

**Speech by Mr Antonio Vercher,  
President of the Consultative Council of European Prosecutors (CCPE),  
in the course of international conference on the role of prosecutors in the  
protection of individual rights and public interest in light of requirements of  
the European Convention on Human Rights**

**7 July 2021, Saint Petersburg**

**Dear Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation,  
Dear colleagues and distinguished guests,  
Ladies and gentlemen,**

It is an honour and pleasure for me to be invited to this conference, and I would like to extend my sincere greetings on behalf of the Consultative Council of European Prosecutors (CCPE) to all participants.

I would like, in particular, to thank the Office of the Prosecutor General of the Russian Federation for an excellent organisation of this important event in co-operation with the Council of Europe and International Association of Prosecutors.

I am very pleased by this opportunity to say a couple of words about the Consultative Council of European Prosecutors (CCPE) which plays a significant role in the overall structure of the Council of Europe's bodies and institutions. The CCPE is in fact a unique body of its kind, comprised of serving prosecutors from each of the Council of Europe member State, acting in their individual capacity. In this way, the CCPE provides a voice and perspective of serving prosecutors throughout Europe. It focuses on the practical context and aims to help ensure that prosecutors can work in independent, impartial and effective way when fulfilling their important responsibilities within the national legal systems.

We all agree that prosecutors play a powerful and influential role within society and their voice is important. Important as they uphold, through the actions, the rule of law, fairness, impartiality, and safeguard the liberties and freedoms of fellows' citizens. Fearless prosecutors and prosecution services, tenacious in their pursuit of justice, protective of their

independence and impartiality, free of political control and direction, actively cooperating internationally to combat crime, will always be a bulwark for freedom and liberty.

The CCPE is on some occasions referred to as the “prosecutorial arm” of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, meaning that it is through the CCPE that the best European practices are assembled, analysed and transformed into “soft law” standards and guidance which the Committee of Ministers transmits to all member States for reinforcing the status of prosecutors and their independent, impartial and effective work.

Since its establishment in 2005, the CCPE has adopted fifteen general Opinions which cover the most essential aspects of the prosecutorial profession, and support the work not only of prosecutors, but also of policy makers and other legal professionals. CCPE’s standards help in creating a conducive legal, institutional and procedural framework for prosecutors and consequently enable them to effectively work on cases and disputes at national level, in line with the European Convention on Human Rights and the case law of the European Court of Human Rights.

The current context of the COVID-19 pandemic has been particularly challenging for all of us. In 2020, the CCPE adopted its landmark Opinion No. 15 (2020) on the role of prosecutors in emergency situations, in particular when facing a pandemic. The restrictions introduced as a result of the pandemic affected to various extents civil and political rights protected by the European Convention on Human Rights, as well as economic, social and cultural rights, entailing discrimination against certain vulnerable groups. That is why it is all the more important for prosecutors to continue ensuring respect for the European Convention on Human Rights in member States during a pandemic, which appears to be ongoing. We have a key role to play to ensure that the measures taken under a public health emergency are used to protect people, and that new legal measures are applied with strict respect for human rights obligations.

Fighting corruption and related economic and financial crime is yet another challenge for the judiciary. In 2019, the CCPE adopted Opinion No. 14 (2019) on the role of prosecutors prepared in close co-operation with the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) which is the Council of Europe’s anti-corruption body. This Opinion serves as a practical guide for prosecutors as regards the definition of corruption, particular aspects for prosecution services and individual prosecutors when fighting corruption, institutional requirements and

safeguards needed for this task, including the legislative framework, resources, staffing, organisational mechanisms and the training and specialisation of prosecutors.

Other Opinions of the CCPE included contextual insights into important issues such as : independence, accountability and ethics of prosecutors, the quality and efficiency of the work of prosecutors, including when fighting terrorism and organised crime, the role of prosecutors in relation to the rights of victims and witnesses in criminal proceedings, relations between prosecutors and the media and other aspects.

Last but not least, Opinion No. 9 (2014) of the CCPE on European norms and principles concerning prosecutors, including the Rome Charter, covers the evolution in Europe of relevant norms and best practices guiding the work and profession of prosecutors in line with the requirements of the European Convention of Human Rights and the case law of the European Court of Human Rights.

As prosecutors, we need to be vigilant in guarding against the danger of providing a fig leaf of legal respectability to what in reality are situations which depart or are devoid of the rule of law. The CCPE is always at your disposal to provide support and expertise in country specific situations, upon request, taking into account the CCPE standards I mentioned earlier.

In conclusion, in addition to giving us the opportunity to meet again, both in person and online, I am confident that the present conference will contribute to raising awareness about key Council of Europe standards which are designed to guide the work of the prosecution services, as well as of other legal professionals, in line with the fundamental requirements of the rule of law and human rights, and pave the way for an effective implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights.

As prosecutors we must never lose sight of our real value and contribution which we can make to ensure that the rule of law is upheld.