

Committee of Ministers

The texts adopted by the Committee of Ministers in 2015 can be consulted at: 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 2015, the Committee of Ministers was chaired until 19 May by Belgium, then by Bosnia and Herzegovina until 10 November and thereafter by Bulgaria.

The fight against terrorism was a top priority for the Committee of Ministers in 2015. Following the terrorist attacks in Paris in January and Copenhagen in February, the Committee made statements condemning these acts and called for the reinforcement of Council of Europe activities. The Committee endorsed proposals by the Secretary General for immediate action to combat violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism. Subsequently, at the 125th Ministerial Session on 19 May, the Committee of Ministers adopted an Additional Protocol to the Council of Europe Convention for the Prevention of Terrorism¹ to address the issue of foreign terrorist fighters. It further adopted a declaration and an action plan on the fight against violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism. The action plan sets out a series of practical steps to reinforce the legal framework against terrorism and violent extremism and to prevent and fight radicalisation through concrete measures in the public sector, in particular in schools and prisons, and on the Internet. Following the terrorist attacks in Paris on

13 November, the Committee of Ministers adopted a statement condemning these barbaric acts, underlining that it would continue to give the highest priority to the action plan, the implementation of which was subsequently reviewed in December.

■ A major issue addressed at the Ministerial Session was the role of the Council of Europe in response to the current crises and conflicts in Europe. The report presented by the Secretary General at the session on the state of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Europe pointed to several concrete challenges while proposing possible lines of action to address them. The session also looked at the contribution to democratic security in **Ukraine** and the **conflict in Georgia**. The progress made in the implementation of the **policy of the Council of Europe towards neighbouring regions** was also welcomed. In this respect, Neighbourhood Partnerships were approved early in the year with Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia for 2015-2017, an important step in reinforcing co-operation with these countries. The Committee of Ministers also endorsed priorities for co-operation with the Kyrgyz Republic for the period 2015-2017.

1. To date, the Additional Protocol to the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism, opened for signature on 22 October 2015, in Riga (Latvia), has been signed by 20 member states and the European Union.



125th Session of the Committee of Ministers,
in Brussels (Belgium, 19 May 2015)

■ **Guaranteeing the long-term effectiveness of the European Court of Human Rights system** was also addressed at the Ministerial Session. The Committee welcomed the results achieved to date by all relevant stakeholders in the framework of the reform of the Convention system and, in particular, the measures taken by the Court to further increase the effectiveness of its work and the swift implementation of Protocol No. 14, and the resulting decrease in the number of pending cases. It noted, however, the current challenges, among them the backlog of potentially admissible and well-founded cases pending before the Court, the repetitive applications resulting from non-execution of Court judgments, as well as the increasing workload of the Committee of Ministers in its function of supervision of the execution of judgments. The Committee endorsed the declaration unanimously adopted on the occasion of the High-level Conference – “The Implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights, our shared responsibility” (Brussels 26-27 March 2015). It invited the states parties, the Court and the Secretary General to implement the Brussels Declaration and to inform the Committee of the progress made by 30 June 2016.

■ The Committee of Ministers met on four occasions to supervise the execution of Court judgments with 1 048 being closed in 2015. Details concerning the Committee’s work in this area can be found on the website of the Committee of Ministers. In February and October, the Committee of Ministers held an exchange of views with the **President of the European Court of Human Rights**. The Committee also held several exchanges of views with the **Commissioner for Human Rights** during the year.

■ **The situation in Ukraine** remained of great concern. In April, the Committee adopted several decisions in this respect, in particular calling upon all parties concerned to strictly respect the Minsk Agreements and to take the necessary further steps for their swift and full implementation. It also expressed, *inter alia*, its serious concern regarding the continued deterioration of the human rights situation in eastern Ukraine and Crimea and the need to secure respect for all human rights and to ensure that the relevant human rights monitoring bodies can carry out their activities unimpeded. Finally, it welcomed the reforms conducted by the Ukrainian authorities to consolidate the functioning of democratic institutions, the protection of human rights and the rule of law while underlining the importance of bringing forward these reforms. It reiterated the willingness of the Organisation to provide further assistance under the Action Plan for Ukraine for the period 2015-2017 launched in Kyiv on 18 March 2015. The Committee also held two exchanges of views with Sir Nicolas Bratza, Chair of the **International Advisory Panel on Ukraine** – in April following the publication of the panel’s report regarding the investigations conducted on the violent incidents which took place in Maidan at the end of 2013, and in November, on the basis of the report published by the panel regarding the investigations into the events which took place in Odessa on 2 May 2014.

■ Concerning specific co-operation with other member states, the Committee of Ministers reviewed the progress made by **Serbia** as regards the fulfilment of its statutory commitments. While noting that some reforms remained to be completed, it decided to discontinue the regular stocktaking procedure concerning Serbia. The Committee also approved an action plan for **Bosnia and Herzegovina** to provide assistance for the period 2015-2017 in fulfilling its statutory and specific obligations as a member state. Regarding **Albania**, a programmatic co-operation document

was approved, also aimed at providing assistance for the period 2015-2017. In June, the Committee approved assistance programmes in view of the local elections being held in the **Republic of Moldova** on 14 June 2015 and in Albania on 21 June 2015. Finally, in September it approved a new action plan aimed at providing continued assistance to **Armenia**.

■ In October, the Committee of Ministers reviewed the state of implementation of the commitments entered into by **Azerbaijan**. It expressed serious concerns at the deterioration of the legal and administrative framework in which civil society and independent media operate, and at the increased number of prosecution procedures against human rights defenders and journalists. At the same time, it welcomed the progress made by Azerbaijan in some areas. It reiterated its commitment to continue to provide assistance to Azerbaijan and the importance of the effective implementation of the 2014-2016 Action Plan.

■ With regard to **Georgia**, at the Ministerial Session in May the Committee took note of the consolidated report of the Secretary General on the conflict in Georgia covering the period from November 2014 to March 2015 in the light of which a number of decisions had been taken. In particular, the Committee stated that the so-called treaties signed between the Russian Federation and the Georgian regions of Abkhazia and South Ossetia respectively were detrimental to the ongoing efforts to strengthen security and stability in the region, clearly violated Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity and had no legal validity. It called on the Russian Federation to facilitate and grant unrestricted access to the Council of Europe bodies to the areas affected by the conflict. In November, the Committee held an exchange of views on the subsequent (12th) consolidated report on the conflict. In 2015, the Committee also took note of a report on the Council of Europe's co-operation activities in **Kosovo**.²

■ During the year, the Committee held three **thematic debates**, which gave rise to a number of operational decisions. The first one concerned "Council of Europe action against extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism", the second "Migration challenges for Europe: need for collective action", and the third "Freedom of assembly and association: current challenges and the response from the Council of Europe".

■ A number of other priority fields were addressed in 2015. Throughout the year, the Committee of Ministers, through various decisions and declarations

reiterated its objective to create a **death penalty-free** zone in Europe, and promote a universal moratorium on the use of the death penalty. It deplored executions carried out in Japan and the United States, two Council of Europe observer states as well as in Jordan and Belarus. In January, the Committee took note of a report on the implementation of the Council of Europe **Gender Equality Strategy 2014-2017** and invited the Secretary General to ensure the follow-up of this report. In May, the Committee of Ministers decided to establish 18 November as the European Day on the Protection of **Children** against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse, the aim of which is to raise awareness of such crimes and of the need to prevent such acts, to promote the ratification and implementation of the Lanzarote Convention by member states and to prevent the stigmatisation of victims. The first such day took place in 2015. With regard to **Roma**, the Committee agreed on strategic orientations with regard to "Updating the Council of Europe's agenda on Roma inclusion (2015-2019)" and agreed in principle to the establishment of a European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (working title).

■ The **Council of Europe Convention against Trafficking in Human Organs** was opened for signature at a high-level international conference held in Santiago de Compostela on 25 March 2015. Fourteen member states signed it on that occasion.

■ Finally, the **annual exchange on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue**, held in early November in Sarajevo, focused in particular on the role of religions and non-religious beliefs in preventing radicalisation and violent extremism.

■ **Co-operation with other international bodies** remained a priority for the Committee in 2015. At the Ministerial Session in May, the Committee took note with satisfaction of the increase in co-operation between the Council of Europe and the **European Union** in the light of a report presented on this matter. In February, the Committee held its annual exchange of views with experts on human rights questions dealt with in the **United Nations** framework. With regard to the **OSCE**, the Co-ordination Group between the two organisations held two meetings in 2015 to review co-operation. The Committee also held an exchange of views with Ms Astrid Thors, OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities in December.

■ Finally, in November, the Committee approved the **Council of Europe's Programme and Budget 2016-2017**, the Organisation's third biennial programme and budget. In this context, Turkey's initiative to become a major contributor in 2016 brought significant additional means to the Organisation, allowing it to strengthen its operational capacity.

2. All reference to Kosovo, whether 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.