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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
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The situation in Belarus

Reply to Recommendation[1]: Recommendation 2107 (2017)
Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers has carefully considered Recommendation 2107 (2017) on "The situation in Belarus".

2. The Committee welcomes the enhanced dialogue engaged by the Belarusian authorities with the Council of Europe over recent years and reiterates that its strategic objective remains the integration of Belarus into the Council of Europe, on the basis of the Organisation's values and principles, pursuant to the Declaration of the May 2005 Warsaw Summit.

3. As the Committee has indicated several times, a major step to enable Belarus to move closer to these values would be to abolish the death penalty in the country. From this point of view, the Committee of Ministers can therefore only deplore the fact that the Belarusian authorities continue to carry out death sentences and urges these authorities to commute all death sentences issued by the courts. It reiterates its call to Belarus to establish without delay a formal moratorium on executions as a first step towards the abolition of the death penalty.

4. With regard to the Parliamentary Assembly's concerns with respect to the human rights situation in Belarus, the Committee of Ministers calls on the Belarusian authorities to comply with their international human rights commitments in this domain, in particular concerning freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, the right to liberty and security and the right to a fair trial. The Committee is concerned about recent incidents, including the arrests of representatives for Belarusian trade unions and will follow this process closely. It also urges the Belarusian authorities to develop a constructive political dialogue with all national stakeholders, including representatives of civil society and the opposition, with a view to further democratisation of the country.

5. The Action Plan for Belarus adopted by the Committee of Ministers in October 2016 seeks to help the country to move towards Council of Europe standards. It is being implemented in close co-operation with the Belarusian authorities and civil society representatives. The Committee of Ministers will shortly consider an interim report on implementation of the plan, including with regard to the abolition of the death penalty, to which it attaches particular importance.

6. The Committee points out that Belarus is currently a Contracting Party to ten Council of Europe treaties[2] and a member of four Partial Agreements.[3] The Action Plan includes activities aimed at raising the Belarusian authorities' awareness of other Council of Europe conventions to encourage the country's future accession to them. This is the case in particular of the Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard

1. Adopted at the 1301st meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (29 November 2017).
2. The European Cultural Convention (ETS No. 018); the European Convention on Information on Foreign Law (ETS No. 062); the Additional Protocol to the European Convention on Information on Foreign Law (ETS No. 097); the Convention on the Conservation of European Wildlife and Natural Habitats (ETS No. 104); the Anti-Doping Convention (ETS No. 135); the Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in the European Region (ETS No. 165); the Criminal Law Convention on Corruption (ETS No. 173); the Civil Law Convention on Corruption (ETS No. 174); the Additional Protocol to the Criminal Law Convention on Corruption (ETS No. 191) and the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (CETS No. 197).

to Automatic Processing of Personal Data (ETS No. 108), the Convention on Cybercrime (Budapest Convention, ETS No. 185) and the Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime and on the Financing of Terrorism (CETS No. 198).

7. The Committee of Ministers is willing to assist Belarus bringing its legislation in line with Council of Europe standards with a view to paving the way to its accession to Council of Europe instruments open to non-member States in accordance with applicable rules.

8. Belarus also takes part in a number of intergovernmental committees[4] which are allowed to hold events in Belarus to help promote Council of Europe standards, subject to the relevant rules and in compliance with their respective terms of reference.

9. The Committee of Ministers points out that the Council of Europe information point (InfoPoint) in Minsk facilitates communication and co-ordination with the national authorities and other stakeholders in implementing the Action Plan for Belarus. The Committee of Ministers, in co-ordination with the Belarusian authorities, could consider setting up a Council of Europe programme office in Minsk subject to further development of the relations with the country. In this context, the Committee of Ministers will take into consideration any possible steps that might be taken by the Parliamentary Assembly towards restoring special guest status for the Parliament of Belarus.

3. The European Pharmacopoeia, the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) and the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS).

4. Steering Committee for Educational Policy and Practice (CDPPE), Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee; Steering Committee for Culture, Heritage and Landscape (CDCPP); European Steering Committee on Youth (CDEJ); Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH) and its subordinate bodies; European Committee on Legal Co-operation (CDCJ); Steering Committee on the Media and New Communication Services (CDMSI); Committee of Legal Advisers on Public International Law (CAHDI) and the Ad hoc European Committee for the World Anti-Doping Agency (CAHAMA).