

The Council of Europe and University Chairs Meeting ‘Towards an Enhanced Role of the Council of Europe in University Teaching and Research’ (Dec. 2014)

In order to strengthen the relationship with universities, the Directorate of Policy Planning, in co-operation with the Directorate General of Human Rights and Rule of Law (DGI) and the Directorate General of Democracy (DGII), organised a meeting on 3 December with representatives of leading European institutions of higher education. These include the University of Oxford, Istanbul Bilgi University, European University Institute (Florence), University of Sarajevo, Central European University (Budapest) and the European Humanities University (Belarussian University in exile, Vilnius). The meeting brought together European academics, in particular those working in the fields of Human Rights, European Studies and International Relations, as well as representatives of Council of Europe bodies, including the European Court of Human Rights, DGI and DGII, and the diplomatic community.”

The brainstorming meeting was designed to explore how to make human rights and democracy a prominent topic in teaching and research as well as in the universities’ general approach to education. In his speech the Secretary General of the Council of Europe emphasised that in the context of a growing crisis of values among Europeans, and especially young Europeans, education, and in particular human rights and democracy education, is a paramount task. The perspectives of academic institutions and the Council of Europe were presented and discussed and potential avenues for future mutual co-operation were explored during three sessions:

1. ‘Learning Human Rights and Democracy: The Council of Europe in University Teaching’
2. ‘The Council of Europe as a Subject of Academic Research’
3. ‘Towards Innovative Joint Projects: Strengthening Co-operation between the Council of Europe and Academia’.

Participants considered ways in which the Council of Europe could open up so as to enhance academics’ understanding of the work of the Organisation and how, inversely, Council of Europe bodies could benefit from academic research to support their standard-setting and monitoring activities. It was underlined that when it comes to the research dimension of universities, an important element from the perspective of the Council of Europe is that universities play a key role in advising governments and international organisations about how to address the manifold and dynamic problems of democracy and human rights.

This dialogue resulted in a number of proposals for innovative projects for future co-operation between the Council of Europe and academia which will be considered by the relevant Council of Europe committees in the fields of human rights and education.