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Speech Prime Minister Alexander De Croo at Council of Europe Summit in Iceland

Prime Minister Alexander De Croo spoke today at Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Member States of the Council of Europe in Reykjavik.

Read the Prime Minister's full speech below.

Madam Secretary General,

Thank you for your leadership and thank you, Prime Minister Jakobsdóttir, for your generous hospitality. Our meeting here in Reykjavik reaffirms the unique place of the Council of Europe in our continent's new geopolitical landscape.

Russia's heinous and devastating aggression against Ukraine, which we condemn in the strongest terms, is not only directed against Ukraine; it is also directed against our values, our democracies, and our idea of human dignity, which we protect and reinforce through the Council of Europe.

Ukraine has become the place where our future is at stake: the future of a European and international order based on the rule of law. The day after the Russian invasion, the Council of Europe presented a united front to the greatest challenge in its history. Our decision to expel Russia was a moral imperative.

Madam Secretary General,

There will be no fair or lasting peace without justice. The perpetrators and sponsors of Russia's massive violations of human rights and international humanitarian law will be held accountable to the Ukrainian people.

By establishing the Register of Damage caused by Russia's aggression against Ukraine, the Council of Europe is making a decisive contribution to the establishment of an International Compensation Mechanism. I am proud that Belgium is a founding member of this Register. Belgium will participate fully in this initiative.

Furthermore, Belgium shares the international community's concern about the fate of Ukrainian civilians, in particular children, illegally transferred or deported. These criminal practices must stop immediately, and all children must be released and sent home.

Madam Secretary General,

I reaffirm Belgium's unwavering commitment to the European Convention on Human Rights. Together with the Court, it guarantees the human rights of every person on the European continent.

The European Court of Human Rights plays a key role in promoting democratic stability in Europe. Belgium recognises the binding nature of the Court's judgments and remains committed to comply with them. My country expects other Member States, without exception, to do the same. We support a

cooperative approach based on honest dialogue to help States implement the Court's judgments.

Belgium is very committed to the promotion and protection of the human rights of every person in our societies, including women, children and LGBTQIA+ people.

My country attaches great importance to the Istanbul Convention, the first international, legally binding instrument to combat violence against women and domestic violence. Implementing this Convention is a priority for Belgium, both domestically and in its foreign policy.

In 2018, Belgium established a fund within the Council of Europe. With this fund, Belgium supports projects all over Europe that strengthen human rights, the fight against all types of discrimination and the rule of law.

Finally, Madam Secretary General, our democratic societies are facing internal and external threats. We must reflect on how best to protect and promote human rights, democracy, and the rule of law on our European continent.

In our respective countries and in the Council of Europe, we must have the courage to assert loud and clear the values for which we are ready to fight, and to denounce with conviction the abuses and transgressions that we will not tolerate.

Thank you.

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