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## **Priorities of the Maltese Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe May – November 2025**

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In today's rapidly evolving geopolitical environment, Europe stands at a pivotal crossroads. From the ongoing war of aggression against Ukraine, the rise in democratic backsliding and threats to democratic institutions, to the increasing spread of hate speech, hate crime, disinformation and misinformation, we are faced with an array of profound challenges. With multilateralism under severe strain, the rules-based international order often disregarded, and a resurgence of the "might is right" mentality, the very foundations upon which the Council of Europe was built are being directly challenged.

And yet, in the face of these pressures, the Council of Europe has continued to serve us well. Its conventions, grounded in the protection of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, remain a compass in a world increasingly marked by tension, conflict, and inequality. They continue to guide our actions and principles when certainty is scarce, and our common values are contested.

History reminds us that progress is never guaranteed. The Council of Europe was born out of the ashes of war, on the understanding that brute force, conquest and authoritarianism had led Europe to its darkest hour.

The promise of "never again" was not only a moral commitment, but also a blueprint for lasting peace and co-operation. That mission is not only relevant today — it is urgent and indispensable.

It is precisely in these moments of global instability that we must recommit to that founding promise. We must learn from our past with determination and redouble our efforts to uphold international law, protect human dignity, stand firmly against impunity, and defend our shared values. We must ensure that the promise of "never again" is not hollow, but enduring. We must continue to strive for just and lasting peace, and for a united and resilient Europe — one that fosters solidarity, cherishes diversity, safeguards fundamental rights and freedoms, and empowers children and youth to reach their full potential.

Only by uniting in our diversity and reaffirming our common values can we meet the demands of this new geopolitical era and secure a peaceful, prosperous and democratic future.

### **Priorities of the Maltese Presidency of the Committee of Ministers**

Malta's Presidency, for the fourth time in its history, comes at a highly symbolic year as our country celebrates its 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary as full member of this Organisation, the continent's leading human rights Organisation which we had proudly joined just a few months after gaining independence. Our recent consecutive tenures as an elected member of the United Nations Security Council and as Chairperson of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe have demonstrated our unwavering commitment to multilateralism and diplomacy, and we are honoured to be able to continue these efforts as President of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

Our Presidency will also mark the milestone 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights. As the first binding international treaty to enshrine the rights articulated in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, this Convention has been instrumental in safeguarding the fundamental rights and freedoms of over 700 million people across our continent. The date of 4 November 2025 will not only be a celebration of this anniversary but also serve as a moment to reflect on and highlight the Convention's significant achievements including the unique human rights system created around it, with the European Court of Human Rights and the supervision mechanism of the Committee of Ministers aimed at ensuring the full execution of all the final judgments.

As the brutal, unprovoked and unjustified war of aggression against Ukraine continues in its fourth consecutive year, Malta remains resolute in its support to Ukraine and its brave people. By continuing to stand in solidarity with Ukraine, as this fellow member State defends its sovereignty and the lives of its people, we are safeguarding the very values that define European identity. Malta will continue to contribute to the Council of Europe's Action Plan for Ukraine and support the vital work of the Register of Damage, the establishment of a Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine, as well as the ongoing efforts to establish a comprehensive international compensation mechanism to ensure fair reparation for loss, damage, and injury. We will continue to actively support and promote the protection of the millions of Ukrainian children forced to flee their homeland, while paying particular attention to the needs of children with disabilities, who are among the most disproportionately affected by this war.

Malta is determined to continue the implementation of the commitments entered at the highest political level at the Reykjavík Summit in May 2023, and to build on the important work undertaken in this regard by the previous successive Presidencies of Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, and Luxembourg. Being deeply committed to cross-border co-operation, Malta looks forward to opening for signature in Valletta the third Additional Protocol to the European Convention on Mutual Assistance in Criminal Matters in the margins of its informal Conference of Ministers of Justice amidst a planned discussion on enhancing judicial co-operation, synergies and mutual assistance in countering transnational crimes.

Furthermore, as an avid advocate of multilateral diplomacy, we will endeavour to strengthen the external outreach efforts of the Council of Europe to ensure that its pertinent work, activities and standards resonate beyond our continent, while placing particular emphasis on raising its visibility.

### ***Enhancing the protection of Children, Promoting their Best Interest***

The Maltese Presidency will attach great importance to the protection of children, in particular against sexual violence. With the rise of digital technologies, broadening social media platforms and growing capabilities of artificial intelligence, new and deeply alarming avenues for sexual abuse have emerged, amplifying the risks of manipulation of children while perpetrators hide behind anonymity. It is for this reason that the Ministers responsible for Social Policy, Family and Children's Rights will convene in Malta on the occasion of the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Convention). The aim of this Ministerial Conference is to collectively discuss and decide on the way forward to effectively tackle these new and emerging challenges while taking stock of progress made in addressing this pervasive human rights violation.

Every child has the right to grow in an environment that nurtures their development, ensures their safety and supports their well-being, with their best interests as the primary consideration in all decisions that affect them. Applying the best interests' principle ensures that children are not just passive recipients of policy but prioritised stakeholders in shaping a safer, fairer and more sustainable future. This is why Malta will actively promote this global principle at a Conference it is hosting on this topic in collaboration with the European Court of Human Rights.

### ***Combatting Violence and Discrimination, Upholding Human Dignity***

Human dignity lies at the very heart of human rights, forming the foundation of a just and fair society. However, it continues to be threatened by different forms of violence and discrimination, fuelled by dehumanising rhetoric and victim-blaming narratives. It is therefore crucial to recognise, identify, and address these harmful manifestations that are often multifaceted, and which reinforce inequality, marginalisation, and exclusion. It is with this in mind,

that the Maltese Presidency will raise awareness of such different forms of prevalent violence and discrimination, highlighting the importance of an intersectional approach, as it seeks to counter harmful narratives and rhetoric while actively promoting equality, respect and inclusion.

A list of different events will be held throughout the Presidency to this end. These include the 12<sup>th</sup> IDAHOT+ Forum which will focus on advancing SOGIESC equality and inclusion, a high-level Conference on combating trafficking in human beings and the use of artificial intelligence for prevention and protection, the annual Gender Equality Commission's Conference on tackling sexism and violence against women, the launch of the No Hate Speech Week together with a Conference on preventing and combating hate crime including hate speech, and separate discussions with the participation of experts on dismantling gender stereotypes and advancing women's participation in politics.

### ***Empowering Youth, Safeguarding Democracy and the Rule of Law***

The future of Europe hinges on its capacity to adapt and respond to the evolving needs of its citizens in an ever-changing and fast-paced world. Youth have a lot to offer in this regard, not only as digital natives, but also as catalysts for change. By engaging youth in democratic processes, societies ensure that decision-making evolves with the changing needs to meet contemporary challenges. This approach helps young people develop a stronger understanding and deeper appreciation for legal frameworks, ensuring that they remain relevant and responsive. In turn, this contributes to their long-term preservation while reinforcing the rule of law and democratic resilience. It is essential that the voice of young people is not only heard but valued, and that they are empowered to meaningfully participate in decision-making processes. In this respect, the Presidency looks forward to the implementation of the Reykjavík Summit's commitment of incorporating a youth perspective in the deliberations of the Council of Europe in order to cultivate a stronger, more resilient, inclusive and future-oriented Organisation. The hosting in Malta of the Specialised Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth and the European Youth Work Convention solidify Malta's pledge to empower and engage young people across the continent, as well as beyond through the active support of the annual Youth Peace Camp and its continued active contribution to the work and activities of the North-South Centre.

In today's digital world where disinformation and misinformation run rampant, citizens of all ages need to be equipped with the skills and knowledge to thrive while guaranteeing the adequate protection of freedom of expression. This topic will be given due importance during the Presidency, including at the high-level Conference on Building Democratic Resilience to Disinformation, where the pertinent role of digital citizenship education to foster critical thinking and decipher the truth in an online world flooded with information will be of particular focus in addition to examining differences experienced across generations. Moreover, the Maltese Presidency aims to highlight the important role of culture and cultural heritage as strategic necessities for democratic resilience and a powerful antidote to division and hate – which is needed more than ever today.

### **Programme for the Maltese Presidency of the Committee of Ministers**

#### **14 May 2025 – 14 November 2025**

14 May 2025, Luxembourg – **Handover of the Presidency between Luxembourg and Malta**, start of the Presidency of Malta of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe

20 May 2025, Malta – **12<sup>th</sup> European IDAHOT+ Forum entitled 'Advancing SOGIESC Equality and Inclusion in a Transforming Europe'**

21 to 22 May 2025, Malta – **3<sup>rd</sup> meeting of the Committee of Experts on Sexual Orientation, Gender Identity and Expression and Sex Characteristics (ADI-SOGIESC)**

22 May 2025, Malta – **Presidential Committee and Bureau of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)**

23 May 2025, Malta – **Working breakfast of the Women@PACE network, Standing Committee of the PACE and a side event entitled 'Young People: Seen, Heard, and in Charge'**

23 May 2025, Strasbourg – **Helga Pederson Moot Court Closing Ceremony**

24 May 2025, Malta – **Participation at the Malta Public Service Expo 2025**

27 to 29 May 2025, Malta – **Fourth European Youth Work Convention (EYWC) entitled ‘Youth Work Xcelerate’**

28 May 2025, Strasbourg – **First Meeting of the Committee of Ministers’ Deputies under the Maltese Presidency**, followed by the inauguration of the Presidency Tram and the Flag-raising Ceremony

4 June 2025, Strasbourg – Celebration of the 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Venice Commission with the presentation of an **Exhibition entitled ‘A user’s guide to the Rule of Law’**

4 to 6 June 2025, Strasbourg – **Octopus Conference 2025: Co-operation on Cybercrime**

5 June 2025, Strasbourg – **Informal Meeting of the Committee of Ministers’ Deputies dedicated to ‘Dismantling Gender Norms: A discussion on Harmful Gender Stereotypes’**

10 to 11 June 2025, Malta – **High-level Conference on Technology and Artificial Intelligence (AI) in the fight against human trafficking entitled ‘Empowering Change: Technology and AI in the Fight Against Human Trafficking’**

12 June 2025, Vienna – **Presentation of the Maltese Presidency’s Priorities to the OSCE Permanent Council**

12 June 2025, Malta – **Bureau of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and side-event seminar on advancing women’s participation in politics**

13 June 2025, Strasbourg – **Informal Retreat of the Permanent Representatives**

13 June 2025, Malta – **International Conference entitled ‘Multilevel Governance Conference to address environmental challenges: Overcoming institutional silos and developing cross-sector collaboration’**

18 to 20 June 2025, Strasbourg – **No Hate Speech Week**

19 to 20 June 2025, Strasbourg – **Conference on Preventing and Combating Hate Crime**

20 June 2025, Strasbourg – **Participation at the ‘Freedom of Information and Anti-disinformation Hackaton – New Democratic Pact’**

23 to 27 June 2025, Strasbourg – **Third part 2025 Session of the PACE**

30 June to 1 July, Malta – **Informal Conference of Ministers of Social Policy, Family and Children’s Rights on the occasion of the 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Lanzarote Convention, entitled ‘Achievements, Challenges and a Way Forward to Protect Children from Sexual Exploitation and Abuse’**

2 to 3 July 2025, Malta – **45<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Committee of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of Children Against Sexual Exploitation (Lanzarote Committee)**

3-4 July 2025, Strasbourg – **Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (HELP) Annual Network Conference**

30 June to 9 July 2025, Strasbourg – **Youth Peace Camp 2025**

9 July 2025, Strasbourg – **High-level Stock-taking Conference on the situation of children of Ukraine: Council of Europe actions**

10 July 2025, Colmar – **Retreat of the Committee of Ministers’ Deputies dedicated to justice for Ukraine**

4 September 2025, Malta – **Participation at the National Youth Parliament (NYP) 2025**

11 September 2025, Malta – **Meeting of the Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination of the PACE**

12 September 2025, Malta – **Conference entitled ‘“Ensuring Equality for Rainbow Families in Europe’ in celebration of Pride Week 2025**

12 September 2025, Malta – **Participation at the 'All Digital Summit' 2025 entitled 'Summit of Educated Digital Citizens: Empowering Connected Generations'**

17 September 2025, Malta – **High-level Conference on Building Democratic Resilience to Disinformation**

17 to 18 September 2025, Malta – **Annual Gender Equality Commission (GEC) Conference entitled 'Ending sexism and violence against women in politics - an essential step towards equal participation'**

18 to 19 September 2025, Malta – **Informal Conference of Ministers of Justice on strengthening cross-border co-operation and mutual assistance**

25 September 2025, Strasbourg – **Informal Meeting of the Committee of Ministers' Deputies dedicated to freedom of expression**

29 September to 3 October 2025, Strasbourg – **Fourth part 2025 Session of the PACE**

6 to 7 October 2025, Malta – **1539<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Committee of Ministers' Deputies**

8 to 9 October 2025, Valletta, Malta – **10<sup>th</sup> Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Youth entitled 'Young People for Democracy: Youth Perspectives in Action'**

11 October 2025, Venice – **Participation at the 35<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Celebration of the Venice Commission**

20 to 22 October 2025, Malta – **Meetings of the working groups of the Council of Europe European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ)**

23 October 2025, Malta – **High-level Conference on the Best Interest of the Child**

27 October 2025, Strasbourg – **Launch of the Committee of Ministers' Recommendation on Equality of Rights of Intersex People**

28 to 30 October 2025, Strasbourg – **49<sup>th</sup> Session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities**, including the adoption of the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life

29 to 30 October 2025 (TBC), Lisbon – **The North-South Centre's Lisbon Forum 2025 entitled 'AI and Global Governance: Rights, Representation and Readiness'**

30 October 2025, Malta – **Training Seminar on the 'Cultural Routes of the Council of Europe for Local Stakeholders'**

4 November 2025, Strasbourg – **Celebration of the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights at the European Court of Human Rights**

4 to 7 November 2025, Strasbourg – **Participation at the World Forum for Democracy 2025 'Democracy at risk: how can we revive it?'**

6 November 2025, Malta – **3<sup>rd</sup> Meeting of the Co-ordinating Bodies of the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence Against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention)**

14 November 2025, Strasbourg – **Handover of the Presidency between Malta and the Republic of Moldova**

### **Cultural programme in Strasbourg**

28 May 2025, *Palais Universitaire* – **Inauguration Ceremony of the Presidency**, an evening of music and poetry featuring some of the most iconic figures of the Maltese artistic scene, including Ira Losco, Claire Tonna, Jamie Cardona, the Big Band Brothers and a performance by Teatru Anon.

2 to 6 June 2025, Cosmos Cinéma – **Maltese Cinema Week**, paying tribute to the works of Cecil Satariano who brought Maltese cinema to the international stage. Each evening will feature the screening of one of his restored works followed by a selection of contemporary Maltese films to mark

the '100 Years of Film in Malta' celebrations.

24 June 2025, Cathédrale Notre-Dame de Strasbourg – **'A Tribute to Palestrina and Malta's Sacred Music'**, featuring a performance by KorMalta, Malta's National Choir, offering a unique blend of Renaissance polyphony with Maltese sacred works.

25 June 2025, Palais de l'Europe – **Launch of the Presidency Stamp** in collaboration with MaltaPost.

12 September 2025, Palais de l'Europe – **Back to Work Party in the Colours of Malta** in collaboration with the Council of Europe's Amicale.

13 to 14 September 2025, *Bibliothèque Nationale et Universitaire* – **A weekend of literary adventures for children**, featuring exhibitions, book presentations, and an interactive production by Teatru Malta, Malta's National Theatre, among others.

30 September 2025, *Pavillon Joséphine* – **'A taste of the Maltese Festa'**, in celebration of Malta's National Day and the country's 60-year anniversary of its accession to the Council of Europe, promising to merge gastronomy, art, crafts, traditions and live music.

28 and 29 October 2025, Château de Pourtalès – **'Women and War, Flavours of Resilience'**, featuring two gastronomical evenings accompanied by music and discussions, that will honour women's resilience in times of war.

4 November 2025, Opéra national du Rhin – **'Malta Sings Europe'**, a special concert in celebration of the 75<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the European Convention of Human Rights, with world-renowned tenor Joseph Calleja taking centre stage.

13 November, Palais des Fêtes – **Closing Ceremony of the Presidency**, marked by a contemporary dance performance from ŻfinMalta, Malta's National Dance Company.