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**STATEMENT BY
MR. BENEDETTO DELLA VEDOVA, UNDERSECRETARY OF STATE FOR
FOREIGN AFFAIRS OF ITALY, AT THE 1353rd MEETING OF THE OSCE
PERMANENT COUNCIL**

3 February 2022

**On the priorities of the Italian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the
Council of Europe**

Mr. Chairperson,
Permanent Representatives,
Ladies and gentlemen,

I am very pleased to have been invited by the Polish Chairmanship to take part in this meeting of the OSCE Permanent Council and to have the opportunity to present to you the priorities of the Italian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, which we assumed on 17 November last year and which will end on 20 May with the meeting of Foreign Ministers.

Although the beginning of the year seems to offer a glimmer of hope that the most acute phase of the pandemic drama is behind us, it obliges all of us, once again, to confront security scenarios that are of increasing concern.

The deteriorating climate of debate on the major issues of peace, security, human rights and the rule of law calls with increasing urgency for a renewed commitment at the political level to rebuilding trust and dialogue within the framework of truly effective multilateralism.

Let me therefore state my firm belief that the Council of Europe is a key player in the implementation of this commitment.

It is an ideal forum for debate and dialogue on our values and for the promotion of a multilateral approach, with which Italy fully identifies and which extends beyond the borders of the organization's membership.

The pandemic has clearly demonstrated that no country can go it alone and that the international community can only benefit from a shared set of rules. We need more not less multilateralism, at both the global and the European level.

In that respect, the OSCE and the Council of Europe share a common mission, that of dialogue and co-operation to build a framework of commitments and rules that ensure peace and security based on the comprehensive approach to security advocated by the OSCE. Italy therefore attaches great importance to co-operation between the two organizations and is committed to taking every opportunity to enhance and promote such co-operation during its Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

The Council of Europe community – which encompasses a broad representation of OSCE countries – has a well-established tradition of rights protection, a mature public opinion and regulatory and operational tools that enable it to meet the most demanding challenges, such as the current pandemic, without compromising the fundamental principles of coexistence, respect for human rights and promotion of democracy and the rule of law.

I will not hide the fact that within this community there have been some setbacks in recent years in terms of commitments and standards. Nevertheless, the Council of Europe remains a collective project, supported and affirmed by its Member States. It is therefore the Member States themselves that must inject vigour into this instrument, which is more necessary than ever, in order to pursue the vital objective of ensuring an area of dialogue and coexistence that integrates and consolidates the plurality of national situations on the basis of shared principles and values.

It is with this conviction that the Italian Chairmanship has made it one of its priorities to promote a renewed commitment to shared principles and values, starting with issues of common interest such as culture, the legal instruments available to States to deal with the pandemic, the protection of social rights and interreligious dialogue.

However, this effort to reach an understanding, this willingness to engage in inclusive dialogue, must serve to consolidate and not evade shared responsibilities.

In 1949, a number of countries, including Italy, decided to set up the Council of Europe. Other States have joined over the years, accepting its founding principles and values. Today it is our duty to maintain our commitment to this organization and to the unique framework, in all its breadth and complexity, of Conventions and legal instruments. Nor should we forget the jurisdictional role of its greatest asset – the European Court of Human Rights – and the fundamental contribution to dialogue within the organization and the active defence of its principles and values by its Parliamentary Assembly.

The programme of our six-month Chairmanship includes more than thirty events – some of which have already taken place – in three priority areas.

Our first objective, as I have already mentioned, is to foster a renewed commitment to the Council of Europe's shared values and principles.

We therefore intend to pay special attention to those areas and topics that promote dialogue and inclusiveness. Among them, I should like to mention first of all the protection of cultural heritage as a tool for the promotion of our common identity, intercultural dialogue and social inclusion.

Social rights are also a key aspect of European integration and one of the founding principles of Europe. Italy intends to work to strengthen the European Social Charter signed 60 years ago in Turin.

The second priority area will aim to promote the rights of women and young people, who are particularly vulnerable to violence and discrimination, even more so in the context of the pandemic.

Italy aims to promote women's rights, empowerment and meaningful and equal participation in social, economic and public life. This issue was also a focus of our G20 Presidency. We will spare no effort to combat gender-based and domestic violence, stressing in all instances the importance of the Council of Europe's Istanbul Convention. We are committed to encouraging further signatures and ratifications of this legal instrument, which we believe to be the most far-reaching in this area at the multilateral level.

We also intend to prioritize the protection of children's rights and the promotion of youth policies. It is our duty to protect their rights, but also to prepare them to become informed and responsible citizens. In that regard, the new Council of Europe strategy for the rights of the child will be launched during our Chairmanship. We will also organize a forum on democratic citizenship, to which young people from the 47 Member States will be invited to participate, hopefully both in person and online.

Our third objective is to build a people-centred future. The Council of Europe has often been at the forefront in addressing the challenges posed by new technologies. We might recall, for example, the Budapest Convention on Cybercrime, which is now a global benchmark, on which we also intend to focus during this six-month period, with the opening for signature of the Second Additional Protocol.

The Council is also currently examining the risks posed to the respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law by the development and use of artificial intelligence. Building on the initial impetus provided by the Finnish Chairmanship and the decision of the Hamburg ministerial meeting in May 2021 at the end of the German Chairmanship, Italy is committed to starting negotiations under its Chairmanship to define a legal instrument to regulate the development and use of artificial intelligence while respecting human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

The rule of law and the independence of the judiciary are the basis for effective democracy and the protection of human rights and fundamental freedoms.

With that in mind, we consider it essential that the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights are enforced and that the effectiveness of the monitoring mechanism is ensured. Italy sees the European Union's accession to the European Convention on Human Rights as a key element in making the European system of human rights protection more coherent and comprehensive.

In order to strengthen a people-centred vision of the future, Italy considers it a priority to reaffirm the function of punishment as a means both of rehabilitation of the offender and of reparation for the victim. This was the theme of the Conference of Ministers of Justice that took place last December in Venice. As part of our efforts to promote the independence of the role of Prosecutors General, we will organize a meeting of all Prosecutors General in Palermo in May.

It will be an occasion to remember an important anniversary for our country, 30 years after the murder of judges Falcone and Borsellino, a date that marked a fundamental turning point in our country's fight against Mafia associations.

A cross-cutting objective in relation to the priorities I have outlined is to heighten public awareness of the Council of Europe. During the six months of our Chairmanship, we have planned various initiatives to familiarize young people in particular with the reality of the Council of Europe and its values and principles.

Our Chairmanship will end on 20 May with the meeting of Foreign Ministers in Turin, where we hope to be able to present the progress made during the six-month period and the lines of future action.

In closing, I should like once again to thank the Polish Chairmanship for this opportunity, in the hope that our Chairmanship will help to further strengthen dialogue and co-operation between Strasbourg and Vienna in the pursuit of our common goals.

Thank you.