**Ceremony to mark the 70th Anniversary of the European Convention of Human Rights**

**Event organised by the Greek Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe**

*Athens, 4 November 2020*

Excellencies,

Ladies and Gentlemen,

**The ECHR and PACE**

* There could be no better place to hold the event to commemorate the 70th anniversary of the European Convention on Human Rights than the beautiful city of Athens: the birthplace of democracy.
* It gives me great pleasure to be here with you today and represent the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe – the body that put forward the proposal that led to the drafting of the European Convention on Human Rights.
* For it was the Parliamentary Assembly which in a recommendation to the Committee of Ministers of 8 September 1949 called for the drawing up of a draft convention “*providing a collective guarantee, and designed to ensure the effective, enjoyment of all persons residing within their territories of the rights and fundamental freedoms referred to in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights*”.
* The Convention - a unique, living, legal instrument - is Europe’s remarkable contribution to the universal recognition and protection of human rights.
* From the very moment the Convention opened for signature in Rome on 4 November 1950, just fifteen months after the Assembly’s recommendation, the Assembly recognised the paramount importance of this treaty, and considered from the outset that the willingness to ratify it should become a *sine qua non* condition for membership for states wishing to join the Council of Europe.
* And from the date of the adoption of the treaty, the Assembly lobbied in favour of extending the rights enshrined therein, which led to the adoption of a number of additional protocols to the ECHR, guaranteeing inter alia the right to free and secret elections, to individual property, and to be free of discrimination.
* PACE members, with their unique dual powers as members of national parliaments and members of a pan European Parliamentary Assembly, continue to play an important role in ensuring that rights of the Convention are duly upheld. They initiate and support legislative reforms needed to implement judgments of the Court or use the parliamentary powers to scrutiny and holding governments accountable if they do not comply with the requirements of the Convention.
* The Assembly provides the Convention with a strong political network which will continue to stand up to unfair attacks against the Court and will continue to put forward constructive and innovative proposals, including on ways to tackle new challenges and drawing the attention to the emergence of a “new generation of rights” such as discrimination through algorithms, or the right to a healthy environment.
* And when addressing this new “generation of rights”, it is essential to ensure that all Europe’s citizens are protected according to a common and uniform standard. Accession of the EU to the ECHR shall guarantee this.
* The COVID-19 pandemic showed the fragility and – sometimes – the unpreparedness and unaptness of our legal obligations and rights’ provisions systems. It is therefore our duty to fill any legal and policy gaps, and as proclaimed in the Athens Declaration: “reaffirm our *deep and unwavering commitment to uphold, implement and further reinforce the values, principles and rights enshrined in the Convention”*.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen,

* Let’s cherish, uphold and treasure our Convention, for the next 70 years and many more after that!

Thank you.