

# Europe and its institutions



Similar names –  
can you tell the difference?

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE



# THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

The **Council of Europe** is an intergovernmental organisation with its headquarters in Strasbourg. It comprises 46 countries of Europe representing more than 700 million citizens. Its role is to promote democracy and protect human rights and the rule of law in Europe.

The **Committee of Ministers** is the executive decision-making body of the Council of Europe. It is composed of the foreign ministers of the member states or their permanent diplomatic representatives in Strasbourg. It decides the Organisation's policy, approves its budget and programme of activities and monitors the execution of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights.

The **Parliamentary Assembly** is the deliberative body of the Council of Europe. Bringing together elected representatives from the 46 national parliaments, it has initiated many of the Organisation's conventions, including the European Convention on Human Rights. It meets in Strasbourg four times a year.

The **Congress of Local and Regional Authorities** is responsible for strengthening local and regional democracy in the 46 Council of Europe member states. It brings together 612 elected officials representing more than 130 000 local and regional authorities.

The **Commissioner for Human Rights** is an independent institution within the Council of Europe. The Commissioner's role is to promote awareness of and respect for human rights in the Organisation's 46 member states.

The **European Court of Human Rights** is based in Strasbourg and ensures compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights in the 46 member states. Both individuals and states can refer cases to the Court. Its judgments are binding on the states concerned.

The **European Convention on Human Rights** is an international treaty of the Council of Europe, adopted in 1950. It guarantees fundamental, civil and political rights not only to all nationals of the 46 member states, but also to any individual under their jurisdiction.

The **European Social Charter** is a Council of Europe treaty that guarantees fundamental social and economic rights. It guarantees a broad range of everyday human rights related to employment, housing, health, education, social protection and welfare.

The image shows the European Union flag, which is a blue field with twelve yellow stars arranged in a circle. The flag is waving and is partially obscured by a blue banner at the bottom.

# THE EUROPEAN UNION

The **European Union** comprises 27 countries which have partly delegated their sovereignty to the organisation to enable it to take, at European level, democratic decisions on matters of common interest.

The **European Council** consists of the heads of state or government of member states and the President of the European Commission. It sets the main priorities of the European Union.

The **Council of the European Union** is responsible for co-ordinating the general activities of the organisation. Together with the European Parliament, it carries out a legislative function and adopts the Union's budget. It is made up of the ministers from the relevant sector of activity.

The **European Parliament** comprises members elected by direct universal suffrage by the citizens of the European Union. Its headquarters is in Strasbourg. Committee meetings and certain additional plenary sessions are held in Brussels. It shares its law-making and budgetary powers with the Council of the European Union.

The **European Committee of the Regions** is the European Union's assembly of regional and local representatives. It is composed of 329 members, elected representatives of regions and cities from the 27 EU countries.

A **European Commissioner** is a member of the European Commission, the executive body of the European Union. The Commission, based in Brussels, is composed of 27 Commissioners (one per member state). It proposes and implements European laws, manages the budget, monitors treaties and ensures the daily management of the European Union.

The **Court of Justice of the European Union**, based in Luxembourg, ensures the enforcement of the European Union's law and may be asked by national courts to give an opinion.

The **Charter of Fundamental Rights**, a text of the European Union on human rights and fundamental rights, was adopted in 2000.

The **European Economic and Social Committee** represents employers, workers and civil society organisations. It helps optimise the quality of EU policies and legislation.

## *Did you know?*

The **Universal Declaration of Human Rights** was adopted by the United Nations in 1948 in order to reinforce, at international level, the protection of human rights. The **International Court of Justice** is the United Nations' judicial body. It has its headquarters in The Hague.



\*All references to Kosovo, whether in the territory, institutions or population, are understood to be made in accordance with Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

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## A shared flag

The flag was chosen in 1955 by the Council of Europe and subsequently adopted by the European Union in 1985. It has thus become a shared symbol of European integration, without being specific to any one institution.

[www.coe.int](http://www.coe.int)

The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 46 member states, including all members of the European Union. All Council of Europe member states have signed up to the European Convention on Human Rights, a treaty designed to protect human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The European Court of Human Rights oversees the implementation of the Convention in the member states.

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