

Reform of the European Court of Human Rights: joint declaration reached in Interlaken

Interlaken / Bern, 19.02.2010 - In the framework of its Chairmanship of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers, on 18 and 19 February 2010 Switzerland organised a Ministerial Conference in Interlaken in order to decisively spur the reform of the overburdened European Court of Human Rights (ECHR). By issuing a joint declaration the representatives of the 47 Member States of the Council of Europe confirm their intention to secure the long-term future of the ECHR.

At the Ministerial Conference on the future of the European Court of Human Rights in Interlaken Switzerland was represented by Federal Councillor Micheline Calmy-Rey, Head of the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA) and Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, and by Federal Councillor Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf, Head of the Federal Department of Justice and Police (FDJP). The Head of the FDJP chaired the two-day Conference. Besides the representatives of the 47 Member States of the Council of Europe, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe Thorbjørn Jagland, the President of the European Court of Human Rights Jean-Paul Costa and the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu also took part in the event.

The Conference aimed at setting the course for the future reform of the ECHR. With the issuing of a joint declaration the event was crowned with success. According to the declaration it is necessary in particular to reach a balance between the incoming cases and the settled ones and to reduce the volume of approximately 120,000 outstanding cases as well as to guarantee that new appeals are dealt with in reasonable time. Moreover, the national implementation of the Court's judgements should be improved and the Committee of Ministers should guarantee an effective supervision of the implementation process. In order to reach these objectives the political declaration contains an action plan with a list of short and middle-term measures as well as an agenda for their implementation.

The Secretary General of the Council of Europe Thorbjørn Jagland declared: "We will save the Court because we have no other choice. People in Europe deserve no less and will get no less". Jean-Paul Costa, President of the ECHR, said: "I can assure you that in its independence our Court is extremely willing to follow the road indicated at the Interlaken Conference". The President of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly, Mevlüt Cavusoglu, welcomed the measures taken to increase the efficiency of the Court but insisted that such measures can only bear fruit within the context of a strong CoE.

Federal Councillor Micheline Calmy-Rey underlined that: "In Interlaken we have laid the foundations that will enable us to accelerate the reform process of the Court. Switzerland will actively pursue this target during its Chairmanship of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers and thereafter". Federal Councillor Eveline Widmer-Schlumpf declared: "I wish to point out that we can be very pleased with the result of the Interlaken Conference. It was important that the result was not limited to a merely political declaration of intent, but suggests more concrete measures".

On Thursday, just before the opening of the Ministerial Conference, the Russian Minister of Justice Alexander Kononov in the presence of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe Thorbjørn Jagland and of Federal Councillor Widmer-Schlumpf deposited the ratification instrument. Protocol 14 will therefore enter into force on 1 June 2010.

The Ministerial Conference in Interlaken is a key event of the six-month Chairmanship of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers, which Switzerland took over on 18 November 2009.

Interlaken Declaration

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