



Association of Schools
of Political Studies of the
Council of Europe

TEXT UNDER EMBARGO UNTIL 00h01 ON MONDAY 14 MAY 2023

**MESSAGE TO EUROPEAN LEADERS GATHERING IN REYKJAVIK ON 16 AND 17
MAY FOR THE 4th COUNCIL OF EUROPE SUMMIT**

Strasbourg, 14 May 2023

We, the members of the Association of Schools of Political Studies of the Council of Europe, are committed to strengthening respect for democracy, human rights and the rule of law through our work with civil society and policy makers in our respective countries.

We are deeply concerned about the many different and increasingly sophisticated forms of harassment including abusive surveillance of NGOs, journalists, lawyers, academics, human rights defenders, whistle-blowers and others, all of which are aimed at silencing dissenting voices and curbing political pluralism.

A vibrant civil society is an essential ingredient of a functional democracy but a growing number of both Council of Europe and European Union Member States are restricting the rights of those who dare to denounce corruption, the abuse of power or violation of the rights of women, migrants, LGBTI persons and other marginalised groups.

We, like hundreds of millions of Europeans, expect our leaders to act when they meet this week in Reykjavik at the 4th Council of Europe Summit but will they have the courage to call out and berate the culprits?

We ourselves were branded an “undesirable organisation” by Russia. Several of our members have paid or are paying a heavy price for standing up for the values of the Council of Europe.

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In Turkey, the founder of our Turkish School, Osman Kavala and its Director, Hakan Altınay, are in jail on trumped up charges. Likewise in Azerbaijan, Ilgar Mammadov, Director of the Baku School, was held in prison illegally for more than 5 years. The Russian and the Belarus Schools are forced to operate abroad.

We respectfully remind you, European leaders, that under Article 3 of the Statute of the Council of Europe, every Member State "must accept the principles of the rule of law and of the enjoyment by all persons within its jurisdiction of human rights and fundamental freedoms, and collaborate sincerely and effectively in the realisation of the aim of the Council of Europe..."

You know and we know that from Baku to Budapest rule of law is regularly flouted, from London to Ankara the European Court of Human Rights is denigrated and across our continent populist authoritarian governments are trampling on their people's basic rights.

Will you speak out on these issues and call the perpetrators to account or will you just turn a blind eye to those who are "seriously violating" Article 3 in the hope that quiet diplomacy will solve the problem?

Surely the appeasement of Russia in 2008 and 2014 and the rising tide of authoritarianism has demonstrated once and for all that diplomacy and friendly persuasion are not enough? Surely you remember from your school days that bullies only back off when you stand up to them?

Now is the time for action; not words.

We are asking you to turn Europe into a place where the values for which, every day, Ukrainians are fighting and dying, are really respected and applied.

Please pressure recalcitrant Governments into ratifying and applying the Istanbul Convention on combating violence against women and domestic violence.

Please, if you reaffirm your common commitment to the Council's core values, show the world you really intend practicing what you preach.

That means acting firmly and forcefully to make Governments implement the rulings of the ECtHR and live up to the principles enshrined in the Convention they chose freely to join and which sometimes they even played a significant role in drafting.

Paramount among those principles is the right for all people in the jurisdictions of the Council of Europe Member States to enjoy "the right to have rights" which Hannah Arendt upheld so forcefully. This includes the poor, the vulnerable, migrants, refugees, stateless persons, in other words all those whom unscrupulous Governments would seek to exclude.

The consequences of the pandemic years and the war in Ukraine have called into question many of the assumptions which we took for granted but they cannot be used to water-down our rights and freedoms. The whole purpose of our support for Ukraine is to prevent this happening.

We are counting on you, our leaders, to be steadfast in respecting and implementing the principles and values for which the Council of Europe stands. It is up to you as Heads of State and Governments because, regrettably, both the Council of Europe and the European Union are nothing more and nothing less than the combined political will of their Member States.

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NOTES FOR EDITORS

- The Association of Schools of Political Studies (ASPS) was set up in July 2008 by the Directors of the Schools of Political Studies of the Council of Europe to play an enhanced role in the management of their programme, to strengthen links between the Schools and foster their activities.
- The first School was set up in Moscow in 1992. Since then other Schools have been established in Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Georgia, Greece, Kosovo, Moldova, North Macedonia, Montenegro, Morocco, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Tunisia, Turkey and Ukraine.
- Nils Muiznieks became President of the ASPS in November 2018. He was the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights from 2012 to 2018. Previously he had held several important posts in Latvia including Minister responsible for social integration, Director of the Advanced Social and Political Research Institute (ASPRI) and Director of the Latvian Centre for Human Rights and Ethnic Studies.

CONTACT:

- ♦ Jack Hanning, Secretary General +33675797327 jack.hanning@gmail.com