



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

Thursday 30 January 2014

**Press conference
President Dean Spielmann
30 January 2014**

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to welcome you all to this press conference, which by tradition is held before the formal opening of our judicial year. The solemn hearing marking this event will take place tomorrow. As has been the case for a number of years, it will be preceded by a seminar, which this year is entitled "Implementation of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights: a shared judicial responsibility" – a subject which in my view is especially important.

I would add that our guest of honour will be Mr Andreas Voßkuhle, President of the German Federal Constitutional Court.

This week I have received Mr Sebastian Kurz, the Austrian Minister for Foreign Affairs and Chairman-in-Office of the Committee of Ministers.

Since this morning and throughout tomorrow, I will also be receiving a large number of presidents of the highest courts of our member States.

This morning, you were given packs containing the Court's annual statistics, and I know that you always examine them very carefully. As happened last year, you have been provided with USB keys containing a lot of useful information, including the annual statistics, the table of violations found for each country in 2013 and the activity report for 2013.

The Council of Europe and the European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA) this week published a practical handbook on European data-protection law, to mark European Data Protection Day.

The handbook is the first comprehensive guide to Council of Europe and European Union law on data protection, taking into account our Court's case-law in particular. Copies are available in this room.

In 2013 the Court's work has been quite remarkable as we have continued to build on the progress made in 2012.

The results are impressive, because we have managed to achieve an even greater output than last year. One aspect that is particularly pleasing to note is that for a number of high case-count countries, such as Turkey, Romania and Poland, the backlog of manifestly inadmissible applications has already been eliminated. Other countries, such as Germany

and France, now have no backlog at all. In 2014, the same situation should be achieved for Russia (which we would not have thought imaginable just three years ago).

A number of conclusions emerge from a more detailed analysis of the statistics, and I would like to share these with you:

First of all, regarding the number of new applications received, the figures are relatively stable, which in itself is a very positive development because until now, we have always had to contend with a year-on-year increase. By the end of last year we had received some 66,000 new applications, a very similar figure to the previous year.

Next, the number of applications determined judicially has increased by approximately 6%. By the end of 2013 we had disposed of more than 93,000 applications. The number of decisions by a single judge is slightly lower than the previous year, around 80,000.

Lastly, and I know this is a striking figure, at the start of this year the number of pending cases stood at 99,900. This again reflects a considerable reduction from just over two years ago, when the total was in excess of 160,000. I will not deny that falling below the symbolic figure of 100,000 pending cases is a source of great satisfaction and an encouragement for us to carry on. Above all, it serves as proof that it is always possible to change things and to reverse trends if you put in the necessary energy and resources. This reflects a process of reform which began with the Interlaken Conference, continued with the Izmir and Brighton Conferences, and, above all, was made possible through the entry into force of Protocol No. 14.

The figures speak for themselves and you can imagine how gratifying they are for us, after all these years of seeing them rise inexorably. You can examine them in detail at your leisure, but if I could make just one comment, it would be to say that these very positive results are the fruit of the substantial work accomplished within the Court, by the judges and members of the Registry. This success stems largely from the setting up of a special section responsible for filtering and for effective implementation of Protocol No. 14 (with the introduction of the single-judge system). I must add that a number of member States have placed judges at the Court's disposal and this support in terms of human resources has been extremely useful to us.

Lastly, as you perhaps know, a special account was set up following the Brighton Conference, giving States the opportunity to make voluntary contributions which will be put towards tackling the backlog of cases. We have already received contributions from the following countries: Austria, Andorra, Azerbaijan, Finland, France, Germany, Ireland, Luxembourg, Monaco, Norway, Serbia, Slovakia and Switzerland. Other contributions have been made by Croatia, Hungary, the Netherlands, Sweden and Turkey. As a result, seven additional A-grade lawyers will be able to work at the Court, dealing in particular with the backlog. The total amount received is 1,800,000 euros.

The statistics also provide us with information about the specific situation for individual States. Turkey, which for a long time occupied second place, is now in fifth. The

reforms it has carried out, in particular the introduction of new remedies, are a step in the right direction.

As for Russia, the figure has fallen from 43,000 pending cases two years ago to 16,000 at present. This is a quite spectacular drop. I would not be surprised if the trend continues in 2014. I am sure that, like me, you will be following the situation with great interest.

Things are more delicate in some other countries. One example is Italy, which has become the country with the second highest case-count, with a total of 14,600 pending applications. I know that the Italian authorities are doing everything they can to resolve the situation. They have all my encouragement.

The number of applications from Ukraine is also particularly high.

We shall, of course, continue to deal with single-judge cases as rapidly as possible. There are 27,000 such cases pending at present. These cases are mainly assigned to the Filtering Section, which from now on will also deal with repetitive cases, applying the methods that have already been successfully tried out for single-judge cases – what we refer to as “one in – one out”.

Another point concerning new applications to the Court:

Since 1 January, stricter formal requirements for lodging an application have been applicable following the entry into force of the new Rule 47 of the Rules of Court. The purpose of this amendment is to increase the Court's efficiency and speed up the examination of applications.

It entails two main changes.

The first concerns the information and documents to be supplied to the Court so that it can examine applications easily and thus perform its role as efficiently as possible. In future, any application form sent to the Court must be completed in full and be accompanied by copies of all relevant documents. Any incomplete application form will be rejected.

The second change relates to the interruption of the period within which an application must be lodged with the Court, namely six months following the final decision delivered by the highest competent national court. For this period to be interrupted, the application form will now have to satisfy all the conditions set out in Rule 47. An incomplete case file will thus no longer be taken into account for the purposes of interrupting the six-month period.

To help applicants comply with these new rules, the Court has already made information available online in the languages of the States Parties to the Convention. A new application form has been available on our website since 1 January, together with information material designed to assist applicants in completing the form.

In addition, a Turkish-language version of Hudoc has been available for two months now. Next spring, a Russian version will be launched. We can only welcome the fact that our site is becoming more widely accessible as a result of such initiatives.

In the field of communication, I know that you are familiar with and use our thematic factsheets. I am pleased to announce that in the next few weeks, seven new factsheets will be published, concerning the following themes: prohibition of political parties, migrants in detention, life imprisonment, elderly people and the European Convention on Human Rights, people with disabilities and the European Convention on Human Rights, criminal justice for minors, and protection of reputation.

I am now ready to answer your questions, together with our Registrar, Erik Fribergh, who will be assisting me at this conference.