



**Statement by H.E. Helga Hauksdóttir,
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Iceland,
at the 1459th Meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council,
Vienna, 1 February, 2024**

Thank you, Madame Chair,

Iceland fully aligns with the statement of the European Union, but in addition I would like to make the following remarks in my national capacity.

Allow me to extend Iceland's gratitude to the Minister of Foreign Affairs, H.E. Ms. Dominique Hasler, for presenting the main priorities of Liechtenstein to the OSCE Permanent Council today, in her capacity as President of Committee of Ministers of the CoE. This year is an important one for the CoE, as we celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Council. Let me assure you, that you have Iceland's full support for your Presidency. Taking on the CoE Presidency is not a small undertaking for any country – on the contrary – but for a small state it underlines that their voices in the international fora are also strong.

It goes without saying, that Iceland fully shares Liechtenstein's priorities to promote and strengthen human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Europe. About a year ago, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland, at the time holding the Presidency of the CoE, presented the same core values as overarching in our Presidency's priorities.

Amidst the dramatic degradation of regional security and frightening trend of democratic backsliding we are experiencing, it is critical that we keep these principles and values front and centre.

We are pleased to see that a Follow-up to the Reykjavik Summit, including accountability for the most serious crimes in the war of aggression against Ukraine, is among the main priorities of Liechtenstein's Presidency. Iceland extends its gratitude to Liechtenstein, and Latvia as former Presidency, for keeping the implementation of the outcomes of the Reykjavik Summit high on the agenda of the CoE.

Among other important focus areas of Liechtenstein's Presidency are children, youth and education, violence against women and girls and the fight against trafficking in human beings. Iceland absolutely adds its voice in support of these focus areas.

I would also like use this opportunity to mention a joint initiative of the Icelandic Government and the Parliamentary Assembly of the CoE (PACE), in the field of gender equality. The Vigdís Prize for Women's Empowerment, a Prize that pays tribute to former Icelandic President Vigdís Finnbogadóttir, aims to reward outstanding initiatives which promote the empowerment of women in all their diversity. Calls for nominations are out, with a deadline on February 15. Further information is on CoE's website.

Madame Chair

In a few weeks time, it will be two years since the start of the Russian Federation's unlawful, unjustified, and unprovoked full-scale invasion of Ukraine – an invasion that marked a sad watershed in our post-world war history. Russia's war so clearly violates everything that our two key European organizations – the OSCE and the Council of Europe – stand for, and the fundamental principles and commitments upon which they were founded.

It is exactly now, during times of war and instability, that we need a system based on the peaceful coexistence of states within the framework of international law and rules. Resolution of disputes between states, must happen through dialogue and negotiations, and not on the battlefield. Iceland calls on Russia to comply with its international obligations and immediately cease all hostilities and withdraw its forces fully and completely from the internationally recognized territory of Ukraine.

Madame Chair

Our two organizations – the Council of Europe and the OSCE – have important, and complementary, roles to play and it is important that the two organizations continue to reinforce each other's work and continue to foster democracy, security and cooperation.

Democratic rights have been hard-earned, they cannot be taken for granted and they are worth fighting for. We must never tire of advocating for democracy, human rights and the rule of law, and a peace that is based on equity and justice.

I thank you, Madame Chair