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Report on the Russian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe

Introduction

The programme of Russia's Chairmanship was aimed at increasing the authority and role of the Council of Europe in the interests of ensuring the rights, prosperity and well-being of all Europeans, advancing multifaceted co-operation among all European states, and, eventually, strengthening European unity. The Russian Chairmanship links the fulfilment of this task to the full-scale realisation of the founding principles of the Organisation embodied in its fundamental texts, in particular Article 1 of the Statute of the Council of Europe.

Implementation of the political decisions taken by the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe at their Third Summit in Warsaw in May 2005 has been the main theme of the Russian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers. In directing the Organisation's work, the Russian Federation has been anxious that the Council of Europe serve as an effective mechanism for pan-European co-operation in various fields, fully assuming the leading role assigned to it at the Summit, in order to build a Europe without dividing lines based on democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

No less than 28 events were organised within the framework of the Russian Chairmanship alongside the regular work of the Committee of Ministers, including five meetings at Ministerial level. In programming these events, the Russian Federation based itself on the unique expertise of the Council of Europe in a number of key areas and took advantage of the variety of its instruments and mechanisms. At the same time, another major goal of the Russian Federation was to enhance the activities of the Council of Europe in order to derive maximum benefit from its potential for member states through placing emphasis on intergovernmental co-operation within the framework of the Organisation.

During the whole term of the Chairmanship close relations were maintained and synergies were systematically sought with all relevant Council of Europe actors, and primarily with the Committee of Ministers' institutional partners which are the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Organisation's specialised bodies.

A. Reinforcing the system of human rights protection in Europe

The realisation of the first priority of Russia's Chairmanship – reinforcement of national human rights protection mechanisms, development of human rights education and protection of the rights of national minorities - reiterates the importance of ensuring the leading role of the European Convention on Human Rights. Protocol no.14 to this Convention is currently in the process of ratification (the Russian Federation signed it on

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A political organisation set up in 1949, the Council of Europe works to promote democracy and human rights continent-wide. It also develops common responses to social, cultural and legal challenges in its 46 member states.

4 May 2006). The Russian Chairmanship favours intensifying the process of further improving the effectiveness of the European Court of Human Rights and looks forward to thorough discussions of the Report by the Group of Wise Persons presented today to the Committee of Ministers. The view of the Russian Federation has always been that beyond the instruments which exist at the European level, a key to ensuring the effective protection of human rights, reducing the workload of the European Court of Human Rights, and improving national judicial systems, lies with the strengthening of national mechanisms and the development of human rights education. These objectives guided the organisation of a number of events during the Russian Chairmanship.

A key component of effective human rights protection in Europe being closer links between the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights and national practice, the first of these events was an international conference on "The effects of the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms on the development of the legal systems of European states" on 28 and 30 June in Yaroslavl. This conference, which was attended by 98 participants from 17 states, produced a series of recommendations on key issues such as the integration of the Convention into higher education programmes; the possible creation of a mechanism to analyse the case-law of the European Court of Human Rights; holding regular conferences on the newest trends in the practice of the European Court of Human Rights; and setting up a working group on promoting European standards and best practices in the field of the enforcement of domestic judgements.

Human rights education and awareness-raising on relevant standards and principles was the subject of an international conference in Moscow on 21 and 22 September 2006 on "Education in citizenship and human rights". The event provided an opportunity to lawyers, education experts and members of professional associations and appropriate non-governmental organisations to discuss initiatives aimed at furthering education in citizenship and human rights in the school and non-school sectors, including the European Programme for Human Rights Education for legal professionals (HELP). The Russian Chair hopes that the conference's recommendations, in particular regarding the introduction by the Council of Europe of an international project on education for democratic citizenship and human rights standards, which could start with a pilot phase in Russia, will be followed through in practice.

The Seminar "Evolution of moral values and human rights in a multicultural society", held in Strasbourg on 30 October, was the first opportunity for representatives of all the largest European confessions, secular philosophers and political science experts from many member states to discuss broad opportunities for pursuing the Council's interaction with religious confessions in the area of human rights, as well as the need to take into consideration the cultural heritage and traditions of different European peoples. The Russian Federation believes that holding such meetings on a regular basis would contribute to increasing mutual understanding and creating synergies in the efforts to improve human rights protection.

The protection of the rights of people belonging to national minorities is an essential condition for preserving peace and stability in Europe. As the Council of Europe possesses unique expertise and legal mechanisms in this area, the Russian Federation decided to promote these through a seminar on 18 October 2006 in Strasbourg on "International legal guarantees for the protection of rights of national minorities and problems in their implementation", with a special focus on minority education. A proposal was to use the experience of different countries, including Russia, to create, under the aegis of government authorities, consultative structures representing national minorities, so as to enable them to participate more efficiently in devising governmental decisions in the field on interethnic relations.

The Russian Federation believes that the Council of Europe cannot stay indifferent towards the violations of the rights of national minorities in certain countries, the unresolved problem of mass statelessness in these countries, the scale of which is unprecedented for present-day Europe, as well as the impossibility for members of national minorities to use the mother tongue when communicating with the authorities, to receive proper education also in their native language and for many of them to vote.

Another issue to which Russia decided to pay special attention was the decision at the Warsaw Summit to effectively promote the rights of the child. The question was addressed at a conference on "the work of national ombudspersons from Council of Europe member states in protecting the rights of children" held on 29 and 30 September 2006 in Athens. This conference provided an opportunity to review the experiences of national ombudspersons from Council of Europe member states in working to protect children's rights and to discuss possible strategies for developing institutional and legislative frameworks to improve this protection.

The Russian Federation appreciates close co-operation with the Human Rights Commissioner on this and other issues and will continue to support the work of this valuable institution of the Council of Europe.

Finally, it is worth noting that, during the Russian Chairmanship, the Committee of Ministers held a discussion on the Secretary General's proposals contained in his report under Article 52 of the European Convention on Human Rights on the question of secret detention and transport of detainees suspected of terrorist acts.

B. Creating a common European legal space to protect individuals from modern-day challenges

Throughout its Chairmanship, the Russian Federation has sought to promote and secure the role played by the Council of Europe in developing a pan-European legal space. The Council of Europe has a unique body of conventions which deserve full implementation by member states, as they offer effective mechanisms to address challenges through a coordinated approach. An encouraging 40 ratifications and 24 signatures of Council of Europe conventions were obtained during the Russian Chairmanship and it is hoped that this dynamic will be sustained. Beyond the existing instruments, new tools must be designed to address contemporary issues that confront member states. With this in mind, the Committee of Ministers undertook, at the instigation of the Russian Federation, a stock-taking of standard-setting activities carried out by the Council of Europe bodies which gave a useful overview of initiatives under way.

The position of principle advocated by the Russian Chairmanship on the strengthening of the Council of Europe's leading role in shaping the pan-European legal and humanitarian space is fully in line with the approaches set out by the Prime Minister of Luxembourg, Mr Jean-Claude Juncker, in his report on the relations between the Council of Europe and the European Union.

One way of creating this common pan-European space is to develop direct co-operation between the highest legal (judicial) bodies in member states, including ministries of justice, constitutional and supreme courts and prosecutor's offices. Improving legal education and training for legal and judicial professionals and sharing information and good practice are also a valuable tool in this regard. It was against this backdrop that several events have been held within the Programme of the Chairmanship, offering possibilities for direct ties between high-level legal practitioners.

Thus, the 7th Conference of European Prosecutors General organised by the Council of Europe, in association with the Prosecutor General's Office of the Russian Federation, was hosted in Moscow on 5 and 6 July 2006. The conference focused on the role of the public prosecutor in the protection of individuals and addressed two topics: "The duties of the public prosecutor in the criminal field towards victims and witnesses, and in particular towards juveniles" and "The duties of the public prosecutor towards persons deprived of their liberty".

Given the important role played by public prosecutors in international judicial co-operation in criminal matters, the conference inaugurated the Consultative Council of European Prosecutors (CCPE) and encouraged it to contribute to the strengthening of such co-operation, including by updating the European Conventions in this field, streamlining and harmonising mutual judicial assistance procedures and improving the efficiency of public prosecution services. At the first meeting of the CCPE, a draft framework overall action plan was elaborated, due to be approved by the Committee of Ministers in the coming weeks.

Another major event on the subject of judicial co-operation in criminal matters was the High-Level Conference of Ministries of Justice and Internal Affairs on "Improving European co-operation in the criminal justice field" organised in Moscow on 9 and 10 November 2006 by the Council of Europe in association with the Russian Ministries of Justice and Internal Affairs. Through their discussions, participants stressed the need to improve the efficiency of practical co-operation between European states in the criminal justice field (questions relating to extradition, legal aid for criminal cases, transferring criminal proceedings, handing over convicted offenders, etc) and the European treaty regime in this area. The Russian Federation believes that the European Conventions on extradition and on mutual assistance in criminal matters that date back to 1957 and 1959, do not correspond on many accounts to the nature and scope of modern criminal threats. The elaboration of modernised conventions in this area would allow anti-criminal co-operation at the pan-European level to benefit from simplified procedures, as well as from efficient mechanisms of resolution of disputes arising during their implementation.

A third event worth mentioning was the conference on "The common European legal space and constitutional law practice", held from 25 to 29 October 2006 by the Council of Europe in association with the Russian Constitutional Court. It provided an opportunity for member states to discuss how European constitutional courts can play a part in protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, in the light of the European Convention on Human Rights and the relevant case-law of the European Court of Human Rights.

On the specific subject of combating terrorism, which has been a major concern of the Russian Federation and indeed of the Council of Europe for several years now, the period of the Chairmanship saw a number of important developments, which will need to be consolidated and amplified in the coming months and years.

The first ratifications of the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism (ETS No.196), and the Council of Europe Convention on the Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime and on the Financing of Terrorism (ETS No.198), both adopted at the Third Summit, have taken place. The number of ratifications of the Protocol amending the European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism (ETS No.190) has increased. There is every likelihood that the Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism will collect the number of ratifications necessary for its entry into force by the end of 2006. The Committee of Ministers' appeal to member states regarding the two other instruments will also produce results. The Russian Federation has itself taken steps down this path by being the first state to ratify the Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism on 19 May 2006 and by ratifying the Protocol amending the European Convention on the Suppression of Terrorism on 4 October 2006. The Committee of Experts on Terrorism (CODEXTER) conducted in June a thematic review of the implementation of these Conventions, identifying problems that states encounter and possible ways to overcome them.

Furthermore, the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism was at the centre of the discussions at the Joint Seminar of the Council of Europe and the OSCE on the "Prevention of terrorism: fighting incitement to terrorist crimes and other types of terrorist activities", which was held in Vienna on 19 and 20 October 2006, under the joint sponsorship of the Russian Federation and Germany. The main goals of the seminar were to promote best practices regarding ways of banning the incitement to commit terrorist crimes and its apologetics, involving civil society institutions to ensure the prevention of terrorism and its apologetics, and promoting interaction between law enforcement agencies in the fight against incitement to terrorism and the recruitment and training of terrorists as well as the development of recommendations in this area. The Seminar participants noted that in the legal regime of counter-terrorism work, much stronger emphasis is now placed on prevention than before. The Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism is a reflection of this trend and is the first international legal instrument to criminalise incitement to terrorism. The crucial UN Security Council Resolution 1624 was to a large extent inspired by the work of the Council of Europe.

The Committee of Ministers will soon consider possible follow-up to be given to the seminar, with a view to identifying concrete preventive anti-terrorist measures. In this context, the Committee has already invited various steering committees acting in the fields of culture, education, youth and social cohesion, to consider their possible contribution to the prevention of terrorism.

Meanwhile, the Committee of Ministers invited CODEXTER to pursue its work on identification of lacunae in international law and action against terrorism and to continue its work in drawing up of country profiles on counter-terrorism capacity and the exchanges of best practice concerning, inter alia, the protection and compensation of victims of terrorism. The Russian Federation considers that the necessity to devise a European strategy to counteract the use of information technologies in criminal, including terrorist, purposes, is nearing the top of the current agenda. There is an objective need to elaborate a special Council of Europe legal instrument on combating acts of cyber-terrorism. An independent expert report on this subject has been commissioned by the Secretariat and will soon be available for the relevant expert committees.

The issue of the protection of victims of terrorism and other forms of crime was also discussed at the 27th Conference of European Justice Ministers held in Yerevan (Armenia) on 12 and 13 October 2006, in particular in the light of Recommendation Rec(2006)8 to member states on assistance to crime victims, adopted by the Committee of Ministers in June under the Russian Chairmanship. One of the promising topics here is that of compensation and insurance schemes for victims of crime, including terrorism. Activities on crime victims should be coordinated with similar work under way within the OSCE.

As far as the development of new legal instruments is concerned, active standard-setting work was under way during the term of the Russian Chairmanship. A draft Convention on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse, as well as a draft revised Convention on adoption of children are at an advanced stage of elaboration at the expert level. The Russian Federation has itself taken steps towards wider participation in European Conventions by ratifying, during its Chairmanship, the Criminal Law Convention on Corruption and signing the European Convention on Transfrontier Television and the two Protocols to the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities and Authorities.

C. Developing efficient forms of democracy and civic participation, promoting good governance

Improving the forms of democracy with due regard for specific national contexts, involving civil society more actively and adopting best governance practices are all important issues for Council of Europe member states and ones which the Organisation ought to consider in order to come up with innovative solutions, in line with the request made by Heads of State and Government at the Warsaw Summit.

On the subject of elections, which are a core element of democracy, the Russian Federation has long argued that the Council of Europe could fill the legal vacuum created by the lack of common legal standards for holding and monitoring elections. The Chair of the Committee of Ministers had occasion to raise this matter at its meeting on 21 September with the Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE.

So far, electoral monitoring procedures have not been duly approved at intergovernmental level. The question of the practice of so-called joint election observation missions, without inviting representatives of the CIS Inter-Parliamentary Assembly to participate was raised. So was the imbalance of attention given to certain elections compared to others, where so-called “non citizens” were deprived of their right to vote. The adoption of a European convention on standards for democratic elections would contribute to solving this issue.

Possible further steps to promote democratic standards in electoral matters were the focus of discussions at the 3rd European Conference of Election Management Bodies held in Moscow on 22 and 23 May 2006, under the auspices of the Venice Commission and the Russian Chair, and will be examined further within the framework of the Committee of Ministers. The Russian Federation will follow with the utmost interest the discussions that are due to start in November on this subject in the Committee of Ministers Rapporteur Group on legal co-operation.

On the more general subject of adapting democratic institutions to the changes taking place in European societies, the Forum for the Future of Democracy held in Moscow on 18 and 19 October in association with the Russian Federation Federal Assembly and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe provided an opportunity to take a comprehensive look at ways of establishing closer links between political parties and civil society and possible elaboration of the code of good practice for political parties which the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe has decided to initiate.

As pointed out by the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe in the Declaration adopted at the Third Summit in Warsaw, maintaining and developing effective, transparent and accountable democratic institutions is essential in order to promote effective democracy and good governance. This is particularly true at local level, which is the closest to citizens and their concerns. It was against this background that a seminar on the “Efficiency of the work of local self-government bodies” was organised on 22-24 June 2006, in Veliky Novgorod, with the aim of discussing modern governance methods for municipal entities and making recommendations for improving governance efficiency at local level. The participants adopted an Action Plan on ensuring effective local self-government in Russia to promote best practices for training and capacity-building aimed at efficient management and service provision, and developing cross-border co-operation.

A practical and concrete approach inspired by the real needs of the regions guided the Russian position with respect to the important proposal of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities to establish a Centre for inter-regional and cross-border co-operation in Saint Petersburg. The Russian Federation hopes that the elaboration of the mandate of the Centre will be completed shortly.

Lastly, modern democracy cannot exist without the active involvement of non-governmental organisations and civil society. To this end, a European conference of non-governmental organisations on “Ensuring social rights and the process of developing a dialogue between the authorities and civil society” took place on 15 and 16 September 2006 in Moscow, in association with the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe. The conclusions produced by the conference now need to be translated into practical measures, to promote the role of NGOs in safeguarding the social rights of families and children, the elderly and people with disabilities.

During the course of the Chairmanship, Russia has aimed at promoting, in every way, the role of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe in the development of European regional integration and improvement of local democracy. The conduct of the Congress autumn session in Moscow on 13-15 November, the first session held outside the Council of Europe headquarters, has been a significant step in this direction.

D. Improving access to social rights and the protection of vulnerable groups

The objective of building a more humane Europe was supported by the Heads of State and Government at the Third Council of Europe Summit. While continuing its support for all the Council of Europe’s activities in the social field, the Russian Chair decided to make a specific contribution to the implementation of the Ten-Year Action Plan to promote the rights and full participation in society of people with disabilities. In association with the Russian Ministry of Health and Social Development and the Nordic Council, a conference was accordingly held in St Petersburg on 21 and 22 September, on improving the quality of life of people with disabilities, where the Disability Action Plan was officially inaugurated.

The conference led to the adoption of the “St Petersburg Declaration” in which participants recommended that member state governments incorporate the principles and measures set out in the Council of Europe Disability Action Plan in their policies, legislation and practice. All relevant bodies and committees of the Council of Europe were also invited to adopt a co-ordinated, strategic approach to ensuring that the implementation of the Disability Action Plan is mainstreamed and regularly evaluated to identify progress. In addition, the conference workshops produced three specific recommendations: (i) move gradually but purposefully towards de-institutionalisation, with an urgent focus on the needs of children, (ii) create positive conditions in the way that working life is organised for people with disabilities and (iii) secure interaction between all branches of state administrative and other structures in the different spheres, as well as securing their social partnership and dialogue with NGOs.

As far as the protection of children is concerned, the Russian Federation held a seminar in Moscow on 14 and 15 September 2006 entitled “Ensuring children’s rights – ensuring the development of society” under the three-year programme “Building a Europe for and with children”. The seminar emphasised the need for the development of institutional mechanisms for protecting the rights of children, in particular children living in difficult conditions, including disabled children and orphans, and stronger support for the family as a basic condition for ensuring children’s rights.

The participants in the seminar spoke in favour of strengthening the role of the commissioners for children’s rights; greater attention to deinstitutionalisation of children living in specialised facilities; integrated education for children with special needs; improved efficiency of juvenile justice; greater involvement of public associations, the voluntary sector and business in the field of child welfare policies. It also discussed assistance to families with disabled children and providing other forms of care for orphans as an alternative to institutionalisation.

During the Russian Chairmanship, the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers adopted six recommendations on promoting patient-oriented health care. Ways of combating counterfeit medicines at national and international levels and the legal possibilities for fighting the problem were discussed at a conference on “Europe against counterfeit medicines” held on 23 and 24 October 2006 in Moscow. The suggestion made at the conference to develop, under the Council of Europe auspices, a legal instrument for combating “pharmaceutical crime”, including counterfeit medicines, is an innovative proposal for the protection of the health of European citizens.

The Russian Federation in general attaches a special attention to furthering co-operation with the Council of Europe in the field of social cohesion. An important step in this direction was made by the Organisation by inviting Russia to accede, as an observer, to the European Pharmacopoeia and to the Partial Agreement in the Social and Public Health Field.

E. Strengthening tolerance and mutual understanding through the development of dialogue, co-operation in the field of culture, education, science, youth and sport

Since the Third Summit, promoting intercultural and interreligious dialogue has been at the forefront of the Council of Europe’s activities and of the Russian Chair of the Committee of Ministers. This work was one of its focal points. Mutual enrichment through better knowledge of others’ culture and cultural exchanges is a powerful means to attain the Council of Europe’s statutory objectives. In the face of growing tensions and attempts by extremists to use religious or other arguments to disseminate hatred and fear, new effective steps are needed to preserve the atmosphere of tolerance in Europe on the basis of equality and mutual respect. An essential element of intercultural dialogue is dialogue and interaction between state and religious organisations, and between different confessions.

With its centuries-long experience of co-existence of various ethnic groups, cultures and religions, Russia took the step of organising an international conference on intercultural and inter-religious dialogue in Nizhniy Novgorod on 7 and 8 September. The event drew some 300 government officials, experts and senior representatives of various religious communities from all over Europe. The “Volga Forum Declaration”, adopted at the end of the conference, suggests many possible lines of action. The following points, which reflect the work of the three workshops set up during the conference, warrant particular attention:

- first, the urgent appeal issued by conference participants for the Council of Europe to develop appropriate mechanisms for an open, transparent and regular dialogue with religious organisations”;
- secondly, the declaration, while insisting on the fact that freedom of religion, conscience and expression are fundamental values set out in the European Convention on Human Rights, calls on the media to adopt a responsible attitude and encourages them to reflect society’s diversity and to promote greater mutual understanding while respecting human dignity;

- thirdly, the competent authorities in Council of Europe member states, including local and regional authorities, are urged to rapidly adopt policies defining effective tools and actions for promoting democratic management of cultural diversity. The Volga region was cited in this connection as an example of dialogue and co-operation between different ethnic groups and religious communities.

The Russian Federation welcomes the progress in the preparation of the White Paper on intercultural dialogue. The elaboration of this report should be combined with practical action, while drawing on the numerous initiatives already taken within the Organisation and by other international bodies, especially the U.N. "Alliance of Civilisations" initiative.

History teaching is a highly appropriate tool for promoting mutual understanding and tolerance. The numerous activities conducted by the Council in this area ended with a final conference on the implementation of the project "Teaching history in a multicultural society: integration of mechanisms of intercultural dialogue in the school teaching of history", which took place on 23 and 24 June 2006 in St Petersburg. This conference recommended specific measures to use history teaching to overcome the threat of ethnic, national, cultural and religious intolerance, such as adapting general history education curricula, developing transborder co-operation in the field of education, training teachers to work in a multicultural environment, preparing a set of relevant materials and textbooks, promoting students' research on intercultural issues etc.

Values are created and propagated through culture and education. A genuine European identity has to be based on respect for cultural heritage of all peoples of Europe and cultural diversity. These fundamental principles were reiterated in the "Tsarskoye Selo Declaration" which was adopted at the end of the colloquy on the value of cultural heritage, organised by the Russian Federation on 22 September 2006 in St-Petersburg to mark the start of European Heritage Days. The participants in the colloquy, while emphasizing the value of cultural heritage, encouraged the Council of Europe to play an active role in developing various mechanisms at the European and national level in order to promote the preservation of heritage and to facilitate access for everyone to heritage.

Another area of the Council of Europe's work to which the Russian Federation has always attached, and will continue to attach, particular importance is the youth sector. For greater unity in Europe will only be achieved if we manage to teach young people to understand one another and to work together. A European Youth Forum for diversity, human rights and participation in St Petersburg 21-25 September 2006 brought together four hundred representatives from youth organisations all over Europe. They put emphasis on the notion of youth mobility as the essential pre-requisite for enhancing the role of young people in defining a common future for Europe and building a Europe without dividing lines. Many conclusions and initiatives contained in the Forum's Declaration should be realised in the form of the Council of Europe's projects.

Increased mobility and participation of students in creating a knowledge-based society and the Bologna Process were central topics of a seminar on students' role in creating a European higher education area held in Moscow in November.

Finally, in view of the growing popularity of sport, the role it plays in promoting integration and preventing social exclusion and alienation must not be underestimated. The Russian Chair very much hopes that, following the Conference of European Ministers of Sport in Moscow on 20 and 21 October, an enlarged Partial Agreement of the Council of Europe in the field of sport will come about shortly.

F. Co-operation with other international organisations

Throughout its Chairmanship, the Russian Federation has attached great importance to the development of co-operation between the Council of Europe and other international organisations, in line with the wishes expressed by Heads of State and Government at the Warsaw Summit.

One initial focus has been on forging closer co-operation with the United Nations, as emphasised by the Russian Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Lavrov, in his speech to the United Nations General Assembly in September. The Russian Federation believes that the resolution on co-operation between the Council of Europe and the United Nations adopted by the General Assembly on 13 November will provide a sound basis for better interaction between the Council of Europe and the United Nations.

Similarly, the Russian Chair has carried on its predecessors' efforts to strengthen co-operation with the OSCE, with a view to developing joint initiatives on issues of common interest, by capitalising on the complementary nature of their activities. As pointed out at the high-level "3+3" meeting in New York on 21 September between the Council of Europe and the OSCE, this is particularly important in the four priority areas of co-operation agreed by the two organisations, namely the fight against terrorism, protection of the rights of persons belonging to

national minorities, combating trafficking in human beings and the promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination. The meeting of the Council of Europe/OSCE co-ordination group in Strasbourg on 29 September provided an opportunity to review progress in these four areas and to put forward practical proposals for further action, for example as regards involving the OSCE in the Council of Europe's work on promoting intercultural dialogue. The workshop on the prevention of terrorism jointly organised by the Council of Europe and the OSCE in Vienna was particularly rewarding in this respect (see page 4 above). The Russian Federation very much hopes that there will be more joint initiatives of this kind in the future, and will make every effort to assist this process.

As regards relations between the Council of Europe and the European Union, the Russian Chair has been making considerable efforts since May to move forward the negotiations on the draft Memorandum of Understanding which is to provide the framework for closer co-operation between the two organisations. The Chair has been aiming at having the Memorandum as a result of collective creative work, with account taken of the positions of all interested parties, including the ideas put forward by the Parliamentary Assembly. We are grateful to our partners for their valuable contributions to the document. However, the drafting work has uncovered serious political and legal problems that can only be solved through compromise. It has not been possible so far to agree on the aims and principles of the inter-institutional co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Union. Issues related to legal co-operation, the preservation of the coherence of the European human rights protection system as well as the role of the Council of Europe vis-à-vis the policies elaborated by the EU, including the European Neighbourhood Policy, are still under discussion.

The Russian Federation is ready to seek compromise solutions. We hope that EU member states will also show understanding and readiness to take the existing concerns into consideration. Further work on the Memorandum needs to take account of the ideas and recommendations contained in Mr Juncker's report, in particular those related to the shaping of a pan-European legal space and to the principles and mechanisms of collaboration between the Council of Europe and the European Union. The Russian Chair has been consistently in favour of the earliest implementation of the decision taken at the 116th Session of the Committee of Ministers, to establish a high-level group to consider the report and the recommendations contained therein. We hope that the Group's terms of reference will be adopted shortly.

The Russian Chairmanship is convinced that the practice of inviting Parliamentary Assembly representatives to meetings on Council of Europe co-operation with other international organisations, including the European Union, should be continued. We consider that both organisations will benefit from their involvement in the exchange of views on current issues of such co-operation, which could thereby be better coordinated.

G. Reform of the Organisation

During the Russian Chairmanship, the work on further reform of the Organisation described in Chapter V of the Action Plan continued with a view to secure transparency and cost-efficiency as well as internal co-operation and knowledge sharing. The Committee of Ministers welcomed the new Council of Europe Communication Strategy. New elements were introduced in human resources policy. The Ministers' Deputies reviewed the structure of the bodies subordinate to the Committee of Ministers and held an in-depth discussion on streamlining of the Council of Europe's presence in some member states, including the activities of the information offices.

However, sometimes difficult discussions on the budget and the worrying trend of the decline of the Organisation's Programme of Activities against the background of its overall budget increase, call for much bolder and far-reaching measures, especially through savings in administrative and staff expenditure, which constitute almost two-thirds of the budget of the Organisation. Resolute measures are needed to ensure a just geographical balance and introduce staff mobility.

H. Country-specific co-operation

Throughout the Russian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, particular attention was paid to developing inter-governmental co-operation and providing necessary assistance for reforms through action plans and programmes approved by the Committee of Ministers with regard to Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Serbia, the "former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" and Ukraine. Election observation missions were also sent by the Council of Europe to Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, the "former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" and to Montenegro, which the Russian Federation hopes will soon become a member state of the Council of Europe.

A number of country-specific reports and resolutions on observance by member states of their obligations under Council of Europe conventions were also adopted during the Russian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers.

The discussion on regional conflicts showed that the comparative advantage of the Council of Europe lies not in direct involvement in conflict resolution, but rather in creating proper conditions for negotiating processes and increasing mutual trust.

The Russian Federation believes that the goal of the earliest accession of Belarus to the Council of Europe could be more effectively achieved through active dialogue with the participation of the authorities and civil society.

A welcome development was the agreement reached in July between the Council of Europe and NATO, which will allow the CPT to visit all detention facilities in Kosovo to verify whether detention conditions comply with the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment.

Conclusion

The Russian Federation would like to take this opportunity to thank the Secretary General and the staff of the Secretariat, as well as all the member states and the various Council of Europe bodies for the support they have shown throughout its Chairmanship.

The above overview shows that the Council of Europe can develop as an effective mechanism of pan-European co-operation and creation of a common legal and humanitarian space provided there is political will among the member states. Numerous events of a pan-European scale organised by the Chairmanship reconfirmed the potential of the Council of Europe and the desire of government representatives, experts and the civil society to engage in active multifaceted co-operation in various fields. The Committee of Ministers should do its utmost to promote this co-operation. The Russian Federation believes that the initiatives and the interesting proposals collectively worked out by the participants in the events will receive thorough consideration and have an appropriate follow-up in the Council of Europe Programme of Activities.

The Russian Chairmanship extends its best wishes for success to the incoming San Marino Chairmanship in further strengthening the Council of Europe for the benefit of the inhabitants of Europe.