



EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS  
COUR EUROPÉENNE DES DROITS DE L'HOMME

**130th session of the Committee of Ministers**

Speech by Robert Spano

*Athens, 4 November 2020*

Ladies and Gentlemen, Ministers,  
Madam Secretary General,  
Mr President of the Parliamentary Assembly,  
Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,

Allow me first of all, President Varvitsiotis, to congratulate you on the achievement of the Greek Presidency which ends today. I am happy to be in your beautiful city of Athens and I would like to greet all those who are watching us from a distance. The pandemic is preventing us from being together and we all regret this new reality. However, technological tools give us the opportunity to be together, in another form. This is a sign that, in the dramatic situation we are experiencing, we do not give in. It is precisely in difficult times that we come together in a meaningful way. Because the values we stand for are in danger.

Minister Varvitsiotis,

Despite the pandemic we continue to face, your Presidency has been able to implement its priorities. In particular those relating to the European Court of Human Rights. I am thinking, in particular, of the major conference organised at the Court on 18 September to celebrate the 70th anniversary of the Convention and the Conference on Human Rights and the Planet.

One of the themes chosen for this ministerial session is "an effective response to the health crisis while fully respecting democracy, the rule of law and human rights". This is the challenge facing our democracies. How to preserve the health of populations without disproportionately undermining rights and freedoms.

But this pandemic has also been a challenge for our Court. Our objective during this period has been to ensure the continuity of the European system of human rights protection. Indeed, let us not be

naïve, times such as the present one are conducive to infringements of fundamental freedoms. It is essential that the protection of human rights continued to be ensured during the crisis.

In fact, Ladies and Gentlemen, let's be clear, the fundamental values of the Council of Europe - democracy, the rule of law and human rights – have never been as challenged as in the present. It is our duty, our common responsibility, for us, here today, the current generation of guardians of the Council of Europe and the European Convention on Human Rights, to perform our roles with determination and resolve. To fail is not an option.

This has been the Court's main priority since the beginning of the pandemic and will remain or top priority. The Court has steadfastly refused to allow the pandemic or other challenges facing the Convention system to hinder the proper administration of justice. We have rapidly developed our abilities to deal with pending cases, reforms that I have already informed you about during the recent exchange in the Committee of Ministers.

Allow me to recall that since the beginning of the year, the Court has decided more than 33,200 applications. If we look only at the number of applications concluded with a judgment delivered by the Grand Chamber and the Chambers, there has been an increase of 23% from last year. This shows our commitment to dealing with the most important cases as a matter of priority, a priority policy that will be further strengthened in the coming months and years.

This lack of disruption to the Court's work was particularly crucial in this period in which rights and freedoms have been curtailed as a result of the pandemic. I am proud to be able to say that our Court has played its full role and will continue to do so.

Before concluding, I wish the German Presidency, which starts today, every success. It will be a great pleasure for me to take part in the events organised in this framework and especially in those that will be organised in cooperation with the Court, in particular the Rule of Law Conference and the Forum of Regional Human Rights Courts.

I am pleased that the priorities of the German Presidency will clearly coincide with those of the Court in these difficult times.

Honourable Ministers, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you.