



PRESIDENCY OF FINLAND

Council of Europe
November 2018 – May 2019

PRÉSIDENCE DE LA FINLANDE

Conseil de l'Europe
Novembre 2018 – Mai 2019

21.11.2018

Presidency of Finland of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe
November 2018 to May 2019

Presidency Programme and Calendar

**The Essence of Europe – Advancing Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law
for All**

The Council of Europe is a cornerstone of human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Europe. The member States are obliged by legally binding human rights treaties to secure the human rights of individuals under their jurisdiction. Respecting human rights, democratic principles and the rule of law at national level is also a key element in enhancing rules-based multilateral co-operation.

Finland as a firm supporter of these values is pleased and honoured to hold the Presidency of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers from 21 November 2018 to 17 May 2019. We are particularly pleased that during the Finnish Presidency the Council of Europe will celebrate its 70-year anniversary on 5 May 2019.

The main goal of the Finnish Presidency is to further strengthen the crucial work of the Council of Europe in advancing human rights, democracy and the rule of law. This core mandate of the Council of Europe is particularly important now that human rights are being challenged at both the European and global level. Finland regards the 70th anniversary of the Council of Europe as an excellent opportunity to communicate to the public the importance of human rights and the rule of law in responding to both current and future problems in Europe. European crises, the contemporary and future human rights challenges and the political and financial problems faced by the Council of Europe all underline the need to focus on the essence of the work of the Council of Europe.

During its Presidency, Finland will therefore emphasise the fundamental strengths of the Council of Europe: the European Convention on Human Rights, the European Court of Human Rights, other legally binding treaties and their monitoring mechanisms, such as the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, as well as instruments and mechanisms that support the implementation of human rights in our member States. All

of these activities are essential and irreplaceable. Their impact on the lives of individuals is invaluable and they advance the protection of human rights.

Non-discrimination, equality, women's rights, the rights of the child, the rights of minorities – in particular taking into account the situation of the Roma – and the rights of persons with disabilities have seen progress through the work of the Council of Europe. In the long term, equal opportunities and the fair treatment of all citizens will promote democratic security and economic prosperity across Europe.

The Council of Europe is also seen to be in the vanguard of the development of human rights at the global level. Finland deems it important that the Council of Europe is able to react swiftly to major human rights challenges. For example, it is necessary to consider how existing human rights norms are able to respond to human rights questions brought about by new technology, digitalisation and, in particular, artificial intelligence.

The first and crosscutting priority of the Finnish Presidency is to support and strengthen Europe's system of human rights and the rule of law. The two other key priorities are equality and women's rights; and openness and inclusion as well as a focus on young people and the prevention of radicalisation. Finland has actively and consistently emphasised these topics in all its work within the Council of Europe. Finland's Presidency programme is human rights-based, with equality and women's rights mainstreamed. The three priorities are interlinked and interrelated, and the main activities to be organised during our Presidency will focus on these priorities. In addition, other events and activities are planned during the Finnish Presidency. A link to these can be found at the end of this document.

Finland will also continue to promote close co-operation with other regional and international organisations and to strengthen interaction between the different bodies of the Council of Europe. Soon after the Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, Finland will assume the Presidency of the Council of the European Union. These two consecutive leadership roles provide an excellent opportunity to advance the co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Union in building stability and security as well as addressing new challenges in Europe.

1. Strengthening the system of human rights and the rule of law in Europe

The Finnish Presidency programme calls for a focus on the essentials: strengthening the work of the Council of Europe in its key mandate areas, implementing the obligations and fulfilling the commitments, and supporting the monitoring mechanisms. These elements have been Finland's priorities in the Council of Europe for many years. Given the current situation in Europe, supporting and defending human rights and the rule of law are more important than ever.

During our Presidency, we will celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Council of Europe, the 60th anniversary of the European Court of Human Rights, the 20th anniversary of the single, permanent European Court of Human Rights, and the 20th anniversary of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights. These anniversaries provide an

opportunity to highlight the achievements of these human rights institutions, and the challenges they face, in particular the respect for the European Court's judgments. Additionally, the Finnish Presidency will coincide with the 70th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights.

The European system of human rights and the rule of law does not function in a vacuum. It needs to be able to react to changes and new challenges arising in Europe and beyond. The enjoyment and the protection of human rights must be guaranteed also in the future. With the constant development and increased use of artificial intelligence, discussion is needed on the relevance of the current mechanisms for protecting human rights. Artificial intelligence brings benefits to our daily lives yet at the same time it is necessary to look into ethical and legal questions that it raises. What does artificial intelligence mean to human rights? Are the current instruments adequate and sufficient or should they be developed to respond to new situations brought about by artificial intelligence? Are some groups, for example minorities, neglected or do they face new challenges due to poorly conceived algorithms? How should we address this within human rights norms? What happens to democracy, security and accountability? How can we ensure that artificial intelligence supports the advancement of democracy and the rule of law?

We must be able to ensure that when it comes to questions of new technology, we will be able to uphold the respect for human rights and the rule of law. In addition, the advancement of digitalisation means we need to complement the Council of Europe tools in the field of criminal justice, in particular the Council of Europe Convention on Cybercrime.

2. Support for equality and women's rights

Concerning equality and non-discrimination, the Council of Europe is one of the leading organisations in both relevant legal and political work. Finland has actively supported the Council of Europe's work on equality and women's rights. We have supported, for example, the efforts aimed at eliminating violence against women, improving the situation of Roma women, as well as questions related to non-discrimination. All human rights, including civil and political rights and economic, social and cultural rights must be taken into account. It is also essential that everyone in society, including men and boys, becomes involved in taking action. Further, concerning questions of equality and women's rights, it is crucially important to highlight commitments and the need for their implementation. Unfortunately, we are seeing increasing attempts to challenge equality and women's rights in Europe and beyond. In this regard, the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence is a remarkable achievement of the Council of Europe and its effective implementation by member States is of vital importance.

The new Council of Europe Gender Equality Strategy 2018–2023 is also an essential tool and we will be promoting its implementation during the Finnish Presidency. We will hold a conference to bring attention to the priority of eliminating sexism and stereotypes. Harassment and hate speech towards women, along with stereotypical treatment of women at work and in the media, weakens women's ability to exercise their rights and pursue

opportunities. Harassment and hate speech are negative phenomena that need to be fully eliminated. During the Finnish Presidency, we will also discuss ways to eliminate sexual abuse of children at all levels in society. As part of this effort, a seminar will be organised with a specific focus on the sports sector.

3. Openness and inclusion – as well as a focus on young people and the prevention of radicalisation

An open society and an active civil society are important elements of any democracy. Fundamental freedoms such as freedom of expression and speech and freedom of association and assembly are crucial to a thriving democracy. Finland has a long history of emphasising public participation: ministries have developed online platforms for public participation and organised hearings for civil society. Representatives of civil society often participate as independent members of official Finnish delegations to international meetings, bringing to meetings the direct voice of civil society. We also have numerous officially established advisory boards where representatives of civil society act together with authorities from different sectors. At the local and municipal level, Finnish legislation gives residents extensive rights to participate in and influence activities that concern their living environment, public services and local or municipal decision-making. In addition, an equally important element for promoting an open society is our legislation on access to information and official documents, as well as on good governance.

During our Presidency, we will highlight participation and dialogue with civil society. In preparation for the Finnish Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, the Ministry for Foreign Affairs, in co-operation with other ministries, held a public event where people could participate in discussing the Presidency goals and programme.

At events to be organised during our Presidency, we will highlight and promote discussion on human rights defenders, education for democratic citizenship and human rights, as well as the elimination of radicalisation leading to terrorism and youth work. Support for human rights defenders is extremely important when the challenges we face are increasing and civil society space is shrinking. An active civil society that embraces a plurality of voices is an ultimate strength in helping advance human rights. To promote an understanding of human rights standards, we need to uphold inclusiveness, and advance education on human rights and democratic values. In this regard, it is especially important to support the social inclusion of young people and eliminate discrimination and marginalisation.

Inclusiveness means that everyone is able to participate meaningfully in society, including individuals and groups that are today easily marginalised and that often face discrimination. During its Presidency, Finland will highlight in particular the situation and rights of the Roma. Additionally, Finland will consider how the work of the Council of Europe can support the use and strengthen the status of sign languages in Europe.

CALENDAR OF MAIN EVENTS DURING THE FINNISH PRESIDENCY

- 1. Handing over the Presidency from Croatia to Finland
21 November 2018, Strasbourg**
Responsible Finnish Authority: Ministry for Foreign Affairs
2. Roundtable of the European Governmental LGBTI Focal Points Network
21–22 November 2018, Tallinn, Helsinki
Responsible Finnish Authority: Ministry of Justice
together with the Government of Estonia
- 3. PACE Standing Committee
22–23 November 2018, Helsinki**
Responsible Finnish Authority: Parliament of Finland
4. The 20 years of the Single Court of the European Court of Human Rights
26 November 2018, Strasbourg
Responsible Finnish Authority: Ministry for Foreign Affairs
5. CDDH Workshop on the Protection and Promotion of the Civil Society Space in Europe
29 November 2018, Strasbourg
Responsible Finnish Authority: Ministry for Foreign Affairs
6. Human Rights Defenders in Council of Europe area – current challenges and possible solutions, Round table organized by Office of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights
13–14 December 2018, Helsinki
- 7. First 2019 Session of the Parliamentary Assembly
21–25 January 2019, Strasbourg**
Responsible Finnish Authority: Parliament of Finland
+ event to mark the 20th anniversary of the Commissioner for Human Rights
Responsible Finnish Authority: Ministry for Foreign Affairs
8. Conference Protecting Common European Standards on the Rule of Law
5 February 2019, Tampere
Responsible Finnish Authority: University of Tampere, Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Justice, Prime Minister's Office
9. Education and Training Pathways of Youth Workers
20–22 February 2019, Helsinki
Responsible Finnish Authority: Ministry of Education and Culture
- 10. High Level Expert Conference on Artificial Intelligence, Human Rights and the Rule of Law
26–27 February 2019, Helsinki**
Responsible Finnish Authority: Ministry for Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Justice,
(advisory role: Ministry of Economic Affairs and Employment)

11. Meeting of the Bureau of the Congress

1 March 2019, Helsinki

Responsible Finnish Authority: Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities, Ministry of Finance

12. Expert Meeting on the Implementation of Roma Integration Strategies and the International Roma Women's Conference

25–27 March 2019, Espoo

Responsible Finnish Authority: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health, Ministry for Foreign Affairs

13. Expert Conference on Tackling Gender Stereotypes and Sexism

28–29 March 2019, Helsinki

Responsible Finnish Authority: Ministry of Social Affairs and Health

14. First 2019 Session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

2–4 April 2019, Strasbourg

Responsible Finnish Authority: Association of Finnish Local and Regional Authorities

15. Second 2019 Session of the Parliamentary Assembly

8–12 April 2019, Strasbourg

Responsible Finnish Authority: Parliament of Finland

+ a side event on 10th April to launch a study on sign language, with a music performance by rap artist Signmark

Responsible Finnish Authority: Ministry for Foreign Affairs

16. Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights, Plenary Meeting of EPAN

16–17 April 2019, Helsinki

Responsible Finnish Authority: Ministry of Education and Culture, Ministry for Foreign Affairs of Finland, Ministry of Justice

17. High Level Conference on Responses to Prison Overcrowding

24–25 April 2019, Strasbourg

Responsible Finnish Authority: Ministry of Justice

18. Expert Conference on Sexual Violence against Women and Children in Sports

29–30 April 2019, Helsinki

Responsible Finnish Authority: Ministry of Education and Culture

19. 129th Session of the Committee of Ministers

16–17 May 2019, Helsinki

Responsible Finnish Authority: Ministry for Foreign Affairs