



Predsednica Republike Slovenije

NATAŠA PIRC MUSAR

**Address by the President of the Republic of Slovenia
Dr Nataša Pirc Musar
at the 4th Summit of the of the Council of Europe
“United for Europe – General Debate”**

Reykjavík, 17 May 2023

Check against delivery.

Madam Chairperson, Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Let me begin by congratulating the Icelandic Presidency and thanking the Prime Minister for bringing us together in Iceland at this somber time for Europe. We are here to unite behind our shared values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. These fundamental values have guided Slovenia since independence and joining the Council of Europe 30 years ago.

It saddens me to see how war has entered Europe again. So let me be clear: Slovenia condemns in the strongest terms Russia's brutal aggression against Ukraine. We stand in solidarity with the people of Ukraine and will continue to provide assistance as long as is necessary. We support all efforts to hold accountable all those responsible for crimes committed in Ukraine. The establishment of the Register of Damage is an important step in this regard.

I would like to focus my remarks on three main points.

*Firstly – the question of our time is: how do we reverse the **backsliding on democracy, the rule of law, human rights and minority rights**? This is the crux of why we have gathered here in Reykjavik. We have to do our utmost to reverse this trend, fulfil our obligations and abide by our shared standards. We must lend our full support to the Council of Europe as our continent's leading and indispensable guardian of legal obligations and shared standards on the rule of law, minority rights and human rights. Independence of judiciary and media freedom are key in safeguarding these obligations and standards. I can tell you from our own experience*

that media freedom should not be taken for granted. And as we know all too well: democracy dies in darkness.

*Secondly – and closely related to my first point – is the most critical obligation that all our states share, namely the **full and timely execution of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights**. Slovenia strongly supports the supervisory mechanism for the execution of judgements and all other independent monitoring mechanisms of the Council of Europe. With their independent advice they help us, as member states, to confront any negative trends in a timely manner.*

A growing trend of non-execution of the Court's judgements is deeply concerning and unacceptable. The rules apply to all equally. This is an area where there should be no backsliding.

*And my third and final point – the Council of Europe's role as the **standard-setter for current and emerging human rights challenges** is equally important. On the protection of the environment and on climate change, the Council of Europe should play a leading role. We welcome today's decision and Slovenia can help. We continue to be globally vocal about the right to a clean and healthy environment as a human right.*

New technologies and artificial intelligence are getting ahead of us, and it is high time for the regulation of their use in a human rights-friendly way. Unless we act quickly and decisively, their effects on the enjoyment of our human rights could be devastating. It is we who hold the key to the future: let us make sure it is human-friendly.

Excellences,

Our predecessors, the founders of European institutions, dreamed of Europe as one, and the baton is now with us to make this dream a reality. The Council of Europe's door must be open to new members.

The world may be changing, but the need for respect for human dignity remains as important as ever. On behalf of my country, Slovenia, I am ready to help make sure that we conclude this summit with a strong and positive message for the future of the Council of Europe. And for all of us in Europe.

Thank you.