

**Council of Ministers**  
**Statement by Mr. Gunnar Bragi Sveinsson**  
**Minister for Foreign Affairs of Iceland**  
**at the 124<sup>th</sup> Ministerial Meeting in Vienna**  
**6 May 2014**

Mr. Chairman,

At the outset, allow me to offer my thanks to Austria for hosting this ministerial here in beautiful Vienna. I would also like to commend the Austrian Government for their excellent work during their chairmanship - at challenging times.

Let me also use this opportunity to extend my best wishes to the upcoming Presidency of Azerbaijan.

This year, we celebrate the 65th anniversary of our organization. As we pay tribute to the successes that have been accomplished during this period the recent events in Ukraine underscore that the Council of Europe remains as important as ever to fight for the fundamental values of human dignity and for human rights.

The situation in Ukraine is a sobering wake-up call for the peoples of Europe. It has been truly shocking to see a peaceful European country invaded and partly annexed by a neighbouring country. The violation of international law by Russia and disrespect for the values that the Member States of the Council of Europe have subscribed to is unacceptable.

The Joint Geneva Statement of April 17<sup>th</sup> gave hope for de-escalation and improved security. However, the situation has deteriorated with alarming violence and intimidation, occupation of public buildings and restrictions on media freedom.

Last November Ukrainians took to the streets, demanding change; political and economic reform, respect for democratic values and human rights. They have suffered great losses but retain their hope.

Our message to the people of Ukraine is clear. You have the right to live in a democratic, peaceful and just society and we stand firmly behind you in making this desire a reality.

We also encourage the Ukrainian Government to continue along the path of democratic reform, strengthening the rule of law and good governance, implementing robust anti-corruption measures and safeguarding the rights of all people, including minorities.

Mr. Chairman

It is evident that the Council of Europe can provide important support for Ukraine. We welcome the Immediate Action Package, which delivers on the strengths of our organization and reinforces other international efforts.

The developments in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine are indeed a grave attack on our core values – the rule of law, democracy and human rights for all. When observed, these values are a

foundation for prosperity, security and just societies – but abandoning them leads to mistrust, fear and instability.

Unfortunately, sentiments that threaten our basic democratic values are again on the rise in our continent as shown by the timely report of the Secretary General on the State of Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law in Europe.

It is for example distressing that key elements of political freedom are threatened; such as freedom of expression and media, freedom of assembly and work done by civil society organisations.

In consequence, our governments must redouble their efforts to live up to our common rules, contained in the European Convention on Human Rights and other fundamental instruments of this organization.

In this regard we welcome the actions envisaged in the draft resolution on the follow-up of the Secretary General's report. This report should not be a one-off exercise but a regular barometer of how we are delivering on our commitments collectively, and in the future, also individually.

Thank you, Mr. Chairman.