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**1129th Meeting of the Permanent Council of the OSCE
26 January 2017
Address by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Cyprus
and Chair of the Committee of Ministers of the CoE,
H.E. Mr. Ioannis Kasoulides**

*Dear Secretary-General, Mr. Chairman,
Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,*

The Republic of Cyprus is proud to have assumed the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers for the fifth time since 1961, when it became a member of the Council of Europe. Taking on the responsibility of the Chairmanship, provides an opportunity for Cyprus to play a leading role in the vital work of the Council, especially in promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law, across the continent.

The assumption of this Chairmanship, however, comes at a time when Europe is faced with newly emerging and protracted conflicts, 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.

During such challenging times, the OSCE and the Council of Europe, and, more importantly, the cooperation and synergies between them, are more crucial than ever. There can be no security and stability where human rights are not respected and democracy and the rule of law are not upheld. We recognise the significant role of the OSCE, its independent institutions, and its field missions, in many areas of common concern. Close co-operation has been established in a number of areas, such as media freedom and election observation. A coordination group meets twice a year for the purpose of promoting cooperation between the two Organisations, while the Committee of Ministers has already undertaken a comprehensive review of the ways of enhancing this cooperation. The Cyprus Chairmanship places particular importance on further strengthening cooperation between our two Organisations, especially on the protection of rights of persons belonging to national minorities, the fight against terrorism and trafficking in human beings, as well as the promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The overarching theme of our Chairmanship is **Reinforcing Democratic Security in Europe**, focusing 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.*

Let me briefly outline some key areas of our work:

Having in mind our own historical experiences, the Cyprus Chairmanship attaches great importance to the protection of cultural heritage. This is an issue of particular interest to the Council of Europe but it's also an issue of global significance. Cypriot diplomacy has undertaken an international initiative to bolster the protection of cultural property from wanton destruction and the illicit trafficking of cultural goods.

In March 2016, Cyprus led a cross-regional Statement on the protection of cultural heritage in armed conflicts, in the framework of the Human Rights Council (HRC), which was co-sponsored by an impressive number of 146 members and observer states of the HRC. In September 2016, in collaboration with a core group of partners, Cyprus presented to the 33rd Session of the HRC in Geneva a comprehensive Resolution on "*Cultural rights and the protection of cultural heritage*", which was adopted unanimously, thus putting the issue of cultural heritage firmly on the Human Rights agenda.

On 13th January 2017, the Cyprus Chairmanship organized, a "*Colloquium on building synergies and improving the framework for the protection of cultural heritage*", in the context of the Council's efforts to finalise the new *Convention on Offences related to Cultural Property* and to draw international attention and support for the Organisation's pioneering work in this field. High-level representatives of international organisations and other initiatives gathered 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.

Cyprus has already declared its aspiration to have the new Convention open for signature during the Ministerial Conference, which will take place in Nicosia this coming May. Appreciating that deliberations for an effective text might require a longer period to come to fruition, Cyprus stands ready to host the opening Conference, whenever the Convention is ready for signature.

The Cypriot Chairmanship will also host various events on fostering inclusive, tolerant and democratic societies. We believe that the role of youth is crucial in the fight against violent extremism and radicalisation, and in securing democratic and inclusive societies, in particular through education. Therefore, a ministerial conference entitled "*Securing Democracy through Education*" will be organised in Nicosia in March 2017.

Freedom of expression is severely and unjustifiably restricted in many countries and deserves our special attention. Elaborating further on the three previous Chairmanships' Priorities, the Supreme Court of Cyprus will host in April, an international Conference on "*the freedom of expression and the judgments of the ECHR, in particular, taking into account new trends like the internet*".

Importance is also attached to promoting equal rights for people with disabilities, and ensuring their active participation in society. A high-level Conference of the new Council of Europe Disability Strategy will be held in Nicosia, in March 2017.

On the highly relevant topic of homophobic and transphobic hate crime, the Cypriot Ombudsman will host the Thematic Roundtable of the European Governmental LGBTI focal points in February 2017.

As an EU Member State, Cyprus highly values the cooperation between the European Union and the Council of Europe. 2017 marks the 10th anniversary of the signing of the Memorandum of Understanding between the two Organizations, and the Cypriot Chairmanship will mark the occasion with various events, including a Round Table discussion on migration. Furthermore, Cyprus intends to bolster relations with its southern neighbours by enhancing dialogue and cooperation, sharing legislative expertise and supporting democratic reforms in the southern Mediterranean, upon demand from partners in the region.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The ultimate objective of our two Organisations remains the establishment of peace, security, stability and prosperity in their regions and beyond. To materialise this objective, we need stable and democratic societies based on the fundamental principles of the Council of Europe. These principles were strengthened through the cooperation of European countries in the aftermath of the Second World War. The 24th January – the international day of commemoration of the holocaust, represents the vision of combatting anti-Semitism and any other form of discrimination, which should not be present in any society.

By promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law, the Council of Europe, contributes to a European continent without dividing lines or military occupations, where the values enshrined in the European Convention of Human Rights are enjoyed by all. The European Court of Human Rights is an essential part of our human rights system, and the full and rapid execution of its judgments by all parties is absolutely crucial to guaranteeing the credibility of the Convention. The European Convention on Human Rights is, still today, regarded as one of the most outstanding successes of international law. It is not only a document, but a key part of a system consisting of other conventions, monitoring bodies, assistance programs and of course the Court, which remains, even during a state of emergency, the ultimate authority to determine whether measures taken are in conformity with the Convention.

Cyprus, a small country, that gives priority to upholding the rule of law and ensuring full respect for human rights, will strive through diplomacy and democratic procedures to support the efforts of the Council of Europe to fulfil its mandate, and achieve democratic stability and improvements in human rights protection. Cyprus considers strong diplomatic ties with its partner States and the peaceful settlement of disputes, as the way to respond to global challenges.

Chères collègues,

Chypre est résolument engagée en faveur du respect des principes de souveraineté, d'intégrité territoriale, d'indépendance politique et de protection des droits de l'homme. L'Europe et sa longue histoire ont connu des périodes d'incertitude et d'horreur, mais le continent a aussi été central dans la promotion des valeurs humaines, des principes démocratiques et des chemins de la paix. La nécessité de diplomatie, de sagesse politique et de dialogue n'a jamais été aussi visible et impérative qu'aujourd'hui.

Dans les temps fluides et changeants que nous traversons, nous sommes obligés de considérer ce qu'on donnait pour acquis et faire peut-être autrement. Travaillons donc ensemble pour transformer ces défis en opportunités pour une grande harmonisation et consolidation de nos valeurs et principes, et avec persistance et cohérence nous allons y arriver.

Je vous remercie de votre attention.