

## Address by the President of Latvia Edgars Rinkēvičs at Council of Europe Justice Ministers' Informal Conference 'On the Path to Justice for Ukraine'

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Madam Minister,

Distinguished ministers,

Madam Secretary General,

President of the Parliamentary Assembly,

Commissioner,

Ladies and gentlemen,

A very warm welcome to Riga! I am very pleased to open this conference, a signature event during Latvia's Presidency in the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

The conference is a direct continuation of the Reykjavik Summit that took place in May of this year. The focus of today's conference is the existential issue Europe is facing now. Namely, justice for Ukraine in the wake of Russia's aggression and full-scale military invasion.

Before briefly addressing the central themes of the conference, I want to recall that the Council of Europe was the first

international organisation to decide on the discontinuation of Russia's membership.

This principled position of our organization once again confirmed our commitment to democratic values and the international rule of law. It also affirmed that our organisation is ready to assume a leading role in actively defending these values.

Today's conference confirms that our commitment has not wavered. We seek justice for Ukraine. We stand with Ukraine as long as it takes.

Ladies and gentlemen,

During today's conference, you will address themes that represent pillars on which justice is built – accountability, resilience, and hope.

First, accountability. Russia has brutally violated international law. It must therefore face full accountability. By “full accountability” I mean both, responsibility of Russia as a state, and the individual liability of those Russian officials who launched the war of aggression against Ukraine. Those who committed war crimes and other most serious crimes of international concern.

Russia must also bear full responsibility for the damage, loss, or injury caused to Ukraine and its people. I commend the Council of Europe for creating the Register of Damages. This is an important step towards a future international compensation mechanism.

The Register of Damages will ensure proper registration and documentation of the devastation Russia has brought to Ukraine. I call on all countries that have not yet done so to join the Register and demonstrate our solidarity with and support to Ukraine.

During our Presidency in the Council of Europe, Latvia is determined to advance the operational launch of the Register. I welcome the intention of the Ministers to adopt today a Declaration containing principles that will guide the functioning of the Register or Riga Principles.

I particularly welcome the emphasis on victim-centred approach. We must make sure that victims, in particular the most vulnerable, such as women and children, remain the focus of our efforts.

Second, resilience. The justice system of Ukraine is currently bearing a heavy burden. It continues to ensure justice and the rule of law, including through the investigation of crimes committed by Russia.

By continuing to uphold fair trial standards, Ukraine clearly demonstrates its values and the strength of its democracy. I encourage member states of the Council of Europe to provide support to the Action Plan on Resilience, Recovery, and Rebuilding of Ukraine. Latvia has already provided its financial contribution.

Finally, hope. We all have heard and seen heartbreaking reports about Ukrainian children being forcibly and illegally deported to Belarus and Russia. We must do our utmost to ensure the return of these children, to ensure that they are reunited with their families. We must restore hope.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In Reykjavik, we committed to strengthening the role of the Council of Europe. We also reiterated our common resolve to unite around our values and standards.

I am confident that today's conference will be an important contribution to our work for the benefit of all Europeans, including future generations.

Thank you!



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