
Declaration by the Committee of Ministers on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Council of Europe

*(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 17 May 2019
at the 129th Session of the Committee of Ministers)*

Seventy years after the signature of its Statute in London, the Council of Europe is our continent's leading human rights organisation. We, the 47 member States, have come together to agree common standards on human rights, democracy and the rule of law and continue to be guided by them in the decision-making process in the Committee of Ministers. The creation of such a common legal space is unprecedented in European history, and an achievement that we celebrate.

The European Convention on Human Rights is the most important legally binding instrument for collective enforcement of human rights and fundamental freedoms in Europe, maintaining and promoting the ideals and values of a democratic society. The European Court of Human Rights has a profound impact on the daily lives of over 830 million people in Europe through its judgments and well-established case law. The European Social Charter aims at facilitating economic and social progress in member States and promoting the social well-being of their populations. Together with over 220 other treaties, they constitute the pan-European legal instruments protecting human rights, democracy at all levels and the rule of law. The Council of Europe has drawn on these rights, applying them to specific issues and providing additional protection for individuals. We continue building Europe and developing the common democratic and legal space founded on these rights and freedoms.

The Organisation's strength is the periodic and thorough assessment of all member States, in line with established legal criteria. The Committee of Ministers, its intergovernmental organ, the Parliamentary Assembly, a unique pan-European forum for interparliamentary dialogue and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities carry out monitoring functions and act as guardians of human rights and democracy in their areas of competence. We also highly value the role of the Commissioner for Human Rights, the Venice Commission as well as other independent bodies. We recognise the valuable contribution of each of these bodies and mechanisms in upholding our common legal standards.

European unity is required more than ever to face also new challenges, which threaten our societies. It is vital for the Organisation to respond rapidly and efficiently to emerging issues in member States. Together we must protect and promote the European human rights heritage and reform it to stand the test of our times. Towards that end we commit to enhance the unique role of the Council of Europe as an effective framework for pan-European co-operation.

Compliance with the standards and commitments undertaken is an overriding priority. It is our shared responsibility to maintain the Council of Europe convention system and we reaffirm our deep and abiding commitment to the Statute of the Council of Europe and the European Convention on Human Rights. We also reaffirm our commitment to securing the independent functioning of the judiciary and to continuously reinforcing the authority of the rule of law.

A free and pluralist public debate is a precondition for democracy, and strong action is required to reverse the recent deterioration of freedom of expression in Europe. We recognise the key role of civil society and express our deep concern at its shrinking space. We commit to a meaningful and transparent dialogue with civil society at all levels of our engagement.

We reaffirm the importance of anti-discrimination and equality policies in a democratic society characterised by pluralism, tolerance and broadmindedness.

Diversity is a source of enrichment to all our societies. We will continue to promote a European identity. We reaffirm our commitment to promote equal opportunities, quality education, gender equality and good relations in society based on mutual respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. Our mandate is to defend and extend across our 47 member States the values of freedom and human dignity for every individual without discrimination.

We remain concerned by confrontations and unresolved conflicts that affect certain parts of the continent. We shall work together for reconciliation and political solutions in conformity with the norms and principles of international law.

We, the Ministers representing the member States of the Council of Europe, reaffirm our commitment to the principles of the rule of law and of the enjoyment by all persons within our jurisdiction of human rights and fundamental freedoms. We will continue to collaborate sincerely and effectively in the realisation of the Organisation's aim to achieve a greater unity among us with a view to safeguarding and realising our ideals and principles which are our common heritage, to facilitating our economic and social progress and to pursuing peace based upon justice and international co-operation.