



Ministers' Deputies

Information document

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Priorities of the Cyprus Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (22 November 2016 – 19 May 2017)

The Republic of Cyprus assumes the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe for the fifth time in the fifty five years since its accession to the Organisation. The assumption of the Chairmanship comes at a time when Europe is faced with economic hardship, migratory flows, terrorism, the dangerous rise of populism, xenophobic rhetoric and extremism, and other phenomena which test our democracies and shake public trust in state and international institutions.

It is, therefore, high time to invest more in stable and democratic institutions, transparent and fair processes, pluralistic and inclusive societies that foster tolerant and democratically active citizens. We also need to embrace the fundamental principles upon which the CoE is founded on by safeguarding and protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, strengthening democracy and upholding the rule of law. In that regard, the Cyprus Chairmanship will contribute to tackling the threats to democratic security, in line with the findings of the three annual reports of the Secretary General on the "*State of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Europe*".

The Cyprus Chairmanship is convinced that, in overcoming current challenges, it is imperative that we remain committed to our common principles and values. At this time, the Council of Europe is more relevant than ever. It is our aim to highlight the role the Council of Europe plays by employing its expertise and the significant instruments and mechanisms that have been developed, by reinforcing cooperation between member states and developing synergies with other regional and international partners.

Cyprus highly values the European Court of Human Rights as the guardian of human rights in our continent. Cyprus will take the opportunity of the 55th Anniversary since its signature of the European Convention on Human Rights to mark its commitment to the Convention system, in a special event to be held on 13 December 2016. The full execution of the Court's judgments is an unconditional obligation and a fundamental requirement for democratic security in Europe.

The reform process of the Organisation initiated by the Secretary General in order to render the Council more effective also enjoys the support of the Cyprus Chairmanship. In this regard, the Chairmanship stands ready to initiate, together with the Secretary General, a consultation process in the Committee of Ministers, regarding the organisation of a 4th Summit of the Heads of State.

The overarching theme of our Chairmanship is **Reinforcing Democratic Security in Europe**; we will focus in particular on the following areas:

- a. Rights and freedoms for all people without any discrimination;***
- b. Democratic citizenship; and***
- c. Prevalence of the rule of law.***

In addition to these priorities, the Cyprus Chairmanship will work to advance other areas of important Council of Europe business. The main events of the Cyprus Chairmanship are presented herein below (complete list in Attachment):

A. Reinforcing Democratic Security in Europe

a. Rights and freedoms for all people without any discrimination

The Cyprus Chairmanship attaches great importance to the protection of cultural heritage. Cypriot diplomacy has undertaken an international initiative to bolster the protection of cultural property from wanton destruction and the illicit trafficking of cultural goods, exploring innovative approaches for the creation of synergies and the development of capacities for the effective protection of cultural heritage. Cyprus will do its utmost to promote the efforts of the Council of Europe to finalise *the new Convention on Offences related to Cultural Property* and to draw international attention and support for the pioneering work of the Organisation in this field.

In this regard, the Cyprus Chairmanship is organising a *High Level Segment in the framework of the third drafting session of the PC-IBC*, in Strasbourg, on 13 January 2017. Personalities representing international organisations and initiatives will gather in Strasbourg, under the auspices of the Chairman of the Committee of Ministers and the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, to discuss aspects pertaining to offences against cultural property and international efforts to improve protection, highlighting the significance of the new legal tool prepared by the Council of Europe.

Underpinning the priority attributed to the protection of cultural heritage, the Cyprus Chairmanship is organising a Seminar with the International Institute for the Unification of Private Law (UNIDROIT), in New York, in the first part of 2017, on *"Promoting and strengthening the international legal framework for the protection of cultural heritage."*

The Cyprus Chairmanship will host a high-level Conference (launching event) for the *promotion of the European Cultural Heritage Strategy for the 21st century*. This initiative was proposed at the Sixth Ministerial Conference (Namur, 2015) of Ministers responsible for cultural heritage; it is to be organised by the Town Planning and Housing Department of the Ministry of Interior of Cyprus.

Great importance is attached to promoting equal rights, improving the quality of life and independence of people with disabilities, and ensuring their freedom of choice, and their active participation in society. The Ministry of Labour, Welfare and Social Insurance will host a *High-Level Launching conference of the new Council of Europe Disability Strategy (2017-2023)*, in Nicosia, on 27- 28 March 2017. This event will bring together representatives of all Council of Europe member states, international organisations and civil society, including persons with disabilities and organisations representing them.

The Commissioner for Administration and Human Rights (Ombudsman) will host the *Thematic Roundtable of the European Governmental LGBTI Focal Points Network*, in Nicosia, on 1st February 2017. This will focus on homophobic and transphobic hate crime. It is a highly current and relevant topic for the Council of Europe, which has been particularly active on the matter and is currently preparing a manual for the training of law enforcement agencies regarding such types of hate crimes.

The Cyprus Chairmanship has also placed under its auspices a seminar organised by the Council of Europe's Bioethics Committee (DH-BIO), entitled *"International case-law in Bioethics: Insight and foresight"*, to take place in Strasbourg, on 5 December 2016. It is an event in the run up to the 20th anniversary of the Oviedo Convention in 2017 - the only internationally legally binding instrument on the protection of human rights in the biomedical field. The Seminar provides a unique forum for highly expert dialogue on new trends and challenges in the area of human rights in biomedicine, the development of the case law of the European Court of Human Rights and the jurisprudence of national courts in this area.

Carrying on the torch of the Trio Chairmanship Priorities, the Supreme Court of Cyprus will host an international Conference on *"The freedom of expression and the judgments of the ECHR, in particular, taking into account new trends like internet"*, in Nicosia, on 28 April 2017.

Another Conference on *"Social rights in today's Europe: the role of domestic and European Courts"* is to be organised in Nicosia, on 24 February 2017. The idea is to examine the role and contribution of European and domestic courts to the enforcement of social rights in Europe. In this context, the relevant case-law of the European Court of Human Rights and of the Court of Justice of the European Union, as well as that of a number of domestic courts, will be the subject of discussion between judges, representatives of European monitoring and advisory bodies, with the contribution of academics.

The response of the European continent to unprecedented migratory flows will be the subject of a Round Table discussion to be held in Strasbourg on 14 February 2017, in cooperation with the European Union. Furthermore, the Committee of Experts of the Council of Europe working on the “*minimum standards for the detention of irregular migrants facing deportation*” will be meeting in Nicosia, on 15-17 February 2017.

b. Democratic citizenship

The Chairmanship of Cyprus will host a number of events relevant to fostering inclusive, tolerant and democratic societies. The Ministry of Education will organise in Nicosia, on 22-23 March 2017, a ministerial Conference entitled “*Securing Democracy through Education*”. The Conference will evaluate the progress made on the implementation of the Brussels Declaration of the Ministers of Education and the implementation of educational aspects of the Action Plan on “*the fight against violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism*”, and the “*Action Plan on Building Inclusive Societies (2016-2019)*”.

The Republic of Cyprus emphasises its enduring commitment to dialogue, cooperation and peaceful coexistence. In particular, the organisation of the Youth Peace Camp, entitled “*The role of young people and youth policy in peace-building and intercultural dialogue*”, to be held in Strasbourg, on 28 April-6 May 2017, aims at bringing together young people from conflict areas and helping them develop dialogue, cooperation and peaceful conflict resolution skills. The format will resemble similar activities which the Council of Europe has successfully conducted in the past with young people from Ireland, Israel-Palestine, etc.

The Chairmanship will also place under its auspices a Conference on “*Developing a culture of co-operation when teaching and learning history*” to be organised in Nicosia, on 10-11 March 2017. **Developing a culture of co-operation through teaching and learning history** is a history-teaching project of the Council of Europe in Cyprus. The project aims at raising awareness on teaching and learning history in its complexity in the context of cultural diversity and globalisation based on multi-perspectivity, with a view to overcoming stereotypes and prejudices and strengthening reconciliation processes.

The Ministry of Education and Culture will also host a high level Conference in Limassol, on 11 May 2017, on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the *Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS)*; the meeting will seek to highlight the actions and activities of EPAS that contribute to the promotion of democracy, tolerance and inclusivity in sports.

c. Prevalence of the rule of law

The meeting of the Bureau of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe will be preceded by a Conference on “*Inter-municipal cooperation and good governance: Cyprus and European experience*”. This is a common initiative of the two Local Authorities’ collective bodies: the Union of Cyprus Municipalities and the Union of Cyprus Communities. The Conference is to take place in Nicosia, on 8 February 2017, with the participation of the Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG), members from countries which are going or have gone through similar reform processes, the Council of Europe Secretariat, other experts, UCM, UCC, representatives of the Cypriot local authorities, government and parliament.

Another event taking place in the context of the Cyprus Chairmanship, is the Third Symposium for Official Medicines Control Laboratories on “*Combating Counterfeit and Other illegal Medicines*” (Nicosia, 28-29 March 2017). The scope of the symposium will cover new challenges on combatting counterfeit and other illegal medicines. Special focus will be given on recent developments in the pharmaceutical legislation and regulation of medicines with respect to falsified medicines, new phenomena in falsifications of medicines, advance techniques for the detection of falsifications and the challenge of getting more countries on board the Medicrime Convention.

The *Fifteenth Meeting of Official Cosmetics Control Laboratories (OCCL) Network* will take place in Nicosia, on 30-31 March 2017; experts on cosmetics are expected to present and discuss their activities concerning policy and technical issues and also to set-up their future plans.

B. Co-operation with international and regional partners

Building synergies is necessary in fostering democratic security. In 2017 the European Union and the Council of Europe will celebrate ten years of cooperation on the basis of the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) between the EU and the Council of Europe, signed in 2007. Cyprus will take the opportunity to mark the anniversary through various events. This includes a two-day conference on “*The Inter-relationship between the European Convention on Human Rights and European Union Law*” to be held on 17-18 March, 2017, under the auspices of the Cypriot Chairmanship. The conference will examine the various aspects of the relationship between the European Convention on Human Rights and European Union Law.

Furthermore, Cyprus will take the opportunity of the Chairmanship to bolster the relations of the Organisation with its southern neighbours, primarily through enhanced dialogue and invitations extended to neighbouring countries to take part in events organised during the Chairmanship. Cyprus aims at highlighting the added value of the legal instruments of the Council of Europe, inviting regional partners to further participation and deeper co-operation. From legislative expertise to strengthening of institutions' capacities through peer-to-peer exchanges and networks, the South Programme presents an example of the contribution to the establishment of a common legal area between the two shores of the Mediterranean. In particular, a *Steering Committee Session of the South Programme II* will be held in Nicosia, on 12-13 December 2016. This is the second phase of an ambitious three year EU-Council of Europe initiative to support democratic reforms in the Southern Mediterranean upon demand from the partners from the region.

The *Fifth Intercultural Workshop on Democracy* to be organised by the Venice Commission under the auspices of the Cypriot Chairmanship, will be held in Nicosia, beginning of April 2017. The aim of the workshop is to gather high level representatives from governmental institutions and academia from the countries of the Mediterranean region. The topic of the workshop will be: “*Interaction between constitutional justice and other branches of the judiciary*”. The workshop is aimed at discussing the interaction between constitutional courts and similar jurisdictions and ordinary courts in countries of the Southern Mediterranean. The previous workshops brought together representatives from Algeria, Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, the Palestinian Authority, Morocco and Tunisia, as well as leading constitutionalists from different European countries.

The *Spring Conference of European Data Protection Authorities 2017* is expected to take place in Limassol, on 27-28 April 2017. The Conference is organised once a year and brings together European Data Protection Authorities. It is aimed at addressing subjects of common interest and helping advance the fundamental right to data protection. Participants to this event are data protection authorities from EU countries, other European countries and accredited observers, including the Council of Europe. The conference further enables its members to better fulfil their mandates, to enhance their international cooperation and to coordinate their actions.