

Press Release

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Ukraine: Commissioner calls for urgent improvements of the human rights situation

Strasbourg, 03.10.2007 – The Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights, Thomas Hammarberg presented today a report on the human-rights record of Ukraine. He expressed the hope that the incoming government in Kyiv will implement his concrete recommendations on the administration of justice, police behaviour, minority rights and the social and health spheres.

The report is based on the findings of the Commissioner's official visit to Ukraine in December 2006, when Mr Hammarberg, accompanied by members of his Office, visited Kyiv, Lviv and Odessa and met the highest country authorities, members of the Government, parliamentarians, representatives of the civil society as well as leading human rights experts.

The Commissioner is worried about the corruption in the judicial process, the broad oversight functions of the Office of the Prosecutor General and the backlog and lengthy proceedings in the courts. He recommends Ukrainians authorities to take urgent measures to redress shortcomings in the administration of justice.

The report furthermore identifies cases of torture and ill-treatment, the lack of access to a lawyer as well as the overcrowding and poor health conditions in pre-trial detention centres as the main issues that Ukraine has to deal with. Mr Hammarberg recommends a number of actions to be taken, in particular a comprehensive policy to counter cases of police misconduct and the need to improve medical and sanitary conditions in pre-trial detention facilities.

The report points out that violence against women, trafficking in human beings and children's rights are amongst the most urgent priorities identified by the Government. The Commissioner observes that "there is a definite societal problem of violence against women" and recommends concrete steps to remedy the situation. Urgent measures are also required to improve children's protection against poverty, pornography, drug use and trafficking.

The Commissioner is alarmed by the spread of the HIV/AIDS in Ukraine and he recommends national authorities to improve access to treatments, rehabilitation and social reintegration of people affected by the virus, calling on the Government to urgently establish a national action plan to stop the pandemic, including more emphasis on information campaigns.

The report also expresses concern about the social exclusion of elderly people, the homeless as well of street children.

The Commissioner underlines the need to remove restrictions concerning the scope of application of minority laws. He touches upon the need to ensure societal integration for the Roma and the Crimean Tatar and stresses the importance of effectively implementing the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages through education.

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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 47 member states.

With regard to freedom of religion, particular emphasis is put on the need to ensure that religious denominations possess the status of full legal identities, on the importance of the execution of court decisions concerning restitution of property as well as on the need to strengthen dialogue between different religious denominations.

Finally, the Commissioner calls on Ukraine to ratify the Council of Europe's Convention on Action Against Trafficking in Human Beings and make it operational as soon as possible.

The full text can be read on the Commissioner's website, www.commissioner.coe.int.
For further information, please contact Mr Stefano Montanari (stefano.montanari@coe.int).

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The Commissioner for Human Rights is an independent, non-judicial institution within the Council of Europe, mandated to promote awareness of, and respect for, human rights in the 47 member States of the Council of Europe. Elected by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the present Commissioner, Mr Thomas Hammarberg, took up his function on 1 April 2006.