

## **1. What are the main qualities a Council of Europe Human Rights Commissioner Needs?**

Article 10 of RESOLUTION (99) 50

### *Article 10*

*The candidates shall be eminent personalities of a high moral character having recognised expertise in the field of human rights, a public record of attachment to the values of the Council of Europe and the personal authority necessary to discharge the mission of the Commissioner effectively.*

Integrity, expertise, international recognition, public record, independence and courage are MUST qualities.

In my view, it is of utmost importance that the new Commissioner for Human Rights has a proven, longstanding and recognized successful track record of engaging in, and intervening on, human rights issues, including working in the field, traveling to conflict zones to meet vulnerable groups and those in danger and seeking resolution of human rights problems.

At this moment, Europe faces several very serious crises with human rights implications, ranging from armed conflict to terrorism and violence against persons. In order to have the personal authority necessary to discharge the mission of the Commissioner effectively, any candidate should have a long record of achievements in the human rights area. This requires credibility through experience and vision as well as diplomacy and negotiation skills.

The Commissioner should be an internationally recognized personality in the Council of Europe region and beyond, known by Governments and among civil society organizations, and a person who is able to serve the cause above particular politics or party lines. It would be beneficial if there is public record of statements, publications, interviews, articles and engagement at conferences related to human rights and fundamental freedoms.

## **2. Which human rights advocacy and diplomatic tools in the Commissioner's mandate do you consider most useful and how would you intend to use them taking into account that human rights are under pressure in Council of Europe member states and the space for civil society is shrinking?**

There is at present global anxiety related to human rights, and this needs to change. We are living in dangerous times, times of fear and uncertainty for many in Europe. Terrorist attacks and new lines of conflict are fundamentally altering and challenging the way we think about our basic human rights. The threats we face nowadays are unprecedented. Security challenges are global and less predictable. And this is exactly the time we need to come back to basics and use all the tools we already have at our disposal.

The Commissioner for human rights needs to operate swiftly, especially during political crises and conflicts. The Commissioner needs to have access to the whole of territory encompassing CoE member states. It is clear from the mandate that Commissioner has very broad tools at disposal, but I would put them all under the paradigm of being present and being engaged. It is all about full dedication and unwavering condemnation of human rights violations. It is also about raising awareness, but also about being approachable.

I would aim to establishing an open-door policy for governments, other human institutions and civil society. I would work very closely with governments and institutions dealing with human rights in a transparent, honest and constructive manner. Most importantly, I would meet and talk to people. However, it is only with the participation of all parties, through open dialog and with the inclusion of all layers of society, that we can start tackling solutions to many problems, even those that seem hard to overcome.

The Commissioner's mandate is primarily one of an eminent advocate for the respect of human rights, which requires negotiation skills with Governments as well as communication skills for raising awareness within our societies.

**3. Which are the most important human rights problems which Europe currently faces and how would you propose to address them? What would be your preferred approach - outspoken or discreet diplomacy?**

We have no time to waste and the Council of Europe has no time to waste. The clock is ticking, and the alarm is trying to warn us to start moving in yet another battle to defend our human rights. As societies, we are at the cross roads and we need to join our voices and our forces while defending humanity. It is paramount that we achieve recommitment and reaffirmation of our commitment to human rights for all and bring back the trust to the importance of it.

There are many problems, including:

- Violations of international humanitarian law
- Discrimination of minorities and vulnerable groups
- Online radicalisation and violent extremism targeting youth
- Violence against women and girls and gender equality
- Modern forms of slavery
- Refugees drowning in the Mediterranean Sea
- Challenges to media freedom, including safety of journalists
- Challenges to the rule of law and the functioning of the judiciary
- Religious animosity instead of understanding and dialogue
- Social and economic rights, education and employment.

Talking from my personal work experience, the best approach to dealing with such issues depends on the case and its urgency. If we are, for example, dealing with large scale human rights violations, the Commissioner must be stand up and be the voice for the voiceless. However, if we are dealing with particularly sensitive cases, quiet diplomacy might give better results. Sometimes both approaches need to be combined.

I would work and build on the legacy of all three Commissioners. Close cooperation with all other Council of Europe bodies is essential. I would also work closely with civil society in accordance with the mandate given to the Commissioner under Resolution (99) 50. My promise would be to build bridges, seek dialogue and effective resolutions of the most acute problems, travel wherever and whenever I am needed, promote cohesion, education and equality. However, I would have no hidden agenda at any time, but serve as Commissioner for all defending #humanrightsforall.

#### **4. How would you engage with member states which refuse to follow your or the Council's recommendations or judgements of the European Court of Human Rights?**

My view is that human rights are indeed universal and that no country is beyond scrutiny. Human rights and the rule of law have secured peace among member states as well as individual justice. Any violation of human rights is a challenge to peace and humanity in Europe.

At the same time, we need to be realistic to be able to tackle the most burning issues our societies are facing today. I would remind all member states of the commitments they voluntarily agreed to uphold. I would seek cooperation and engage, and I would be persisting and would not give up in addressing the issue of concern no matter how difficult it might be.

As stated above, silent diplomacy and direct talks with Governments have been used successfully by me for many years in my prior function with the OSCE. I also believe that specific assistance activities for member states should be developed further by the Commissioner, in close cooperation with the ECtHR, the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly.

However, human rights are not negotiable. Therefore, I would use all tools at my disposal and encourage states to effectively engage also with civil society in implementing ECtHR judgements.

#### **5. What is your vision of your relationship with the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly? Will you see your role as that of a free actor in the Council or rather one who must take the interests of other Council institutions into account?**

The various responsibilities of all structures are very clear. I would follow the mandate and move on my own in pursuing the mandatory tasks. Institutional independence is an essential part of the various mandates.

However, it goes without saying that I would cooperate closely with the Committee of Ministers, the PACE, the Secretary General and all other Council of Europe bodies, in order to build up synergies, strengthen the human rights impact of the Council of Europe and avoid wasting resources by duplicating work.

The prior Commissioners have regularly reported to the PACE during plenary sessions. This should not only be continued, but intensified. The Commissioner could usefully be present at PACE meetings and invite committees to be represented at events organised by the Commissioner.

The same approach would be useful regarding the Committee of Ministers, which may wish to hear the Commissioner in its Rapporteur Group on Human Rights or during thematic debates. Inter-institutional synergies within the Council of Europe are also needed for an effective cooperation with other international organisations, including the UN, the OSCE and the European Union. Within the remit of the Commissioner's mandate, the Commissioner may be in a privileged position to seek close cooperation and complementarity with the EU Commissioners, UN High Commissioner for Human Rights in Geneva, but also with the new UNESCO Director-General, as well as OSCE institutions, including Representative on Freedom of the Media.

If elected, I would see that our joint work and sometimes our joint voice brings more clarity and resolutions for issues related to human rights. I would be leading in attempting to bring us together. At the same time, I would always leave an option to act independently and swiftly where necessary.

**6. Who do you think would be your main partners in your work as the Human Rights Commissioner and in which ways do you intend to engage with them? What will be your policy towards independent civil society organizations operating in the Council of Europe member states?**

Part of this question has already been answered by me in the above chapter, and I do not want to repeat what I have said. I would closely liaise with other international and regional human rights organizations such as UNHRC, UNESCO, OSCE and the European Union. In addition, I would use diplomatic skills and expertise acquired through my work with government officials, diplomats, politicians and civil society organizations from all 57 OSCE participating states over the past seven years.

Obviously, I would give importance to close cooperation with regional and national institutions, including ombudsmen. In my previous position with the OSCE, I have regularly and frequently worked with these organizations to build consensus in difficult political environments. Finally, through my engagement with leaders of several countries, I managed to develop an atmosphere of trust to resolve some serious human rights problems.

I would of course work also with civil society organizations; all my career is based on the work with civil society. The Commissioner cannot implement the mandate in full without cooperation with civil society organizations. Civil society organizations, journalists, academia, private sector actors, faith communities and others are indispensable to achieving outcomes in the human rights sector.

I believe that there is a space and a need to increase this cooperation and I would also like to see improved institutional co-operation with the INGO Conference of the Council of Europe, for instance in relation to defending freedom of association.

The key word of success is simple - it is one word: implementation. The norms, resolutions, treaties are there to guide us. We need the political will to make sure they are realized. But this is not a matter for governments only. We must engage our societies at large in the implementation and involve everyone in a dialogue on human rights. And this is where the Commissioner should

play a crucial role. If human rights violations continue, it is clear we are not effective enough. We must do more; we owe it to those suffering from terrible violations right now.

**7. If elected, what communication strategy would you adopt to increase the visibility and impact of the Commissioner?**

In all my previous roles I achieved much greater visibility of the institution I worked for or led. I would be present in public, engage with the public and promote Council of Europe values in local and in international media. I would use my expertise in strategic communications on digital platforms and new media tools including social media. As I was an early participant in the global discussion about new media and the digitalization of journalism, I am an avid social media user myself, leveraging digital platforms to advance the reach and impact of public messaging campaigns. It is always important to define the purpose of a campaign and the goals that we want to achieve.

I think it is worth breaking down barriers and engaging communities in understanding the importance of human rights for our wellbeing and how human rights can be the basis for reconciliation processes and for building bridges among communities in difficult times. All of this with an active engagement of all stakeholders can bring more visibility and credibility to the work of the Commissioner for Human Rights and ultimately to the whole organization.