

# Committee of Ministers

*The texts adopted by the Committee of Ministers in 2014 can be consulted at: [www.coe.int/t/cm/](http://www.coe.int/t/cm/)*

**The Committee of Ministers acts as the main decision-making body of the Council of Europe. It is made up of member states' foreign ministers or their permanent diplomatic representatives in Strasbourg.**

**In 2014, the Committee of Ministers was chaired by Austria until 14 May 2014, then by Azerbaijan until 13 November and thereafter by Belgium.**

**A**t its **124th Ministerial Session** held in Vienna on 6 May on “Council of Europe values and stability in Europe: current challenges”, discussions focused on a report from the Secretary General on the state of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Europe and the current crisis in Europe. The informal session focused on the situation in Ukraine (also see below).

With regard to the long-term effectiveness of the European Convention on Human Rights (“the Convention”), the Ministers welcomed the measures taken by the various stakeholders since its previous session to implement the Brighton Declaration, in particular, and the additional measures taken by the European Court of Human Rights to increase the effectiveness of its work following the entry into force of Protocol No. 14, resulting in a substantial decrease in the number of pending cases. The Committee noted, however, that the backlog of admissible and potentially well-founded cases pending before the Court remains a serious challenge and encouraged member states to continue their efforts to implement the Convention at the domestic level and to fully execute the Court’s judgments. Finally, it called on the States Parties to the Convention to sign and ratify Protocol No. 15 amending the Convention as soon as possible.

The Committee of Ministers met on four occasions to supervise **the execution of Court judgments**, with 1501 cases being closed in 2014. In January and July, the Committee held exchanges of views with the President of the Court, Mr Dean Spielmann, on the activities of the Court and the prospects regarding their development during the coming months.

The situation in **Ukraine** was a regular item on the agenda of the Ministers’ Deputies in 2014. On several occasions, the Ministers’ Deputies reiterated their governments’ commitment to the respect for international law, and in particular to the peaceful settlement of disputes and the full respect of the territorial integrity, unity and independence of Ukraine. They condemned the illegal referendum held in March in the Autonomous Republic of Crimea and the city of Sebastopol, as well as the subsequent illegal annexation by the Russian Federation. The Committee urged dialogue between the Russian Federation and the Government of Ukraine in the search for a peaceful and negotiated solution. The Committee also supported the Secretary General’s initiative to set up an International Advisory Panel whose task is to ensure that the investigations conducted into the violent events that took place in Maidan and subsequently in Odessa comply with the requirements of the European Convention on Human Rights.



Ministerial Session in Vienna (Austria), May 2014

■ In September, the Ministers' Deputies welcomed the protocol signed in Minsk on 5 September 2014, a first step towards a durable ceasefire and a long-term solution to the crisis in eastern Ukraine. They called on all parties to strictly respect and fully implement all 12 principles contained therein without delay. In this context, they called upon the Russian Federation to use its influence over the separatist movement in eastern Ukraine with a view to de-escalating tensions in the search for a peaceful and negotiated outcome to the crisis. The Deputies also urged the Russian Federation to withdraw all its troops from Ukraine and refrain from any further military interference in Ukraine, and to secure the border to avoid the illegal transfer of such assets.

■ Expressing their deep concern for the persons affected by the conflict, the Ministers' Deputies encouraged the Secretary General to examine the way in which the Council of Europe could address the consequences of military operations in Ukraine in terms of humanitarian needs and human rights. The Ministers' Deputies also had an exchange of views with the Commissioner for Human Rights following his visit to Crimea. They examined in April a report on the situation of national minorities in Ukraine, prepared at their request by the Advisory Committee of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities. They called on the parties concerned to follow up all its conclusions.

■ In April, the Committee of Ministers reviewed the state of co-operation and the progress made by **Montenegro** regarding the fulfilment of its statutory

commitments and, while noting that a number of reforms still needed to be completed, decided to discontinue the procedure aimed at making a regular stocktaking of co-operation with Montenegro. In July, the Committee approved two assistance programmes for the general elections in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** on 12 October 2014 and for the parliamentary elections in the **Republic of Moldova** on 30 November 2014. With regards to **Georgia**, the Committee of Ministers approved an assistance programme for the local elections held in the country on 15 June. In April, the Committee of Ministers received the Secretary General's ninth consolidated report on the conflict in Georgia. In the light of the report, the Committee expressed, *inter alia*, its concern at continued violations of the human rights and fundamental freedoms of those residing within the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia as well as the adjacent areas. It also reiterated its unequivocal support for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders.

■ During the year, the Committee of Ministers held four **thematic debates** which gave rise to a number of decisions. The debates were: "Violence against women (co-operation in particular in the context of the Istanbul Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence)"; "The role and functioning of NGOs in the Council of Europe"; "Follow-up to the Report by the Secretary General on the state of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Europe"; and "Ensuring freedom of expression on the Internet".

■ On the subject of **media and freedom of expression**, the Committee of Ministers adopted a declaration on the **protection of journalism and safety of journalists** in which it urged member states to fulfil their obligations to protect journalists and other media actors from any form of attack. In November, the Committee of Ministers approved the text of a Memorandum of Understanding between the Council of Europe and partner organisations on the setting up of a platform to promote the protection of journalism and safety of journalists. They authorised the Secretary General to sign it and invited him to evaluate the effectiveness of the platform after an initial test period of one year.

■ The Committee also adopted a **guide to human rights for Internet users** to help them better understand their human rights online and what they can do when these rights are challenged.



Committee of Ministers' room

■ Regarding the **death penalty**, in April and October, the Committee of Ministers reaffirmed its unequivocal opposition to the death penalty in all places and in all circumstances, and reiterated its strong and urgent call on the Russian Federation, as the only member state which has not yet abolished the death penalty, to take without delay all the necessary steps to transform the existing moratorium on the death penalty into a *de jure* abolition of the death penalty and to ratify Protocol No. 6 to the European Convention on Human Rights. During the year, the Committee of Ministers adopted several declarations deploring executions in Belarus and in the United States of America. With regard to Belarus, the Committee of Ministers reiterated its strong call to all authorities of that country to establish without delay a moratorium on executions, a first step towards abolishing the death penalty, and expressed its readiness to provide the authorities with the assistance they may need to do so.

■ In July, the Committee of Ministers adopted two conventions. The first was the **Council of Europe Convention on the Manipulation of Sports Competitions**, which was opened for signature at the 13th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Sport (Magglingen, Switzerland, 18 September 2014). Fifteen member states signed the convention on this occasion. The second was the **Council of Europe Convention against Trafficking in Human Organs**, which will be opened for signature on 25 March 2015 in Santiago de Compostela (Spain).

■ The Council of Europe 2014 Exchange on the **religious dimension of intercultural dialogue** was held in Baku on 1 and 2 September on the theme "Intercultural dialogue: interaction between culture and religion".

■ **Co-operation with other international bodies and external relations** remained an area of attention for the Committee of Ministers. With regard to co-operation with the **European Union**, at the Vienna Ministerial Session ministers noted with satisfaction the development of co-operation on the basis of a report presented on that occasion. As far as relations with the **OSCE** are concerned, the Co-ordination Group between the two organisations met on two occasions to review co-operation. In February, the Committee of Ministers held its annual exchange of views with experts from capitals on the work conducted within the framework of the **United Nations** on issues relating to human rights.

■ With regard to the **policy of the Council of Europe towards neighbouring regions**, a report was submitted to the Committee of Ministers at the Vienna Session. Final reports on the implementation of co-operation priorities with Morocco, Tunisia and Jordan during the period from 2012 to 2014 were submitted to the Committee of Ministers at the end of the year.