



External relations

- 1. Policy of the Council of Europe towards its immediate neighbourhood**
- 2. Relations with international organisations – new liaison offices**



1. Policy of the Council of Europe towards its immediate neighbourhood

The year 2011 was marked by the development of a Policy of the Council of Europe towards its immediate neighbourhood. At its 121st Session in Istanbul on 11 May 2011, the Committee of Ministers took note of the proposals made by the Secretary General regarding such a policy and invited him to draw up action plans for its implementation, with a view to their approval by the Committee of Ministers.

This policy, which potentially covers the countries of the Southern Mediterranean, the Middle East and Central Asia, sets the following objectives: (1) to facilitate democratic political transition; (2) to help promote good governance on the basis of the relevant Council of Europe standards and mechanisms; and (3) to reinforce and enlarge the Council of Europe's regional action in combating trans-border and global threats. Co-operation with the countries concerned shall be demand-driven, tailored and flexible whilst entirely governed by Council of Europe principles and standards ("benchmarks"), shall include all relevant Council of Europe bodies, shall be financed by extra-budgetary resources and shall be based on close co-ordination with relevant international partners, notably the European Union (see below). Instruments of co-operation include advice, election observation, parliamentary co-operation, participation in relevant Council of Europe structures and activities and accession to relevant Council of Europe conventions in the area of good governance and the rule of law. Against this background, a framework for co-operation was devised, including "Neighbourhood Co-operation Dialogues" and "Neighbourhood Co-operation Priorities".

Contacts have been pursued with the authorities of a number of countries concerned in order to identify areas of co-operation where the Council of Europe can provide meaningful assistance. At the end of 2011, "Neighbourhood Co-operation Dialogue" had significantly progressed with Morocco, Tunisia and Kazakhstan, and was initiated with Jordan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The Assembly had also granted "partner for democracy" status to the parliament of Morocco and to the Palestinian National Council. In this context, a link has been established between the new Neighbourhood Policy of the European Union and the Policy of the Council of Europe towards its immediate neighbourhood in order to jointly support reform processes in countries of the Mediterranean area and Central Asia. A €4.8 million European Union-financed "Council of Europe Programme for strengthening democratic reform in the Southern Neighbourhood" has been prepared for the Council of Europe to implement activities with Morocco and Tunisia in the framework of its Neighbourhood Co-operation Priorities with these countries. Possible interactions with other countries of the Mediterranean area and with Kazakhstan have also been explored.

2. Relations with international organisations – new liaison offices

The year 2011 was also marked by the establishment or reinforcement of Council of Europe Liaison Offices in Brussels, Geneva, Vienna and Warsaw, in the framework of the reform of the Council of Europe's external presence, with a view to facilitating co-operation with the European Union, the United Nations and the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE).

Relations with the European Union (EU)

Since its signature in 2007, the Memorandum of Understanding between the Council of Europe and the European Union has provided the framework within which to develop relations between the two organisations. Oversight of implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding is undertaken by the Senior Officials Meeting and on the occasion of regular exchanges of views of the Ministers' Deputies. The Secretary General reported on co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Union in the framework of his Activity Report "Council of Europe: a strategy for values in action" submitted to the Ministerial Session (May, Istanbul). In addition, in October, the Parliamentary Assembly held a debate on the impact of the Lisbon Treaty on the Council of Europe.

Political dialogue continued. It included high-level meetings under the chairmanship of Turkey and Ukraine with the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy¹, as well as agenda-driven consultations between the Secretary General/Deputy Secretary General and leaders of the EU. These consultations have resulted in increased policy co-ordination and set a framework for intensified collaboration at operational level, including in the field. Inter-institutional relations have also further increased, in particular through exchanges between the Parliamentary Assembly and the European Parliament, between the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Committee of the Regions, and between the European Court of Human Rights and the European Court of Justice.

Leaders of the Council of Europe and the EU have repeatedly expressed their

strong commitment to a rapid accession of the European Union to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR). This matter is now closely followed by the Committee of Ministers. Discussions have also started on participation of the EU in the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) and, in 2011, an Informal Mutual Information Mechanism was set up to provide more early information on respective normative initiatives.

As in previous years, a substantial part of joint activities was carried out through joint programmes between both organisations. In addition, the Council of Europe and the European Union have been joining forces in order to support reform processes in countries of the Mediterranean area and Central Asia (see point 1 above). Co-operation has also continued in the context of the EU's Eastern Partnership¹ (implementation of EU-financed multilateral activities with the countries concerned and participation of the Council of Europe Secretariat in meetings of Platforms 1 and 4). Other joint activities carried out in 2011 included training courses on the Council of Europe for the staff of the European Commission and the European External Action Service. A partnership agreement for the European Training Programme for Roma Mediators (ROMED) was also signed in July. As in previous years, Council of Europe representatives took part in meetings of the Council of the European Union's Working Group on Relations with the OSCE and the Council of Europe (COSCE).

The opening of a delegation of the EU to the Council of Europe in Strasbourg in January 2011 and the reinforcement of the Council of Europe Liaison Office in Brussels have considerably facilitated the reinforcement of the co-operation described above. In addition, contacts and events facilitated

1. In March and July, with the Chairman-in-Office of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and the Vice-President of the Commission.

1. The Eastern Partnership is the Eastern dimension within the European Neighbourhood Policy (Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament and the Council – 3/12/2008 – SEC (2008) 2974).

by the Liaison Office in Brussels have significantly contributed to raising the visibility of the Organisation and of the partnership.

Relations with the United Nations (UN)

The Secretaries General, Thorbjørn Jagland and Ban Ki-moon, had regular contacts during the year. They discussed in particular the developments in the Mediterranean region and the Middle East and the possibilities for mutual reinforcement of action towards democratic political transition.

The first year of operation of the Council of Europe offices in Geneva and Vienna in charge of liaison with the UN proved how many possibilities are available for reinforcement of mutual contacts and interaction on the basis of a standing invitation to the Council of Europe to participate as an observer in the sessions and work of the UN General Assembly.

As in previous years, the Council of Europe continued to work closely with a large number of UN bodies including the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), the Office for the Co-ordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK), the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) and UNESCO, with a clear focus on co-operation with the United Nations Human Rights Council – Universal Periodic Review – and the Office of the High Commissioner on Human Rights (UNHCHR), and the issues of the rights of children and preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

Relations with the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)

The Council of Europe continued its close relations with the OSCE in 2011, with regular contacts in a variety of fora. As in previous years, a broad spectrum of co-operation

activities and regular contacts “in the field” helped to increase the impact of actions of the two organisations at the intergovernmental and parliamentary level or between the institutions and specialised bodies.

The 20th Council of Europe–OSCE high-level “2+2” meeting took place in New York in September in the margins of the 66th Session of the United Nations General Assembly. Discussions centred on current and future co-operation between the organisations, their respective priorities and co-operation in the field.

During the 2+2 meeting, as well as on several other occasions throughout the year, the two organisations exchanged views on potential assistance to the democratic transition processes in the Southern Mediterranean and the Middle East. They agreed to explore ways in which the OSCE and the Council of Europe could complement and mutually reinforce each other’s work.

At the spring meeting of the Co-ordination Group in Strasbourg, attention focused on protection of the rights of persons belonging to national minorities and the promotion of tolerance and non-discrimination, whilst in Vienna in the autumn, discussions concerned co-operation in the areas of the fight against terrorism and the fight against trafficking in human beings.

The opening in 2011 of the Council of Europe Offices in Vienna and Warsaw already brought preliminary positive results towards strengthening the interaction between the two organisations. A similar procedure has been launched within the OSCE following the request by the Council of Europe Secretary General that the Head of the Council of Europe Office in Vienna be invited on a regular basis to attend meetings of the OSCE Permanent Council.

The Council of Europe contributed actively to the annual OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting held in the autumn in Warsaw and was represented at

the meeting of the OSCE Ministerial Council held in December in Vilnius.

Tripartite – Council of Europe/OSCE/ United Nations meetings

No high-level meeting was held in 2011. The three organisations started consultations on re-thinking the concept of the Tripartite meetings in order to make it more relevant and efficient.

Relations with other organisations/other countries

Throughout the year, the Council of Europe maintained regular contacts and relations with more than 20 other international, regional and sub-regional organisations active in the areas of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Relations were, for example, strengthened with the

Organization of American States by the signature of a Memorandum of Understanding in September and by the opening of the Council of Europe Office in Warsaw in charge of liaison with the Community of Democracies.

Co-operation with and support from the Observer States (the Holy See, USA, Canada, Japan and Mexico) continued in 2011, with a focus on looking for possibilities for co-operation in the “third forum”, like the UN, the OSCE or the regions neighbouring the Council of Europe.

Relations with more than 70 non-member states centred on the challenges of the 21st century in fields such as the fight against terrorism, trafficking in human beings, money laundering, cybercrime and bioethics, where the Council of Europe’s acquis presents a strong comparative advantage.