



## 47 member states

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

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THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

WHO WE ARE  
WHAT WE DO



## WHO we are

The Council of Europe, based in the Palais de l'Europe building in Strasbourg, France, is the first and most widely based European political organisation.

Established in 1949 by 10 founding members, it now covers virtually the entire European continent with its 47 member states, and has thus become a unique forum for voicing the concerns, hopes and aspirations of 800 million Europeans.

## WHAT our goals are

Our primary goal has always been to guarantee the dignity of the nations and citizens of Europe by enforcing respect for our fundamental values: democracy, human rights and the rule of law. We believe these values are the foundations of a tolerant and civilised society and indispensable for European stability, economic growth and social cohesion.

On the basis of these fundamental values, we try to find shared solutions to major problems such as terrorism, organised crime and corruption, cybercrime, bioethics and cloning, violence against children and women, and trafficking in human beings. Co-operation between all member states is the only way to solve the major problems facing society today.

## WHAT we do

The Council of Europe's wide range of initiatives often take the form of conventions designed to bring member states' laws into closer harmony with one another and with the Council's standards. There are 200 at present. The best known of these is the European Convention on Human Rights, which outlines the rights and freedoms that member states are obliged to guarantee to all individuals within their jurisdiction.

These conventions are supplemented by the many resolutions and recommendations addressed to member states which play a vital role in finding solutions to our common problems.

## HOW we work

### ■ The Committee of Ministers

This is the Council's decision-making body and is made up of the ministers of foreign affairs of each member state or their Strasbourg-based deputies. Its policies are the basis of European conventions or agreements and recommendations to member states.

### ■ The Parliamentary Assembly (PACE)

This is the deliberative body and the driving force of the Council of Europe. Parliamentarians from member states debate policies for adoption which are submitted to governments for action. Its members are appointed by the national parliaments of each member state.

■ **The Congress** is the voice of Europe's 200 000 regions and municipalities and provides a forum where elected representatives can discuss common problems, pool their experiences and develop policies. It works to strengthen democracy and improve services at local and regional level.

■ **The Conference of INGOs** includes some 400 international NGOs. It provides vital links between politicians and the public and brings the voice of civil society to the Council. The Council's work benefits extensively from the INGOs' expertise and their outreach to European citizens.

### ■ The European Court of Human Rights

This is the judicial body that guarantees human rights for all Europeans. It is open to states and individuals, regardless of nationality, and its jurisdiction is compulsory for all contracting parties.

■ **The Commissioner for Human Rights** is an independent body responsible for promoting education, awareness and respect for human rights in member states and ensuring compliance with the Council of Europe's conventions and recommendations.

■ **The Secretary General**, elected by the Parliamentary Assembly for a five-year term, is responsible for the strategic planning and direction of the Council's work programme and budget and oversees the day-to-day management of the Organisation.

## Our SYMBOLS

**The European flag** was chosen by the Council of Europe in 1955. It displays a circle of 12 gold stars on a blue background. The number of stars is invariable, twelve being a number symbolic of perfection. The same flag was adopted by the European Community (now European Union) in 1986.

**The European anthem**, adopted by the Council in 1972 and later by the EU, is a musical arrangement by Herbert von Karajan of the prelude to the Ode to Joy from Beethoven's Ninth Symphony.

## But there is a difference!

Although the Council of Europe and the European Union now both share a common flag and an anthem, their roles, functions and aims are quite distinct. The Council of Europe is an intergovernmental organisation which today has 47 member states. It is concerned primarily with protecting human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

The European Union currently has 27 members that have delegated some of their sovereignty so that decisions on specific matters of joint interest can be made democratically at European level.

No country has ever joined the European Union (EU) without first belonging to the Council of Europe.

## Did you also know that...

...the Council of Europe is a death penalty-free zone? Thanks to the determination of the Parliamentary Assembly since 1985, abolition of the death penalty is now a precondition for membership of the Council of Europe.

...from the simple pill to the most sophisticated medicines, pharmaceutical products manufactured and sold in Europe are subject to strict standards, thanks to the work of the European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines at the Council?

...the Council of Europe was the first organisation to enact legislation in many fields, including the Convention on the prohibition of cloning human beings and the Convention on the suppression of terrorism?