



**THE COMMISSIONER
FOR HUMAN RIGHTS**



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COMMISSAIRE AUX
DROITS DE L'HOMME

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Human rights have been a pillar of European construction, inspiring co-operation between countries and people. However, all too often implementation has lagged behind standard setting; lofty words have not always been matched by concrete action to the benefit of human rights. In order to fulfil Europe's promise, it is necessary to address systemic shortcomings in member states and to establish sustainable human rights centred policies at national and local levels.

As Commissioner for Human Rights, I am building on the work done so far towards the achievement of this objective. Closeness to people and the situation "on the ground" characterise my approach, as does a constructive, ongoing dialogue with national authorities and intense co-operation with national human rights structures and human rights defenders. Only by working together can we make human rights a reality for all.

Particular attention should be paid to the most vulnerable groups of people, such as children, the elderly and persons with disabilities. More resolute commitment to promoting and protecting the human rights of women, minorities and migrants is also needed. New challenges, such as those arising from a rapidly evolving information society, require a balanced approach which protects human dignity and fundamental freedoms, and promotes mutual understanding.

In this era of austerity and uncertainty, a renewed commitment to human rights principles is badly needed. It is my intention to keep human rights high on the agenda of European countries and to contribute to the development of more humane policies benefiting both present and future generations.

Nils Muižnieks

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Nils Muižnieks", followed by a horizontal line extending to the right.



■ The Commissioner for Human Rights is an independent and impartial non-judicial institution established in 1999 by the Council of Europe to promote awareness of and respect for human rights in the member states. The activities of this institution focus on three major, closely related areas:

- ▶ country visits and dialogue with national authorities and civil society;
- ▶ thematic studies and advice on systematic human rights work; and
- ▶ awareness-raising activities.

■ The Commissioner is elected by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, from a list of three candidates drawn up by the Committee of Ministers, and serves a non-renewable term of office of six years.

■ The current Commissioner, Nils Muižnieks, took up his functions in April 2012. He is the third Commissioner, succeeding Thomas Hammarberg (2006-2012) and Álvaro Gil-Robles (1999-2006).





COUNTRY WORK

■ The Commissioner carries out visits to all member states to monitor and evaluate the human rights situation. In the course of such visits, he meets with the highest representatives of government, parliament, the judiciary, civil society and national human rights structures. He also talks to ordinary people with human rights concerns and visits places of human rights relevance, including prisons, psychiatric hospitals, centres for asylum seekers, schools, orphanages and settlements populated by vulnerable groups.

■ Following the visits, a report or a letter may be addressed to the authorities of the country concerned containing an assessment of the human rights situation and recommendations on how to overcome shortcomings in law and practice. The Commissioner also has the right to intervene as a third party in the proceedings of the European Court of Human Rights, either by submitting written information or taking part in its hearings.



THEMATIC WORK

■ The Commissioner also conducts thematic work on subjects that are central to the protection of human rights in Europe. He provides advice and information on the prevention of human rights violations and releases opinions, Issue Papers and reports.

AWARENESS RAISING

■ The Commissioner promotes awareness of human rights in member states by organising and taking part in seminars and events on various human rights themes. The Commissioner engages in permanent dialogue with governments, civil society organisations and educational institutions in order to improve public awareness of human rights standards. He further contributes to the debate and the reflection on current and important human rights matters through contacts with the media, the publication of periodic articles and thematic documents.

■ As part of country visits, thematic work and awareness-raising activities, the Commissioner pays specific attention to the defence of human rights activists and engages in close co-operation with other Council of Europe bodies and with a broad range of international institutions, most importantly the United Nations and its specialised offices, the European Union and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE). The office also co-operates closely with national human rights structures, leading human rights NGOs, universities and think tanks.





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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, 28 of which are 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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