Press conference

President Dean Spielmann

Strasbourg, 29 January 2015

Ladies and Gentlemen,

Welcome to this press conference, which traditionally precedes the solemn hearing to mark the opening of the judicial year, due to take place tomorrow.

As has been the case for several years now, the solemn hearing will be preceded by a seminar, this time with the title "Subsidiarity: a two-sided coin". This is a subject of obvious importance for our Court and for the Presidents of the highest-ranking courts who will be attending the event. The two speakers at the seminar will be Mr Sabino Cassese, Judge of the Italian Constitutional Court, and Mr Jean-Marc Sauvé, Vice-President of the French *Conseil d'État*.

I would add that our guest of honour at the solemn hearing will be Mr Francisco Pérez de los Cobos, President of the Spanish Constitutional Court.

This week I received Mr Didier Reynders, Deputy Prime Minister of Belgium, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Chairperson of the Committee of Ministers. Together we inaugurated an exhibition on Belgium and the European Convention on Human Rights organised in connection with the Belgian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers. Incidentally, you will have an opportunity to look round the exhibition, which is still on display here.

Among the dignitaries who have visited the Court I would mention Mr Michael D. Higgins, President of Ireland.

Starting this morning and throughout tomorrow I will also be receiving several Presidents of the highest courts of our member States.

The kits containing the Court's annual statistics have been handed out to you this morning and I know that you always scrutinise them closely. Like last year, you have been provided with USB keys containing a wealth of useful

information including the annual statistics, the table of violations found by country in 2014 and the 2014 annual activity report.

On the subject of last year, let me start by informing you that, in 2014, the Court built on the progress made in 2013.

The lessons we can draw from 2014 are the following. First, a decrease of around 3% can be observed in the number of incoming applications. Second, the Court implemented a policy whereby the lodging of applications is made subject to more stringent conditions. Failure to meet these conditions, set out in the new Rule 47 of the Rules of Court, will result in the applicant's complaints being rejected without being examined by a judge. I would stress that applicants whose applications are rejected under Rule 47 are fully entitled to lodge a new application, provided that it satisfies the conditions laid down. Nevertheless, the fact of processing only those applications which are properly presented represents a considerable efficiency gain. A total of 56,250 applications were allocated to a judicial formation, a 15% reduction compared with the previous year. The Court ruled in over 86,000 cases. The number of cases disposed of by a judgment remains high: 2,388, compared with 3,661 the previous year. At the end of 2013 there were some 100,000 applications pending. That figure was down by 30% at the end of 2014, standing at 69,900. Half the pending applications – 35,000 – are repetitive cases. In addition, 8,300 applications (12%) will be dealt with under the single-judge procedure.

In short, the statistical picture is quite satisfactory and I am pleased to see that the methods introduced and implemented within the Court since the entry into force of Protocol No. 14 have borne fruit, especially as regards the backlog of single-judge cases, which is set to be eliminated in 2015. We will now focus our efforts on the processing of the repetitive cases.

The statistics you have been given also provide an insight into the situation of individual States.

Ukraine is now the highest case-count country, with 13,625 applications, followed by Italy. As regards the latter, it is important to stress that Italy made very considerable efforts last year. In September 2014 more than 17,000 cases were pending against Italy; by the end of the year that figure had been reduced to 10,000. I would like to thank the Italian authorities for their efforts, especially as regards the follow-up to the *Torregiani* judgment and all aspects of the length-of-proceedings cases. I am pleased to say that Italy seems to be on the right track as regards its cases before the Court. The third country in the ranking is now Russia, which has lost the top spot it held for a long time.

But what is also important, beyond the analysis by country, is the type of cases concerned, beginning with the most important cases, those we place in the priority category.

The number of priority cases at the end of 2014 was in the region of 7,300. Half of these cases came from two States: Russia (35%) and Romania (13%). Turkey represents another sizeable group (11%).

The number of non-repetitive and non-priority cases was 18,500 at the end of 2014. These cases chiefly concern four States: Russia (17%), Turkey (16%), Georgia (11%) and Italy (8%). We will be striving to implement working methods enabling us to tackle these cases. This is an important challenge facing the Court.

This leaves the repetitive cases, which primarily concern Ukraine (31%), Italy (23%) and Turkey (15%). This category shrank considerably in 2014, with many of the cases being dealt with by single judges after a leading judgment had been adopted. We have done a great deal to streamline the processing of these repetitive cases, which of course continue to represent the largest category of cases pending before our Court. Nevertheless, I would stress one point: no matter how effective the processing methods adopted by the Court, the solution as regards repetitive cases generally lies at domestic level. It is therefore up to each country to ensure that endemic problems are resolved within the country rather than being brought before the Court.

The figures I have just given you speak for themselves and you can imagine what a source of satisfaction they are for us after so many years of inexorable rise. You will have ample opportunity to study them in detail, but if I could make just one comment it would be this: these very positive results are attributable to the enormous amount of work carried out within the Court by the judges and the members of the Registry.

In the information field, 2014 was a particularly full year. We published a third edition of the Practical Guide on Admissibility; as you know, the previous editions have been translated into over twenty languages. I hope that will also be the case for this latest edition. Last year the Court also produced a case-law guide on the criminal aspects of Article 6, and the guides on Articles 4 and 5 were updated. New factsheets came out in 2014 and the existing ones are, needless to say, constantly updated. There are now almost sixty of them.

In 2014 we also launched a Russian-language version of HUDOC, after the launch of the Turkish version in 2013. Other States have expressed an interest

in having a version of HUDOC in their national language. This is obviously an avenue well worth pursuing.

I will keep this fairly brief as I know that you have many questions you wish to ask.

I am happy to answer your questions together with our Registrar, Erik Fribergh, who will assist me during this conference.