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Meetings of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly,
Tallinn, 26 and 27 May 2016

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**Address by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Estonia and Chair
of the Committee of Ministers of the CoE,
H.E. Mrs. Marina Kaljurand**

Dear President of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly Mr.
Agramunt, Deputy Secretary General Mrs. Gabriela Battaini-Dragoni,
Members of the Standing Committee,
Excellences,
Ladies and Gentlemen,

It is a great honour and pleasure for me to welcome you all in Tallinn.
As the chair of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe
we are proud to host you during these spring-days here. Here in the
plenary hall of our Parliament– *Riigikogu* – we ratified the European

Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms 20 years ago. In this regard today's Assembly has the symbolic meaning for us. This applies also to our membership in the Council of Europe, organization which has more than 67 years been the guardian of the human rights and the rule of law in our continent.

We are pleased with the work of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe and the Committee of Ministers working hand in hand by inspiring each other to create stability by protecting human rights and the principles of the rule of law. Through the monitoring mechanisms, dedicated and professional rapporteurs the role of the PACE has been remarkable.

I am pleased that Nadiya Savchenko, member of PACE, has now safely returned to her homeland.

Distinguished guests,

Let me give you first a more detailed overview about **Estonia's priorities** for the period of our Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

We stand strongly for Europe's fundamental values – **human rights, democracy and the rule of law**. We continue with the issues raised by Bulgaria during its period as chairman, and for our part, will also add other dimensions, including a digital one.

Firstly, human rights and the rule of law on the Internet. In times of fast development of information communication technologies and the accompanying impact on the lives of most individuals in Europe, the **protection of human rights and the rule of law online** are needed more than ever. In this respect, the Council of Europe's instruments, its unique mandate of core values, its extensive network of State and non-State actors within and beyond Europe, and its potential to develop agile, cross-fertilized working methods are of considerable added value. In the framework of our chairmanship, we will work together with all partners to ensure the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms both offline and online, contribute to the implementation of the Council of Europe Internet Governance Strategy (2016-2019), and promote relevant Council of Europe standards.

To this end we will organize with our partners several events in Strasbourg and Brussels.

Secondly, we would focus on issues related to **gender equality**. Achieving gender equality is central to the protection of human rights, the functioning of democracy, and respect for the rule of law, economic growth and sustainability. More equal societies work better for everyone and for this reason in Estonia we work hard to have the

equal representation in decision-making levels and equal treatment in the labour market in terms of competitiveness and equal pay.

The Council of Europe's Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017, aims to increase the impact and visibility of gender equality standards, supporting their implementation in member States. The overall goal of the Strategy is to achieve the advancement and empowerment of women and the effective realization of gender equality in Council of Europe member states through activities around five strategic objectives (1. combating gender stereotypes and sexism; 2. preventing and combating violence against women; 3. guaranteeing equal access of women to justice; 4. achieving balanced participation of women and men in political and public decision-making; 5. achieving gender mainstreaming in all policies and measures).

A high-level stock-taking conference with a working title: "Are we there yet? Assessing progress, inspiring action – The Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017" will be held in Tallinn on 30 June and 1 July 2016. The aim is to examine the progress of the Strategy and to launch discussions on the priority themes for the next Strategy.

There appear to be clear inter-linkages between gender equality and human rights - societies, honoring the gender equality principles, are

also outstanding in the field of human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

Thirdly, Children's rights are an integral part of human rights. For example Estonia has the new Child Protection Act enforced from the 1st January this year and it based on the new concept to create a supporting environment for children, to set the best interests of children as primary consideration and to ensure the necessary assistance and care in a timely manner and in close co-operation with relevant institutions at national and local level. We will continue with the work of Bulgaria in this field. We wish to highlight a few themes of the new Strategy for the Rights of the Child, placing emphasis on three key areas: **child participation, children's rights in the digital environment and children in migration.**

These topics will be addressed at an annual high-level conference, organized by the Estonian Human Rights Institute on 4 November 2016 in Tallinn. The conference will focus on the opportunities and challenges of the digital world and we will also discuss about the topics related to children in migration crisis. More importantly we are not only discussing about children and their rights, but **together with** children.

The migration crisis is not only a problem in Europe. It is a global challenge and it will be discussed also at the UN in September. As Estonia is currently holding also the presidency of UNICEF we will

organize a side event in cooperation with UNICEF and the Council of Europe on 19 September in New York. This particular event will focus also on the children in the migration crisis.

The prevention of and fight against the sexual abuse of children will remain one of the priorities in the children's rights agenda. We will ratify the Lanzarote Convention and promote better implementation of the Convention throughout the member States of the Council of Europe.

In addition to these priorities, we will continue to **advance other areas of political importance for the Council of Europe and further improve the Council's co-operation with other international organizations**. Yesterday I gave a speech in the OSCE Permanent Council in Vienna.

Responsibility is the price of freedom. We, on our part, would like to participate in the decision-making process and to contribute to the keeping of peace and security in the world by becoming a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for the period of 2020–2021.

We hold the Council of Europe in high regard as an organization for creating norms and standards. It has considerably influenced our country's legislation and reforms since our accession in 1993. In our second chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, we aim to reflect

in the Council of Europe the same spirit of leadership and inspiration, which our country has benefited from in the past 23 years.

For small countries, respect for public international law in general and human rights in particular, respect for Council of Europe convention system is more than just a fair play issue – it's a security guarantee.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Two years have passed since the illegal annexation and occupation of Crimea and beginning of Russia's military aggression in Eastern Ukraine. The **situation in Donbass continues to deteriorate**. This is a grim reminder of the need to deliver first on the **security provisions of the Minsk agreements** before moving on to local elections, as well as other political and socio-economic measures. All sides of the conflict need to contribute to a peaceful solution.

We are concerned about the human rights situation in illegally annexed **Crimea** and reiterate that the Council of Europe's and UN Human Rights Monitoring Missions in Ukraine and all other humanitarian and human rights organizations must be granted immediate and full access to all areas in Crimea. Our position on the illegal annexation of Crimea is firm and **we support an effective non-recognition policy**. We deplore the recent decision by Crimea's illegitimate authorities to ban the activities of the Crimean Tatar Mejlis.

Our support to Ukraine to undertake fundamental reforms remains essential. Ukraine has done a lot, especially considering the extremely difficult circumstances. We will continue to encourage and assist Ukrainian leadership to stay focused and work together to deliver a stable and prosperous Ukraine that their people expect and deserve.

As I said, successful reforms in Ukraine are the key to the future.. The Council of Europe has a 45-million-euro **Action Plan** for reforms in Ukraine to which Estonia is among the donors. And we also must not forget the reasons and circumstances that have provoked the current situation.

For us, Ukraine is a long-term top-priority partner state in terms of development cooperation. Support for the democratic reforms of our eastern neighbours must remain steadfast, systematic and sustainable. In this regard I would also like to stress the importance of the Council of Europe's continued assistance to these countries.

We will also closely following what is going on in **Georgia's** occupied regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, especially after the new so called Treaties on Alliance were signed with Russia. Here I must say, we are concerned about a number of developments. If the planned referendum, called for by the de-facto authorities in Georgia's occupied region of South Ossetia on joining Russia were to take place,

it would violate international law and constitute a considerable, and unacceptable, escalation of the situation.

We highly appreciate the Secretary General's Consolidated Report on the Conflict in Georgia and underline the importance of maintaining this reporting mechanism also in the future. We must make a full use of all relevant instruments to ensure monitoring of the human rights situation in Abkhazia and South Ossetia.

We appreciate also very much the work of the SG **to uphold the convention system** regardless of multiple crises currently ongoing in Europe and the challenges they pose. As the chairman of the Committee of Ministers we would like to call for the fulfilment of the agreed obligations.

Ladies and gentlemen,

While several years ago the refugees arriving by boats from the Middle East and Africa were real concern for just a few , today the **migrant crisis** is an urgent issue within the entirety of Europe.

For a small country, and a border state of the European Union, like Estonia, **solidarity** is the key and we are **determined to do our part** in tackling the crisis.

[* We participate in the joint actions on the **external border** under the auspices of Frontex, the future European Border and Coast Guard Agency.

* We have started with the **relocation** process and work is under way to start with the **resettlement** from Turkey.

* We have supported countries along the **Western Balkans** route during the peak of the crisis and we stand ready to offer our assistance when needed.

* Our government decided to contribute 2.8 million Euros to the EU's Refugee Facility for **Turkey** to support implementation of the EU-Turkey Agreement of March and the Action Plan of November. **The implementation remains the key** and it requires constant effort and input from all parties.

* The Estonian **development cooperation and humanitarian aid** to the Middle-East, Turkey and North-Africa to tackle the migration crises totaled over 4 million euros in 2015. Our pledges to mitigate the humanitarian needs of the Syrian people through bilateral aid activities and the United Nations will continue this year.]

In this crisis there is no other way out than look at the bigger picture and use the toolbox we have to the full to address the crisis comprehensively and find sustainable solutions to it.

Dear President, Deputy Secretary General, Members of the Standing Committee,

We wish to stand for the spreading of human rights and help alleviate the situation of people who suffer because of conflicts. You can only protect your liberties in this world by protecting the other man's freedom.

Having been forced to live under foreign rule for centuries, we are more than well aware of the value of freedom. In medieval Tallinn was the rule of serfs, without any rights and basically belonging to their master, managed to make their way inside the Tallinn city walls, they had a chance of becoming free. These people had to obey the law and live in the city for one year plus one day. After that, they became free citizens of Tallinn. Locals had a saying: "city air grants freedom." And today we have a good reason to remind everyone of this old saying. Freedom and human rights remains a possession of inestimable value, as to paraphrase Marcus Tullius Cicero.

Thank you for your attention, and once again, I hope you enjoy your stay in Tallinn.