

## Answers to the Questions by three candidate for the Post of Secretary General of the Council of Europe

The following questions have been raised ahead of the online event with the candidates for the post of Secretary General of the Council of Europe: **Alain Berset, Didier Reynders and Indrek Saar.**

Their answers were the basis for engagement with the candidates during the event organised by the Council of Europe's Conference of INGOs and CURE – Campaign to Uphold Rights in Europe on 27 May 2024. They focus on the overall effectiveness of the Council of Europe, as well as human rights and environmental challenges.

### ***1. Please name three subjects on which the Council of Europe should seek major changes in its approaches. What would you want to achieve on these subjects in the next five years?***

#### **Alain Berset**

1 - When it comes to the issues it deals with in its mandate to defend and promote the three pillars, the Council of Europe generally needs to be more effective in moving from diagnosis to remedy. Through its expert groups and its strategic approach to challenges at PACE and in the CM, it covers well the architecture of an issue, but the engineering of actual implementation is still too often lacking within the Secretariat and the member states concerned. If I am elected, I will make sure that the Council of Europe is better able to move from analysis to operationalization. An example that can inspire us is the issue of support to Ukraine, where the Organization moves rapidly from conceptualization to action.

2 - The fight against the erosion of democracy that the Council of Europe has embarked upon by adopting the Reykjavik Principles for Democracy must be guided by an innovative and dynamic flagship project: an Action Plan for the Regeneration of Democracy in Europe. If I am elected, I will work closely with PACE to clearly define the vision and to create partnerships with Member States, national parliaments, local communities and civil society organizations are created, as they all will be the relays for implementing the Plan.

3 - PACE's handling of current affairs through emergency debates needs to be mirrored in the CM, for example during the weekly dialogue between the SG and the CM. Dialogue on the activities carried out by the SG and the SGA must be complemented by a forward-looking dialogue analyzing the impact of current developments on the Council of Europe's activities. If I am elected, I will make sure to install a more political, less procedural and less institutional way of executing the SG's mandate, with a focus also on a forward-looking approach to the management of unforeseeable and unplanned developments.

## Didier Reynders

If the Parliamentary Assembly gives me the opportunity, I would like to:

- Improve the proximity of the Council of Europe to dynamics on the ground and citizens. To do this, the Organisation must equip itself with relevant and modern communication, decentralise its work more widely, notably by strengthening its field offices, and have a greater political role to increase, in the long term, the **visibility** of the Council of Europe.
- Increase **synergies**, within the Organisation, between its two statutory bodies but also with all its components. Although they do not always have the same views, I am convinced that they share the common aspiration to strengthen human rights, democracy and the rule of law.
- Integrate **early warning mechanisms** more widely to counter the decline of democracy and the rule of law.

Progress on the above topics will be essential to ensure the implementation of the decisions taken in Reykjavik and will enable the Council of Europe to be more relevant in face of new challenges in the next five years.

## Indrek Saar

The main goal of my term in office is to increase the influence, relevance and visibility of the Council of Europe. In order to achieve this, we need to a) implement the priorities agreed in Reykjavik, b) increase the synergy and co-operation between the two main statutory bodies – the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly - of the organization and c) strengthen the organization internally. As Secretary General, I will emphasize the importance of direct engagement with all of the stakeholders and engaging closely with the media in order to promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

In order to achieve those objectives, I will focus on the following four key areas, which are of course inspired by the Reykjavik Declaration:

1. Protection of the European Convention of Human Rights and the Convention System, including the execution of Court judgements;
2. Accountability and assistance to Ukraine, with special emphasis to the deported children;
3. New challenges such as the Artificial Intelligence and environment, ensuring that Council of Europe remains as a frontrunners and standard-setters on a global scale;
4. Organisational development, assuring that the Council of Europe keeps up with times and our resources are put into best use for the promotion of our core values.

2. **Do you agree that the over-all effectiveness of the Council of Europe can be improved in achieving its core goal of protection human rights, the rule of law and democracy? Which steps would you want to promote to increase the Organisation's effectiveness?**3. **Do you agree that the overall effectiveness of the Council of Europe can be improved in achieving its core goal of protection human rights, the rule of law and democracy? Which steps would you want to promote to increase the organization's effectiveness?**

### Alain Berset

The mandate to protect human rights, the rule of law and democracy is a broad one, all the more so as it is not just a protection mandate but also a mandate to promote these three civilizational pillars. The Organization's efficiency must certainly be increased, but not everything can be rationalized to the extreme, because with the Russian aggression in Ukraine, which is also an attack on our democracies, the Council of Europe's tasks are increasing. In this context, the three keys to optimizing the Council of Europe's action are:

- i) **Focus on Reykjavik's priorities.** *Proposed method: concentration of the work as well as of the human and financial resources on these priorities.*
- ii) **Synergy between the various Council of Europe bodies working on the same issues.** *Proposed approach: regrouping and decompartmentalization of the different Council of Europe actors as well as creation of ad hoc task forces.*
- iii) **Connection with current events (to be a visible international player and react in time to developments impacting one or more of the three pillars).** *Proposed method: more frequent exchanges with other IOs, individual Member States and with civil society, as well as the launch of initiatives to organize appropriate responses to specific challenges.*

### Didier Reynders

The Organisation has a moral duty to constantly seek to improve its effectiveness in **protecting and promoting** human rights, democracy and the rule of law in a cross-cutting manner.

- **Define a clear vision and objectives** for the implementation of the decisions taken during the Reykjavik Summit. In this context, it is necessary to adopt an approach focused on results.
- Any ambitious vision requires **budgetary means** as indicated by your Hague Declaration. The financial efforts of the Member States in the framework of the 2024-2027 cycle must be accompanied by a **set of reforms** to increase the agility of the Organisation and strengthen its relevance.
- The Organisation must conduct as a priority and simultaneously: a deepening of the dialogue with all the components of the Council of Europe to identify the needs, strengthen and diversify its instruments to ensure respect for the fundamental rights of all citizens, promote the shift from a centripetal to a centrifugal approach to include citizens and strengthen the Organisation's influence and international presence.

### Indrek Saar

Certainly. We possess very valuable know-how within the Organisation and the key question is putting it into practical use in the most efficient way. In order to do that, our Organisation internally needs to keep up with times. Coming from a country known for its efficient administration using modern technologies, I will immediately explore possibilities to maximize the impact of our resources for the promotion of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.

Work on substance must take priority, and my aim is to ensure that our efforts are directed towards achieving concrete results in further advancing our core values. We certainly have room for improvement in using the help provided by modern technologies and artificial intelligence to simplify our routine work.

- 3. Gaps in the implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights and in the execution of verdicts by the European Court of Human Rights are a long-standing concern. Steps that the organization has taken to address this have helped, but serious problems continue. The issue was a major subject in the Reykjavik Declaration by the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government. A suggestion to create the position of a special representative dedicated to visiting governments and advocating for the creation of effective implementation machinery<sup>1</sup> was not included in the Summit declaration, but would you still want to consider this or similar options for more high-level attention for the implementation of judgments? The application of Article 52 of the European Convention on Human Rights provides an explicit possibility for the Secretary General to influence the implementation of the Convention. Is this article in your view effectively utilized; could its use be expanded?**

#### Alain Berset

I believe that rather than creating a post of Special Representative for the implementation of the Court's judgments, it is the SG and SGA who should carry out this task as a matter of priority. This calls for more high-level contacts, through well thought-out preventive diplomacy discussed with the CM Presidency and a group of facilitating States supporting the Presidency and the SG. The Political Director and the Director General of DGI must support this action, which must be carried out in depth and at several levels. We need to create a system of confidence-building measures to engage refractory States, and the SG needs to make more innovative use of the possibilities afforded by Article 52 of the ECHR

#### Didier Reynders

Upholding the integrity and credibility of the Convention system is **one of my four priorities**. The Court's situation is worrying, with over 70,000 pending applications, leading to extremely long processing times, while some situations require a rapid and effective response. Although the Court implemented a prioritization strategy in September 2021 and its budget resources were increased for 2024-2025, it will be important to **further strengthen its means**, if necessary.

C'est pourquoi, en septembre 2021, le président a proposé une nouvelle stratégie de hiérarchisation, qui permettrait à la Cour européenne des droits de l'homme de rendre plus rapidement des arrêts de qualité sur des affaires prioritaires ayant un impact immédiat.

The Convention and the Court are the guarantors of our values and principles. All member states have accepted the **unconditional obligation** to comply with the Court's judgments. The Secretary General must play an indispensable role as a facilitator of dialogue.

The appointment of a special representative is an interesting idea, however, I am not convinced

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<sup>1</sup> See point 4.a in submission of the EIN to the Reykjavik Summit  
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55815c4fe4b077ee5306577f/t/63ff43501b54193bd2ce0dc3/1677673297465/EIN+Fourth+Summit+Briefing+Note+on+ECtHR+Implementation%5B92%5D.pdf>

that it will achieve our objectives. Other possibilities could be explored to assist member states in complying with their commitments. On the other hand, in the event of a lack of political will from a member state, effective implementation would, in my opinion, require a commitment at the **highest political level**, which I would be prepared to lead personally with all the components of the Council of Europe.

### Indrek Saar

I honestly do not believe that the important responsibility of interacting with the governments and advocating for the implementation of European Court of Human Rights judgments is something the Secretary General could afford to delegate to a special representative. On the contrary. I certainly have no intention of micromanaging and I have full trust in the excellent work of the Secretariat and the Commissioner for Human Rights. However, my political and managerial experience has proven that (politically) sensitive questions have to be dealt with at the top level. It has also been echoed by a number of valuable contacts I have had throughout the campaign with the member state's representatives, within the PACE and with other stakeholders, that there is a need for Secretary General's personal engagement and mediation-work in this regard and such effort is exactly what I intend to commit myself to.

- 4. Gaps can also be observed in the implementation by states of the large number of other standards of the Council of Europe, and in their follow-up of the recommendations of monitoring bodies or of expert advice from e.g. the Commissioner on Human Rights or the Venice Commission. Mechanisms that can and should prevent democratic and human rights backsliding are undervalued and underutilized. Do you agree with this analysis and if so, in which direction would you work to bring about improvements?***

### Alain Berset

The decline in general respect for human rights and the erosion of democracy are a general societal trend in Europe. Of course, the Council of Europe must be as efficient as possible in making use of its tools. The negative impact of certain social networks and the massive disinformation injected into these networks and in the media by certain States hostile to our free and democratic societies have a far greater effect than our current mechanisms for defending and promoting democracy, the rule of law and human rights. This is why, to combat this phenomenon, the priority must be to combine in a decisive and innovative way several fields of action such as:

- i) protecting journalists and media freedom;
- ii) combating disinformation;
- iii) denouncing and combating populism, a vector of discrimination and propagator of hate speech;
- iv) promoting cultural diversity as an egalitarian social cement, through policies of inclusion and integration.

As indicated in point 2) of the answer to question 1, a Council of Europe Action Plan for the Regeneration of Democracy would further strengthen the effect of reinforced action in the areas described above.

### Didier Reynders

Mechanisms preventing the erosion of democratic and human rights could be made **more flexible, responsive and effective**. Therefore, if the parliamentarians of the Assembly give me the opportunity, I would like to accomplish the following, among other actions:

- Ensure that oversight bodies can fulfill their mandate without restriction and in a coordinated manner, while ensuring that they do not interfere in their areas of competence. I would **proactively** encourage member states facing particularly difficult situations to accept the full exercise of the mandate of the monitoring bodies, with a view to assisting them.
- Further develop the Organisation's ability to **respond to emerging challenges** by developing relevant instruments (e.g. disinformation, environment). In consultation with the various partners within the Organisation, including the INGOs, it might be appropriate to define together the modalities of a new platform dedicated to violences that NGO leaders might face.
- Support, with the support of the two statutory bodies and consultative bodies, the construction of a monitoring and information framework concerning the implementation of the 12 Reykjavik Principles for Democracy.
- Pay particular attention to the **most vulnerable** by taking into account the challenges of discrimination and violence. I would make the promotion and **protection of women's rights**, in particular the fight against violence against women and domestic violence, a priority.
- Put my experience as European Commissioner for Justice **at the service of the Council of Europe** (where I have been responsible for, among other things, ensuring the defence of the rule of law, coordinating the preparation of annual reports on the situation in each of the EU Member States, preventing and detecting violations of the rule of law at an early stage, but also working in collaboration with the Venice Commission and other Council of Europe bodies, as well as supporting civil society, notably through the CERV program).

### Indrek Saar

I agree with this analysis and this is definitely the area requiring full attention from the Secretary General. The strength and additional value the Council of Europe brings to the multilateral fora is the convention system with concrete standards and mechanisms.

We are indeed living in the times of great challenges, where democracy and human rights have been put under enormous stress and are often undermined. No single country alone can effectively manage democratic backsliding and substantial human rights challenges, which is why we need strong and resilient multilateralism. I firmly believe that our Organisation has a crucial role to play in upholding the principles of international law and further advancing our values across our continent and beyond.

I am proud of what the Council of Europe has achieved in the past 75 years. Of course, even during the 17 years that I have been directly interacting with our Organisation, there have been aspects and situations, where I personally would have hoped for a better solution or a more solid stance. I am proud, however, that in the darkest of moments, we have been able to unite around our core values. I am fully committed to protect this unique system and secure to everyone within our jurisdiction the rights and freedoms defined in the European Convention on Human Rights. We need to do this in close cooperation with all of the important stakeholders, implementing the activities agreed in Reykjavik. This is our role, and this is what is expected of us.



5. *The role of civil society and human rights defenders in supporting the standards and processes of the Council of Europe is mentioned in several places in the Reykjavik Declaration. The Declaration calls for “a review and further reinforcement of the Organisation’s outreach to, and meaningful engagement with, civil society organisations”. Do you agree the interaction between civil society and the Organisation needs increased and consistent attention and expansion and that in particular the place of national NGOs in the outreach and interaction needs clarification and strengthening? What approach would you take to strengthen engagement and coordination between Civil Society, CINGO and other CoE bodies and what priority level does this engagement have?*

### Alain Berset

I agree that the interaction of the leading instances of the Council of Europe with civil society, represented by CINGO and its members, should be reinforced. I am all the more conscious of this fact that exchanges with civil society are essential if the Organization wants to be fully aware of the societal reality of populations and individuals. The Secretariat's roadmap for its interaction with civil society could be more operational. CINGO must become a "sounding board" for the SG and the Secretariat, but also for the CM, with whom exchanges should be more frequent, and this can be facilitated by the SG. Perhaps a periodical working lunch with CINGO delegates would be one way of establishing this "sounding board" role that civil society should have with the SG.

### Didier Reynders

I perceive the Conference as a **historical partner** with whom close collaboration is necessary to protect and promote our fundamental values and principles. The Council of Europe is the international Organisation with the oldest structured relationship with civil society and which organises INGO participation within itself. Moreover, the Conference will celebrate its 50th anniversary during the mandate of the next Secretary General. I would be at **your disposal** to support you in your initiatives in this context, but also throughout the mandate to **discuss your concerns and recommendations**. The Conference must also have access to appropriate working conditions to carry out its missions (e.g. offices with IT facilities).

In line with the work of Mrs. Pejčinović Burić, I would act to implement the Secretary General's Roadmap on Civil society engagement with the Council of Europe 2024-2027, so that the participation of civil society, including young people, can be ensured in a **transversal** way. A **multi-stakeholder** approach would greatly enrich all the work of the Council of Europe. I would also commit to maintaining the recently established practice of holding regular exchanges of views and, if wished, other informal meetings. During his mandate, the Secretary General may, on the basis of his experience and exchanges with the two statutory bodies and consultative bodies, propose a new roadmap.

If the Organisation wants to get closer to its citizens, but also to civil society and its NGO at the local and national scales, it could be envisaged to express itself, for the most important messages, and in respect of statutory bilingualism, in the **language of the Member States**. This could go hand in hand with a greater involvement of the Council of Europe with civil society through the strengthening of its field offices.

## Indrek Saar

Yes, certainly. Before entering into politics in 2006, I was active in the field of performing arts both as an actor and chief executive. My decision to enter into politics was inspired by some politicians' dismissive slogan stating that "people of the arts should remain true to their trade". I wanted to show that we could do more. In other words, I started off as a civil society representative at a grass root level and I strongly believe that inclusion and engagement with civil society and NGOs is something we can only benefit from.

I can assure you that my door will always be open to have a serious discussion on both, known topics, and those, which will be brought to my attention and this is the mentality I expect from the whole Organisation.

- 6. Beyond the implementation problems mentioned in points 3 and 4 above, there unfortunately are member states which show systematic severe underperformance in living up to core standards of the Council of Europe. The way in which this phenomenon is addressed, is an issue of contention, with the Parliamentary Assembly taking an active role and the collective member states in the Committee of Ministers staying passive. Lessons can be learnt from an analysis of how Russia's undermining of human rights inside and outside Russia was (not) tackled before 2022. What do you think should be the role of the Secretary General in dealing with this type of developments?*

## Alain Berset

The Council of Europe is an intergovernmental organization where geopolitical imperatives and national interests are added to arguments of substance relating to Council of Europe standards. Because of the nature of how the CM functions, constructive dialogue will always be favored for quite a long time. There is a de facto division of roles between the PACE, which recommends, and the CM, which decides. This is precisely where the SG can play the role of institutional bridge to move an issue forward in a way that is wanted by PACE and acceptable to the CM. It is to play this bridging role effectively that dialogue with the CINGO can be very useful to the SG. In addition, I would remind you that NGOs also have a role to play with their national governments, so that these engage more proactively in international fora.

## Didier Reynders

The next Secretary General must embody a **bold and committed vision** to firmly, but also with experience, defend human rights, democracy and the rule of law. He must have a **results-oriented political approach** and a strong network of contacts to address these issues at the highest level. **Proactive and active** engagement with national authorities will be essential to understand the challenges faced and identify potential solutions. Dialogue and cooperation will indeed be essential to find lasting solutions to systemic problems.

The Secretary General will need to work closely with the two statutory bodies of the Council of Europe in order to have their support on the most serious issues. The adoption of an **innovative approach** to put new and bold solutions on the table would be relevant.



## Indrek Saar

We are good at finding compromises and this is surely one of our great strengths. But there are certain lines that cannot be crossed. Words matter, actions matter more, but in the end, it's the results that matter the most.

It is my hope that when my five-year term will end in 2029, the Council of Europe will have at least 46 member States. Meaning that all of the current Council members will remain members.

And following a strong approval by the Parliamentary Assembly, echoed by a number of countries during the ministerial meeting on May 17th, that Kosovo's membership into this Organisation would be approved, expanding the scope of our values even further.

Because we have to remember who are we fighting for – our citizens. Human rights and fundamental freedoms must be ensured to all people. In this context, the biggest strength Council of Europe carries is the idealism. The Parliamentary Assembly has been a great school for me, probably the greatest. It has always been guided by idealism, even in the most challenging of times. That is why I have returned to it, time and again.

We have the power of bringing countries together, but in in this regard, we ourselves can be our worst enemies by our activities or inactivity. Using the metaphor of “carrot and stick”, we need a delicate balance of both. We need to stand up for our core values and principles through dialogue, cooperation and solution-oriented mentality from all parties, led by the Secretary General.

My personal life path has taken me from enduring a totalitarian empire to seeing it breakdown and to living in a long standing-democracy. I therefore know human rights, democracy and the rule of law can prevail. And I will spare no efforts in making sure that it stays that way also for the world of tomorrow.

- 7. *The Reykjavik Declaration commits the member states to “strengthening our work on the human rights aspects of the environment”. The Summit initiated the “Reykjavik process of focusing and strengthening the work of the Council of Europe in this field”, while stating (in Appendix V) “that human rights and the environment are intertwined and that a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is integral to the full enjoyment of human rights by present and future generations”. What is your vision on how the Council of Europe’s work on these “intertwined” issues should be strengthened?***

## Alain Berset

The planet faces the triple environmental challenge of pollution, reduced biodiversity and climate change. Clearly, each of these three dimensions has a potential impact on human rights, in particular the right to live in a clean, healthy and sustainable environment. The Council of Europe, through the Berne Convention, already has an instrument aimed at protecting biodiversity, and it is up to the SG to ensure that the contents of this Convention are put into practice as effectively as possible. With regard to pollution, national regulations in Member States and European Union Directives have enabled great progress to be made in recent years in preventing the most serious industrial and agricultural pollution. However, it is clear that there is still much to be done to raise individual awareness of constant environmental discipline and to increase the sustainability and recycling of consumer products in our economies. As far as climate change is concerned, the Reykjavik Process provides the Council of Europe with innovative avenues for reflection and action to make the link with human rights.

### Didier Reynders

As Secretary General, I would support initiatives to assess the Council of Europe's carbon footprint and identify ways to reduce it. This Organisation must fulfill its role in setting standards but also act to be legitimate.

The Organisation has been a pioneer in many areas throughout its 75 years of existence. However, the Council of Europe is currently the only regional human rights system that has not formally recognised the right to a healthy environment. If I have the opportunity to be Secretary General, I would **facilitate dialogue** on this matter between the different components of the Organisation with a view to **developing relevant instruments** such as an additional protocol or a new convention. However, I await the conclusions of the CDDH to have a more refined vision of the subject.

In my capacity as EU Commissioner for Justice, I have proposed a **Directive on Corporate Sustainability Due Diligence**, which has just been adopted by the European Parliament and the Council in its final version. This shows my commitment to a just and sustainable transition.

Internally, I would also support the work of the Inter-Secretariat Task Force on the Environment in its work, particularly on a **new strategy** and proposals for **new activities**.

### Indrek Saar

First of all, I strongly believe that the human rights dimension of environment and fighting climate change is a crucial topic for this Organisation. Furthermore, it is important to recall the Grand Chamber of the European Court of Human Rights April 9<sup>th</sup> ruling on the cases related to climate change. The Court's landmark decision noted that a member State government had violated the human rights of its citizens by failing to do enough to combat climate change.

From the very beginning of my campaign, I have emphasised the importance of environment and fighting climate change, and underlined that this crucial topic must be high on this Organisation's agenda.

The participation of youth and civil society are essential elements of democracy. If we want to be relevant for the future generations, we have to deal with topics that are important to them.

As Secretary General, I will engage closely with local authorities through the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and encourage the Council of Europe Development Bank to focus on the social dimensions of climate change to help member states achieve a just and inclusive transition.

8. *The 2022 report of the High-Level Reflection Group of the Council of Europe<sup>2</sup>, created by the now outgoing Secretary General, raised the issue of the relatively limited resources of the Organisation, arguing that an average of half a euro per inhabitant per year was a very low amount in view of the importance of its mandate. This point was echoed in the outcome document of the 2023 Civil Society Summit<sup>3</sup>. Sometimes the comparison is made with the European Union, that has with massive resources gradually become active in monitoring of human rights and the rule of law, areas that previously were the clearly in the domain of the Council of Europe. Do you think this trend should be reversed? How do you see the relationship and the delineation of roles between the Council of Europe and the EU? The Reykjavik Summit commitments have led to a modest net growth of the budget, but a further growth in resources would arguably help in achieving a further increase in the effectiveness of the Council of Europe. What are your ambitions with respect to the development of the Organisation and its resources?*

### Alain Berset

The rapprochement between the Council of Europe and the EU is a positive development. The EU is the Council of Europe's strategic and main financial partner, and many of our Organization's actions in the field could not be undertaken without the voluntary contributions of the European Commission. Even if there is a huge asymmetry between the financial resources of the Council of Europe and the EU, I am not afraid of close collaboration with the EU in the field of defending and promoting democracy, the rule of law and human rights. On the contrary, I welcome its accession to the ECHR and the boost it will give to the Convention system. In the difficult financial conditions for our Member States to increase the Council of Europe's budget, it will be beneficial to have a solid financial partner ready to invest in our Organization's actions. If elected, I will work closely with PACE to take great care to ensure that this closer partnership is mutually beneficial and does not distort the pan-European spirit and functioning of the Council of Europe.

### Didier Reynders

Over the past two years, the budgetary commitment of member states has been significant. They covered the funding associated with the legitimate expulsion of Russia following its full-scale war of aggression against Ukraine and have agreed to a **13%** budget increase for 2024. This will allow the Organisation to carry out its missions and fulfill the commitments made in Reykjavik.

The Council of Europe, despite its many achievements, is **often not valued at its true worth**. In order to encourage member states to strengthen their budgetary commitment, the Organisation must be more visible, politically engaged but also improve its proximity to citizens by emphasizing its **tangible impacts on their daily life**. These will be my short and medium-term goals in developing an ambitious budget proposal for the next budget cycle.

I am determined to use my experience as **minister of finance** to ensure the proper functioning and sustainability of the Council of Europe. It is nevertheless important to continue the ongoing reform process in order to guarantee its efficiency, agility and ability to meet current and future challenges.

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<sup>2</sup> <https://rm.coe.int/report-of-the-high-level-reflection-group-of-the-council-of-europe/1680a862eb>

<sup>3</sup> Point 1 of The Hague Civil Society Declaration on Council of Europe Reform, <https://rm.coe.int/report-of-the-high-level-reflection-group-of-the-council-of-europe/1680a862eb>

I am aware of the interest and sometimes concern surrounding the relationship between the Council of Europe and the European Union. The two Organisations have neither the vocation to compete with each other nor to exercise any form of duplication. Having a deep knowledge of the European Union, I commit myself, if elected, to working for a strengthening of their **cooperation and complementarity**. As Secretary General, I would use my experience to **strategically defend the interests of the Council of Europe**.

### Indrek Saar

I will somewhat repeat myself, but as my political and managerial experience have shown, resources are interlinked with relevance, influence and visibility. The Council of Europe is doing an excellent and important work but we have to improve on how we communicate it to the general public and to the member states' governments.

I believe the key lies in strengthening the cooperation and synergy between the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Secretary General. Financing matters and in order to achieve the best possible results, there is a need to engage closer with the politicians and diplomats. Because the Committee of Ministers representatives have direct links to the government decision makers and the PACE consists of parliamentarians.

As I mentioned answering question number two, in my view, the work on substance must take priority.

Concerning relationship between the Council of Europe and the European Union, I see no real competition, nor duplication. The European Union needs Council of Europe as much as we need them and I think the European Union positively amplifies important elements of our work, such as the Istanbul Convention, Artificial Intelligence, Register of Damage or other legal instruments. We need to strengthen our cooperation.