either presented or assessed projects which can be considered as exemplary in the field of sustainable landscaping at local level. Participants expressed the wish that on the occasion of the **First International Landscape Day of the Council of Europe**, which was held on 20 October 2017, local authorities should be invited to celebrate the landscape as *“an essential component of people’s surroundings, an expression of the diversity of their shared cultural and natural heritage, and a foundation of their identity”*.

The Czech Minister of the Interior hosted a widely attended conference **“The Quality of Public Administration at Local and Regional Level” which was organised in cooperation with the European Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG) on 20-21 September in Prague.** The programme of the conference focused on, among other issues, good examples of efficient and transparent operation of local and regional authorities and on the simplification and use of electronic tools in territorial public administration. The conference was attended by participants from the Czech Republic and from other member States.

The Deputy Minister of the Interior participated in the 33rd Session of the Congress held in Strasbourg on 18 October. He made a speech at the session on behalf of the Czech Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers. He also exchanged views with members of the Congress on various topics, including youth education, the mission and functioning of the Council of Europe, the budget of the Congress and migration.

4. Promoting Human Rights Education and Linguistic Skills

The Czech Chairmanship devoted special attention to the individual's rights within the framework of human rights education. Human rights education is a long-term process contributing to the prevention of human rights abuses.

The Chair of the Committee of Ministers' Deputies, Permanent Representative of the Czech Republic to the Council of Europe, opened the annual **Conference of the Council of Europe Programme on Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (HELP) which took place on 19 - 20 June in Strasbourg** under the title *“HELP for Friendly justice”*. He emphasised HELP's contribution in ensuring the rule of law, one of the priorities of the Czech Chairmanship, by providing training for legal professionals. The conference gathered participants representing training institutions for judges and prosecutors, as well as bar associations.

On 20-22 June, the Conference on the Future of Citizenship and Human Rights Education in Europe was organised in the framework of the Czech Chairmanship in Strasbourg, with participants including representatives of governments, education institutions and civil society. The Deputy Minister of Education, Youth and Sports delivered an opening speech at the conference. The aim of the conference, held under the heading “Learning to Live Together: a Shared Commitment to Democracy” was to strengthen the implementation of the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights through a continuing dialogue among the key actors.

On the occasion of the **8th Forum on Education Reforms which took place on 26-27 October in Prague**, the Council of Europe launched a new Reference Framework of Competences for Democratic Culture (RFCDC). The Minister of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic welcomed the participants with some introductory words. The Forum was organised by the Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports of the Czech Republic in cooperation with the Council of Europe and the Charles University in Prague. The event brought together participants from the public education sector from 37 countries of the European Cultural Convention, observers and representatives of major intergovernmental organisations and NGOs. Eight working groups focused on different approaches, as to how to apply the competences for democratic citizenship in education.

Regarding the **European Centre for Modern Languages of the Council of Europe (ECML)** the Czech Chairmanship continued to actively support the cooperation carried out in the framework of the ECML’s four-year programme 2016-2019. A working seminar involving foreign experts was organised in Prague in October for the Czech language test-makers who examine the language proficiency of foreigners applying for a permanent residence permit or citizenship.

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

Given the magnitude of the challenges arising in and around Europe, the Czech Chairmanship attached a particular importance to co-operation and co-ordination with other international stakeholders.

The Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs presented the priorities of the Chairmanship at a meeting of the **Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe’s** Permanent Council on 1 June. He particularly highlighted efforts made by both organisations to maintain their common commitments to democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, as well as security and stability.

On 14 June, a roundtable on radicalisation was held jointly by the Czech Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers and the Austrian OSCE Chairmanship in the framework of the Prague European Summit. A ministerial panel took place on this occasion with the participation of the Chair of the Committee of Ministers, a representative of the Austrian Chairmanship as well as the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Slovak Republic.

On 13 October, a conference on internet freedom “The role and responsibilities of internet intermediaries” was organised by the OSCE and the Council of Europe in Vienna. The conference focused on the function of Internet intermediaries which critically influence the way we receive and impart information in the digital age. The conference provided a space for a critical and constructive exchange regarding the role and responsibilities of the Internet intermediaries toward citizens online. The Special Envoy for Cyber Space of the Minister for Foreign Affairs took part in the conference on behalf of the Czech Chairmanship.

The Council of Europe/OSCE Co-ordination Group, established to strengthen synergies with the OSCE in agreed priority areas, met in Vienna on 27 October 2017. A joint report on progress in cooperation in the fight against terrorism and the fight against trafficking in human beings was discussed, also in the context of migration.

The Council of Europe maintains an exceptional range of co-operation with the **European Union**. This co-operation has developed widely since the signature of the Memorandum of Understanding ten years ago.

On 5 July, Ms Mogherini, the High Representative of the European Union, took part in an exchange of views with the Committee of Ministers’ Deputies, during which she insisted on the two organisations’ shared desire to establish more intensive and structured cooperation.

Marking the European Day against the Death Penalty on 10 October was an opportunity for the two organisations to demonstrate their firm opposition to capital punishment, which is unfortunately still applied around the world.

On 13 June, the EU signed the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CETS No. 210), making the first step to committing itself to deeper cooperation in this important domain.

Other events:

On 21 September, the Czech Republic ratified **the Council of Europe Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Organs** (CETS No. 216), raising the total number of member States having ratified it to four. One more ratification will allow this important Convention to enter into force.

The European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines & HealthCare (EDQM) organised an international conference **“The place of the Certification Procedure in the global regulatory environment” which was held on 19 – 20 September in Prague**. It was opened by the Deputy Minister of Health on behalf of the Czech Chairmanship. The conference focused on the challenges and issues surrounding the quality of medicines in a globalised world.

The conference **“20th Anniversary of the Oviedo Convention: Relevance and Challenges” was held in Strasbourg on 24 – 25 October**. The conference was opened by the Deputy Minister of Health. The Convention focuses on upholding the dignity and rights of patients in the field of biomedicine. **The Czech Republic signed the Additional Protocol to the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine concerning Genetic Testing for Health Purposes (CETS No. 203) during the event.**

A conference held in Prague on 2 November entitled **“Twenty years of the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine”** commemorated the 20th anniversary of the Oviedo Convention. The Deputy Minister of Health opened the event. The participants analysed the Convention particularly in the context of the development of the international protection of human rights and the bioethics.

Under the auspices of the Czech Chairmanship **the 16th Assembly of the Compendium of Cultural Policies and Trends in Europe was held in Prague on 8-10 November**. The experts debated the topic of Culture and Populism. On the occasion of this meeting, the last step of the transformation of the Compendium as a Council of Europe project into a regular association took place. The new Compendium Association was presented. The role of the national cultural institutions in the context of the 100th Anniversary of the Birth of Nation States in Central and Eastern Europe was discussed.

Appendix

Calendar of Events

Date Venue	Event Responsible Czech authority
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 programme 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

19-20 June 2017 Strasbourg	Annual conference of the European Programme for Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (HELP Network Conference) Ministry of Justice
19-21 June 2017 Brno	Conference "The binding effect of judicial decisions" Supreme Court, Ministry of Justice
20-22 June 2017 Strasbourg	Conference on the state of citizenship and human rights education in Europe Ministry of Education, Youth and Sports
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 of the EDQM "The place of a Certification Procedure in the global regulatory environment" Ministry of Health
20-21 September 2017 Prague	Conference "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 "Immigration Detention of Children: Coming to a Close?" 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
13 October 2017 Prague	Meeting of government agents representing States before the European Court of Human Rights Ministry of Justice

18-20 October 2017 Strasbourg	33 rd 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
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
2 November 2017 Prague	Expert conference “Twenty years of the Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine” Ministry of Health
8-10 November 2017 Prague	Experts' Assembly of the Compendium of Cultural Policies & Trends in Europe Ministry of Culture
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