



THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE AN OVERVIEW

**Upholding human rights,
democracy and the rule of law**

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE IN BRIEF

ROLE

— The Council of Europe works with its 46 member states to strengthen human rights, democracy and the rule of law throughout the continent and beyond.

” Did you know?

The Council of Europe has 46 member states, with a total population of more than 700 million people.

— It has successfully developed a rights protection system, the best-known mechanism of which is the European Court of Human Rights. The Court was established under the European Convention on Human Rights which has been ratified by all the member states of the Council of Europe.

— The Court oversees the implementation of the Convention in the 46 member states. Individuals can bring complaints of human rights violations to the Strasbourg Court once all possibilities of appeal have been exhausted in the member state concerned.

— The abolition of the death penalty is among the Council of Europe's greatest achievements. Capital punishment has not been used in any of its 46 member states since 1997.

HISTORY

The Council of Europe pioneered the European integration process. It was set up in 1949, in the wake of the Second World War, to ensure the political reconstruction of Europe based on a set of fundamental values, the loss of which had brought the continent to its knees.

The Council of Europe was one of the first international institutions to open its doors to the countries of central and eastern Europe after the fall of the Berlin Wall. It has helped these countries to carry out the necessary political, legislative, constitutional and judicial reforms. It has also succeeded in adapting to modern-day challenges by concluding new treaties in areas such as cybercrime, data protection, international terrorism, human trafficking, violence against women, the sexual abuse of children, etc.



ITS SYMBOLS

The Council of Europe has its flag, anthem and logo.

The European flag, with its circle of 12 gold stars against a vivid blue background, is one of the most famous in the world. Created by the Council of Europe in 1955, it was adopted by the European Union in 1985 and has become a common symbol of European construction, beyond membership of a particular institution.

Equally illustrious is the European Anthem, the prelude to the "Ode to Joy" from Beethoven's 9th Symphony. Adopted by the Organisation in 1972, the European Union also began using the anthem in 1986.

In the Council of Europe's logo, the European flag is combined with a dynamic symbol ("the spiral") representing the shared experiences of European countries and the unwavering commitment of the Council of Europe to the defence of its values.



Did you know?

No country has ever joined the European Union without first being a member of the Council of Europe.



FUNCTIONING

A number of separate bodies and individuals are responsible for the functioning of the Council of Europe, each one playing a vital role.

THE SECRETARY GENERAL

█ Elected by the Parliamentary Assembly for a period of five years, the Secretary General, as the head of the Organisation, is responsible for strategic planning, management of the programme of activities and the budget of the Council of Europe. The post is currently held by Alain Berset from Switzerland.

█ The Deputy Secretary General is also elected by the Parliamentary Assembly for five years, in a separate ballot.

THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

█ This is the Council of Europe's decision-making body and comprises the foreign ministers of all the member states, or their permanent diplomatic representatives in Strasbourg. The Committee of Ministers decides the Council of Europe's policy and approves its budget and programme of activities.

█ www.coe.int/cm



THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

Made up of elected representatives from the 46 national parliaments, the Parliamentary Assembly is a forum for debates and proposals concerning pan-European social and political affairs. It has been responsible for many of the Organisation's conventions, including the European Convention on Human Rights.

www.assembly.coe.int

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

The Congress is tasked with building local and regional democracy in the 46 member states. Consisting of two chambers – the Chamber of Local Authorities and the Chamber of Regions – and three committees, it represents over 150 000 local and regional authorities.

www.coe.int/congress



THE EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS

Established in 1959, the Court is an institution that allows individuals, groups and governments, regardless of nationality, to contest alleged breaches of the European Convention on Human Rights.

www.echr.coe.int

THE COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

The Commissioner for Human Rights is an independent institution within the Council of Europe, mandated to promote awareness of and respect for human rights in the 46 Council of Europe member states.

www.coe.int/commissioner



THE CONFERENCE OF INTERNATIONAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (INGOS)

— The conference provides a vital link between politicians and citizens, and helps to ensure that the voice of civil society is heard at the Council of Europe. It comprises delegates from INGOs.

— www.coe.int/ngo

THE SECRETARIAT

— The Council of Europe is based in Strasbourg, France. It employs 2 300 people from the 46 member states and maintains external offices and offices in charge of liaison with other international organisations.

THE MAIN CONVENTIONS



The Council of Europe upholds human rights and democracy through international conventions. These are agreements which are legally binding upon member states once they have signed and ratified them. States' policies are regularly reviewed to ensure that they are in compliance with the conventions.

THE EUROPEAN CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS

■ The Convention entered into force in 1950 and secures fundamental civil and political rights, in particular the right to life, the right to a fair trial, freedom of expression and freedom of thought and religion. It prohibits torture, forced labour, capital punishment and all forms of discrimination and has established a unique system for ensuring respect for human rights: the European Court of Human Rights.

THE EUROPEAN SOCIAL CHARTER

■ Introduced in 1961 and revised in 1996, the Charter safeguards the economic and social rights of Europe's citizens: employment, social and legal protection, housing, health, education, free movement and non-discrimination.

” Did you know?

The Council of Europe has produced over 220 treaties to promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law.



THE CONVENTION ON CYBERCRIME

■ The Convention on Cybercrime came into force on 1 July 2004 and serves as a guide for any countries wishing to develop coherent and comprehensive legislation on cybercrime. It is the only legally binding-international instrument in this field.

THE EUROPEAN CHARTER OF LOCAL SELF-GOVERNMENT

■ This charter provides the constitutional basis for local self-government in the 46 member states which have ratified it. It guarantees the political, administrative and financial independence of local authorities.

THE EUROPEAN CULTURAL CONVENTION

■ Because culture plays a key part in understanding other people and respecting diversity, the Council of Europe adopted the European Cultural Convention in 1954, which provides the basis for Europe-wide co-operation in the fields of culture, education, youth, sport, languages and the transmission of common values.

” Did you know?

An additional protocol to the European Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism was adopted in 2015 to address the problem of “foreign terrorist fighters”.



THE CONVENTION ON THE PROTECTION OF CHILDREN AGAINST SEXUAL EXPLOITATION AND SEXUAL ABUSE (LANZAROTE CONVENTION)

■ This was the first instrument to criminalise the various types of sexual abuse of children, including abuse committed at home or in the family. The Lanzarote Committee is responsible for monitoring whether parties effectively implement the convention.

THE CONVENTION ON PREVENTING AND COMBATING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN AND DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (ISTANBUL CONVENTION)

■ The convention calls on signatory states to take steps to prevent all forms of violence, to protect victims and prosecute perpetrators. It constitutes a significant step forward in this field and is based on the premise that such violence cannot be eradicated unless efforts are made to achieve greater equality between women and men.



” Did you know?

The Council of Europe’s Anti-Doping Convention, adopted in 1989, is currently the only international legal instrument in this area.

THE EUROPEAN CONVENTION ON HUMAN RIGHTS AND BIOMEDICINE

■ The European Convention on Human Rights and Biomedicine safeguards ethical practice in biomedicine. It sets out guidelines concerning practices relating to medical research on human beings, organ transplants and the use of substances of human origin, protection of the human embryo and foetus, and the use of medical records. A protocol prohibits the cloning of human beings.

THE CONVENTION ON THE COUNTERFEITING OF MEDICAL PRODUCTS AND SIMILAR CRIMES INVOLVING THREATS TO PUBLIC HEALTH (MEDICRIME CONVENTION)

■ Thanks to the Medicrime Convention, which is open to non-European states, it is now possible to punish as criminal offences, on the grounds of damage to public health, the manufacturing, distribution and sale, including via the Internet, of counterfeit medical products.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION MECHANISMS



Every country which joins the Council of Europe agrees to be subject to independent monitoring mechanisms which assess that state's compliance with human rights and democratic practices. In some cases, such mechanisms have been set up under a treaty.

THE GROUP OF STATES AGAINST CORRUPTION (GRECO)

■ Greco identifies deficiencies in national anti-corruption policies and encourages states to carry out the necessary legislative, institutional or administrative reforms. Its evaluation is based on the relevant Council of Europe conventions.

THE COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS ON THE EVALUATION OF ANTI-MONEY LAUNDERING MEASURES AND THE FINANCING OF TERRORISM (MONEYVAL)

■ Set up in 1997, MONEYVAL is responsible for ensuring that member states establish effective systems for combating money laundering and the financing of terrorism.



THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE OF SOCIAL RIGHTS

■ The committee checks whether the rights to housing, health, education, employment and freedom of movement guaranteed by the European Social Charter are being upheld by the countries concerned.

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR THE EFFICIENCY OF JUSTICE (CEPEJ)

■ The work of the CEPEJ is focused on developing management tools, best practice and guidelines for improving the quality and efficiency of justice. It regularly publishes a report on the evaluation of European judicial systems.



THE EUROPEAN COMMITTEE FOR THE PREVENTION OF TORTURE AND INHUMAN AND DEGRADING TREATMENT OR PUNISHMENT (CPT)

■ The CPT, set up under a convention which entered into force in 1989, regularly makes unannounced visits to places of detention in the 46 member states (prisons, police stations and holding centres for foreign nationals) in order to evaluate the way in which detainees are treated.

THE GROUP OF EXPERTS ON ACTION AGAINST TRAFFICKING IN HUMAN BEINGS (GRETA)

■ The GRETA, set up under a convention which entered into force in 2008, regularly publishes reports evaluating the action taken by states to implement the measures set out in the convention.



THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON THE FRAMEWORK CONVENTION FOR THE PROTECTION OF NATIONAL MINORITIES

■ The framework convention provides for a monitoring mechanism which evaluates and improves the protection of minorities in the countries concerned, in particular their right to freedom of assembly, of expression, of conscience, of religion and freedom of access to the media and to their language.

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION AGAINST RACISM AND INTOLERANCE (ECRI)

■ The commission regularly looks at the problems of racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and intolerance in the 46 member states and makes recommendations to national governments.

THE COMMITTEE OF EXPERTS OF THE EUROPEAN CHARTER FOR REGIONAL OR MINORITY LANGUAGES

■ The charter is the only treaty in the world that promotes traditional regional or minority languages. The committee checks to ensure that the states parties are taking the necessary steps to actively promote the use of these languages in all areas of public life.

THE MAIN PARTIAL AGREEMENTS



A partial agreement allows certain Council of Europe member states to work together in pursuit of goals that might not necessarily be relevant or acceptable to all countries. Only those member states involved in the agreements contribute to their financing and development.

THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE DEVELOPMENT BANK

Based in Paris, the bank is the only financial institution with an exclusively social purpose. It participates in financing social projects, responds to emergency situations and contributes to improving the living conditions of the most disadvantaged population groups, including refugees and displaced persons.

THE EUROPEAN DIRECTORATE FOR THE QUALITY OF MEDICINES AND HEALTHCARE (EDQM)

The directorate sets official standards for the manufacture of medicines, and for certain sectors such as blood transfusion and the transplantation of organs. It is also responsible for combating the counterfeiting of medical products.

THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR DEMOCRACY THROUGH LAW (VENICE COMMISSION)

The Council of Europe's advisory body on constitutional matters, the Venice Commission helps to define and develop common constitutional standards and provides legal advice to countries all over the world.

THE NORTH-SOUTH CENTRE

Set up in Lisbon, Portugal, in 1990, the North-South Centre promotes dialogue between Europe, the south Mediterranean and Africa, and the adoption of policies of solidarity in line with the objectives of the Council of Europe.



THE EUROPEAN CINEMA SUPPORT FUND (EURIMAGES)

■ The first body of its kind in Europe, Eurimages finances the co-production, distribution, digitisation and exhibition of European cinematographic works, while at the same time encouraging co-operation between film professionals.

THE EUROPEAN AUDIOVISUAL OBSERVATORY

■ The observatory collects and disseminates statistical and analytical data on cinema, radio, television and audiovisual services in Europe.

THE EUROPEAN CENTRE FOR MODERN LANGUAGES (GRAZ, AUSTRIA)

■ The centre supports the development of language teaching and learning as a means of encouraging communication and co-operation. **www.ecml.at**

THE POMPIDOU GROUP

■ The group's mission is to prepare policies to help member states combat drug addiction.

ENLARGED PARTIAL AGREEMENT ON SPORT (EPAS)

■ The purpose of this partial agreement is to promote sport and to highlight the positive values it conveys. EPAS also works to establish international standards and develop a pan-European framework for co-operation.



THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE AND YOUNG PEOPLE

Young people play a key role in developing European societies. In order to work with young people as effectively as possible, the Council of Europe has adopted an original approach through its “co-management” system, which gives youth organisations an equal say in deciding on youth policies, programmes and priorities alongside government representatives.

EUROPEAN YOUTH CENTRES IN STRASBOURG AND BUDAPEST

Over 5 000 young people from all backgrounds attend study sessions, seminars or courses each year at the European Youth Centres. Over 15 000 young people also benefit from projects supported by the European Youth Foundation with a view to promoting understanding, tolerance and solidarity.

YOUTH PARTNERSHIP AGREEMENT

Since 1998, the Council of Europe and the European Union have had a youth partnership agreement aimed at providing a framework for the joint development of a coherent strategy in the field of training for youth leaders, youth policy and research.

www.youth-partnership.net



THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE AND THE EUROPEAN UNION

The Council of Europe and the European Union (EU) are separate organisations which have different yet complementary roles. The European Union shares the core values on which the Council of Europe is based.

The two organisations work together closely in areas of mutual interest, such as promoting human rights and democracy in Europe and neighbouring regions. Some major programmes and substantial financial resources have been deployed with a view to achieving the organisations' common goal of peace.

Under the Lisbon Treaty, the EU is to sign the European Convention on Human Rights, creating a common European legal space for over 700 million citizens.

As well as the European Union, the Council of Europe has close ties with the United Nations (UN) and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

” Did you know?

A wide range of joint programmes with the EU is helping to support legal and institutional reform throughout Europe and in North Africa.



All references to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

MEMBER STATES

46 MEMBER STATES

Albania, Andorra, Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Moldova, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, San Marino, Serbia, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye, Ukraine, United Kingdom.

” Did you know?
 The Holy See, Canada, Japan, the United States of America and Mexico have observer status with the Council of Europe.

Abolishing the death penalty, upholding freedom of expression, safeguarding children's rights, promoting gender equality, combating terrorism, guaranteeing compliance with quality standards for medicines and health care... These issues affect each and every one of us, but do you know what role is played by the Council of Europe in these spheres?

By drawing up, implementing and monitoring over 220 conventions, the Council of Europe has been striving – since its creation in 1949 – to uphold the fundamental values of our continent: human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

The best known of its treaties is the European Convention on Human Rights, and the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights are regularly reported on in the media.

This brochure provides a quick overview of what the Council of Europe does and how it works.

46 member states. 700 million Europeans.



Free documentation:
edoc.coe.int



Council of Europe Publishing:
book.coe.int

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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.

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE