



COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

ACFC/MR(2025)1

Meeting report

85th meeting

Approved by the Advisory Committee on 30 June 2025

Opening of the meeting

The Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (ACFC) held its 85th meeting from 24 to 28 February 2025 in Strasbourg. Petra Roter, President of the Advisory Committee, opened the meeting and welcomed the members of the Advisory Committee. The President stressed that the 24th of February marks the third anniversary of the start of the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine and expressed concerns regarding the current international situation.

Adoption of the Agenda and Order of Business

The Agenda and Order of Business, as reproduced in Appendix I, were adopted without amendments.

Approval of the report of the 84th meeting of the Advisory Committee

Having examined the report of its 84th meeting, the Advisory Committee approved the report as reproduced in document ACFC/MR(2024)3, without amendments.

Report from the Bureau

The President reported on the Bureau meeting held on 12 February 2025 and informed the Advisory Committee about chairing agenda items during the plenary meeting.

Furthermore, the President provided further details on the exchange of views with the President of the European Court of Human Rights and the presentation by ECMI, inviting members to comment and ask questions in both exchanges.

The President also invited Besarion Bokhashvili, First Vice-President, to give a presentation about the possible inclusion of Spain's deaf community in the scope of application of the Framework Convention, which was followed by a discussion. The Advisory Committee agreed to continue the discussion.

Update by the Secretariat

Elise Cornu, Executive Secretary, informed the Advisory Committee about developments in the Committee of Ministers, including the state of negotiations of country resolutions and updated the members of the Advisory Committee on the timeframe for upcoming state reports.

The Advisory Committee was further informed about the staff changes in the Secretariat, including that Kristina Dedaj would leave the Secretariat as from 1 March 2025.

Approval of draft opinions

In application of Rule 37 of Resolution CM/Res(2019)49, the Advisory Committee unanimously approved the following opinions:

- Sixth draft Opinion on Czechia, on 24 February 2025;
- Sixth draft Opinion on Cyprus, on 27 February 2025;
- Sixth draft Opinion on Malta, on 27 February 2025;
- Sixth draft Opinion on Spain, on 27 February 2025.

The Advisory Committee also decided to communicate these draft opinions to the authorities concerned, and to invite the authorities of Czechia, Cyprus, Malta, and Spain to provide their respective written observations by 12 May 2025.

Adoption of final opinions

In application of Rule 25 of Resolution CM/Res(2019)49, the Advisory Committee unanimously adopted the following final opinions:

- Sixth Opinion on Finland, on 24 February 2025;
- Fifth Opinion on Serbia, on 26 February 2025.

Composition of Working Groups/Planning of visits

The Advisory Committee agreed on the composition of working groups and planning of visits as listed in ACFC/DOC(2025)1. The Advisory Committee also took note of the list of planned visits in the first quarter of 2025. The President asked the interested members to put themselves forward for the planned visits, including as backup members, and to seek to ensure gender diversity in working groups. The Bureau and the Secretariat would then look at the availability of members and their specific expertise before finalising the composition of individual working groups.

Exchanges of views

On 25 February, the Advisory Committee met with Marko Bošnjak, President of the European Court of Human Rights, to discuss minority rights protection. The President emphasised the importance of the Court being fully aware of the work of monitoring bodies such as the Advisory Committee.

The President highlighted the Court's role in safeguarding national minority rights, despite limited explicit references to such rights in the provisions of the European Convention on Human Rights. He stressed that the Court does not operate in isolation and must remain engaged with the institutional, political or social context. Key recent rulings (2019-2024) of the Court that referred to ACFC findings included cases on self-identification, segregation in education, language rights in political campaigns, ethnic profiling, minority voting rights, and freedom of association. The President also addressed the Court's approach to the burden of proof in discrimination-related cases and the role of the Committee of Ministers in ensuring the implementation of the Court's judgments.

During the discussion, several members of the Advisory Committee raised important legal and procedural aspects of the Court's work, particularly in relation to the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM) and broader human rights protection. It was noted that the Court may refer to the FCNM as evidence of a European consensus or as part of customary international law.

The President emphasised that broader engagement with academia and the public is necessary to reinforce the importance of human rights protection, which also includes minority rights. Identifying synergies between the conventions remains as vital as ever. Accordingly, third-party interventions can provide useful insights, and knowledge-sharing initiatives such as the [ECHR-KS Platform](#) are highly valued.

The meeting concluded with discussions on future co-operation.

On 27 February, the European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI) presented its study on *Assessing the Implementation of ACFC Recommendations: Case Studies from Eight States Parties*.

The study used qualitative comparative analysis, drawing on official reports, stakeholder interviews, and legal and policy reviews. It examined how ACFC recommendations have been incorporated into national laws and policies, highlighting both progress and challenges, such as funding shortages, political resistance, and bureaucratic obstacles. A key focus was the role of civil society and minority representatives in shaping policy implementation, highlighting both successful advocacy and cases where recommendations remained unaddressed. The study also considered external influences, including EU accession and geopolitical factors.

The ensuing discussion explored key challenges and ways to enhance the impact of ACFC recommendations. Participants noted the ACFC's progressive stance compared to the more cautious approach of some member states and discussed the distinction between soft law (ACFC recommendations) and hard law (legally binding obligations). Suggestions to strengthen follow-up mechanisms included increasing minority participation and enhancing the promotion of thematic commentaries. Other proposals focused on raising awareness and capacity-building among both national minorities and member states. Further topics addressed included the politicisation of ACFC recommendations and the role of the Committee of Ministers in responding to them. Participants also discussed how

other institutions use ACFC findings and emphasised the importance of ensuring consistency in ACFC opinions across different states while taking national contexts into account.

■ Reporting back on participation in external events

David Smith, Second Vice-President, participated in the CDADI working group on deliverables relating to national minorities, online, on 14 November 2024, during which he presented the Thematic Commentary No. 1 on education under the FCNM. He also participated with Elise Cornu, Executive Secretary, in the [17th United Nations Forum on Minority Issues, in Geneva](#), on 28-29 November 2024.

Elise Cornu and secretariat members reported on their participation in the [18th meeting of Council of Europe Dialogue with Roma and Traveller Civil Society](#), in Strasbourg, on 3-4 December 2024, and suggested that a member of the Advisory Committee could participate as well at one the next meetings of the Dialogue. She also referred to her participation in the Conference on “Challenges and prospects for national minority protection in Europe”, organised by the Hungarian Presidency of the Council of the EU, on 11 December 2024.

Evis Alimehmeti informed the Advisory Committee on her participation in the 1st Balkan Egyptians International Forum on “Visions and perspective of Balkan Egyptians in Western Balkans related with EU negotiation processes”, in Berat (Albania), on 4 December 2024.

Tomáš Hrustič reported on his participation, with secretariat members, in the [follow-up meeting](#) concerning the Fifth Opinion on the Republic of Moldova of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, in Chişinău, on 13 December 2024.

Tove H. Malloy and Elisabeth Sandor-Szalay informed that they participated in December 2024 in a workshop on gender mainstreaming at the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights. Judith Wittenbach, Gender equality rapporteur, informed the Advisory Committee that she attended online a Council of Europe event on gender mainstreaming in monitoring bodies, held on 5 December 2024. She suggested to the Advisory Committee to devote a session at the next plenary meeting to gender mainstreaming in order to discuss any shortcomings and areas for improvements, including an appointment of a member of every working group who will pay special attention to gender-related questions and issues during a monitoring visit.

■ Next plenary meetings

The Advisory Committee confirmed the dates of the following plenary meetings:

- 86th plenary from 30 June to 4 July 2025;
- 87th plenary from 13 to 17 October 2025;
- 88th plenary from 9 to 13 February 2026;
- 89th plenary from 18 to 22 May 2026.

Appendix I – Agenda

Monday 24 February 2025

- 9.30 – 10.15 Opening of the meeting
Adoption of the Agenda & Order of Business
Approval of the 84th meeting report
Report from the Bureau
Update by the Secretariat
- 10.30 – 11.00 Monitoring: Reading and final adoption of the draft Sixth Opinion on Finland
- 11.00 – 12.30 Monitoring: First reading of the draft Sixth Opinion on Malta
- 12.30 – 14.00 Break
- 14.00 – 16.00 Monitoring: First reading of the draft Sixth Opinion on Malta (cont'd)
- 16.00 – 17.00 Monitoring: Final reading and possible approval of the draft Sixth Opinion on Czechia

Tuesday 25 February 2025

- 9.30 – 11.00 Exchange of views with Marko Bošnjak, President of the European Court of Human Rights
- 11:15 – 12:30 Monitoring: First reading of the draft Sixth Opinion on Spain
- 12.30 – 14.00 Break
- 14.00 – 18.00 Monitoring: First reading of the draft Sixth Opinion on Spain (cont'd)

Wednesday 26 February 2025

- 9.30 – 10.30 Monitoring: Reading and final adoption of the draft Fifth Opinion on Serbia
- 10:30 – 12:30 Monitoring: First reading of the draft Sixth Opinion on Cyprus
- 12.30 – 14.00 Break
- 14.00 – 17.00 Monitoring: First reading of the draft Sixth Opinion on Cyprus (cont'd)

Thursday 27 February 2025

- 9.00 – 10.30 Monitoring: Second reading and possible approval of the draft Sixth Opinion on Spain (cont'd)
- 11.30 – 12.30 Presentation of the study on “Assessing the Implementation of ACFC Recommendations: case studies from eight States Parties”, prepared by the European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI) followed by an exchange of view.
- 12.30–14.00 Break
- 14.00 –17.00 Monitoring: Second reading and possible approval of the draft Sixth Opinion on Cyprus (cont'd)
Monitoring: Second reading and possible approval of the draft Sixth Opinion on Malta (cont'd)
- 17.00–18.00 Update by the members and reporting back on participation in external events

Friday 28 February 2025

- 9.00 – 12.00 Composition of Working groups/Planning of visits
Exchange about upcoming visits
Exchange on ACFC working methods
Next meetings
Any other business
List of decisions adopted during the meeting

Appendix II – List of participants

▪ Ordinary Members

Pedro AGUILERA CORTÉS (Spain)
Evis ALIMEHMETI (Albania)
Ingeborg BIRNIE-HAVENGA (Netherlands)
Besarion BOKHASHVILI (Georgia)
Laura-Maria CRACIUNEAN-TATU (Romania); (online on 25 February)
Vladimir DJURIĆ (Serbia)
Yuliia FYSUN (Ukraine)
Tomáš HRUSTIČ (Slovak Republic)
Šarūnas LIEKIS (Lithuania)
Tove H. MALLOY (Denmark)
Egly PANTELAKIS (Cyprus)
Klaus POIER (Austria)
Detlev REIN (Germany)
Petra ROTER (Slovenia)
Roksana RUDEVIČA (Latvia)
Elisabeth SANDOR-SZALAY (Hungary)
David SMITH (United Kingdom)
Judith WYTTENBACH (Switzerland)

▪ Additional Members:

Mikko PUUMALAINEN (Finland)
Harald Christian SCHEU (Czechia)

▪ Guests:

Marko BOŠNJAK, President of the European Court of Human Rights
Zoë BRYANSTON-CROSS, Deputy Head, Office of the President of the European Court of Human Rights
Ljubica DJORDJEVIĆ, Senior Researcher, European Centre for Minority Issues (ECMI)
Meyeti PAYET, Consultant, ECMI
Vello PETTAI, Director, ECMI

➤ Secretariat of the Council of Europe

Elise CORNU, Executive Secretary and Head of the National Minorities and Minority Languages Division
Lusine DRAMPYAN, Administrator
Michaël GUET, Administrator, Policy Adviser
Jörg HORN, Administrator, Policy Adviser
Maxime HUOT, Administrator
Zeynep USAL-KANZLER, Administrator
Amona ZEMON, Project Officer
Kristina DEDAJ, Administrative Assistant
Snežana LALIČIĆ, Administrative Assistant