

Committee of Ministers

The texts adopted by the Committee of Ministers in 2016 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.

During 2016, the Committee of Ministers was chaired by Bulgaria until 18 May, then by Estonia until 22 November and thereafter by Cyprus.

The committee held its 126th Ministerial Session in Sofia on 18 May 2016, during which it considered major political and other issues requiring the attention of the Organisation. The first of these concerned **the fight against violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism**. The ministers welcomed the progress made in the implementation of the action plan drawn up to this end and urged the work to continue. They also called for the swift signature and ratification of the Council of Europe's conventions in the field of terrorism and their protocols by those member states which have not yet done so and by the European Union, as well as for the expeditious designation of the 24/7 contact points to facilitate the timely exchange of information, as provided for by the Additional Protocol to the Council of Europe Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism (CETS No. 217). Member states were also invited to ensure the dissemination of the Guidelines for prison and probation services regarding radicalisation and violent extremism.

Another pressing issue concerned the Organisation's response to the **refugee crisis**. In this context, the Committee of Ministers welcomed the preparation before the end of the year of measures to provide member states with concrete tools to prevent and fight people smuggling. It encouraged the Secretary General to propose further priority action to ensure that special measures and safeguards are in place to protect children, often unaccompanied, who have been affected by the migrant and refugee crisis. Member states were invited to ensure the wide dissemination of the General Policy Recommendation No. 16 of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) on safeguarding from discrimination migrants who are irregularly present.

■ **The key role of democracy, human rights and the rule of law in conflict resolution** was the third main issue addressed during the session, including how to ensure the application of Council of Europe standards and instruments in conflict areas. The committee also examined the Secretary General's third report, "**The state of democracy, human rights and the rule of law – a security imperative for Europe**" and tasked the Ministers' Deputies and the Secretary General to provide appropriate follow-up to the report.

■ **Securing the long-term effectiveness of the system of the European Convention on Human Rights was also addressed at the Ministerial Session.** In this context, the ministers reaffirmed the principles set out in the Interlaken, Izmir, Brighton and Brussels Declarations and welcomed the results achieved to date in the reform of the Convention system through the action of all relevant stakeholders, notably as regards the situation before the European Court of Human Rights, the national implementation of the Convention, in particular the effectiveness of domestic remedies, and the execution of the judgments of the Court. The ministers welcomed, in particular, the efforts made by the Court to increase the effectiveness of its work, through the implementation of Protocol No. 14 and other measures, and the resulting substantial decrease in the number of pending cases. The ministers invited all stakeholders to reinforce their action to implement the above-mentioned declarations and called on those states parties to the Convention which have not yet done so to sign and ratify Protocol No. 15 amending the Convention as soon as possible and to consider signing and ratifying Protocol No. 16.

■ In 2016, the Committee of Ministers stepped up its supervision of the execution of judgments of the Court and increased by almost 40% the number of instances in which it intervened to support in different ways the ongoing execution processes. Progress was noted, notably in the adoption of the reforms necessary to remedy structural problems revealed by the Court's judgments, and the number of cases closed reached a new high (2066 cases closed). During the year, the committee held exchanges of views with the President of the European Court of Human Rights and with the Commissioner for Human Rights.

■ The situation in the member states of Ukraine, Georgia and Turkey was of particular concern to the committee and regularly addressed. With regard to **Ukraine**, in April the committee reiterated its commitment to the independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine within internationally recognised borders. It expressed deep concern at the deterioration of the human rights situation on the Crimean peninsula and reiterated its call for full and unrestricted access to the territories which are beyond the control of the Ukrainian authorities, including in Crimea, to all human rights bodies of the Council of Europe, in order that they can carry out their monitoring activities unimpeded and in accordance with their mandates, and, as a next step, to urgently address deteriorations of human rights and fundamental freedoms. The committee encouraged the continuation of the reform efforts undertaken by the Ukrainian authorities, aimed at strengthening the implementation of Council of Europe standards in the country concerning the constitutional framework, the functioning of democratic institutions, the rule of law and the effective protection of human rights.

■ With regard to **Georgia**, the Committee of Ministers approved an action plan to provide assistance in the period 2016 to 2019, as well as carry out a pre-electoral assistance programme in support of the 2016 (parliamentary), 2017 (local) and 2018 (presidential) elections to be held in Georgia. In May, the committee adopted several decisions on the conflict in Georgia in light of the latest biennial report of the Secretary General. It reiterated the unequivocal support of the Council of Europe member states for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders. It stated that measures taken by the Russian Federation with regard to the Georgian regions of

Exchange of views between the delegates of ministers and Ms Federica Mogherini,
High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice President of the European Commission, concerning the co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Union (Strasbourg, 11 May 2016)



Abkhazia and Tskhinvali/South Ossetia undermined the ongoing efforts to strengthen security and stability in the region and violated Georgia's sovereignty and territorial integrity, and it called upon the Russian Federation to stop and reverse this process and comply with its international law obligations and commitments. The committee regretted again that the Russian Federation continued to install obstacles along the administrative boundary lines. It invited the Secretary General to engage in a dialogue with the Russian Federation and Georgia to grant the existing bodies of the Council of Europe unrestricted access to the territories beyond the control of the Georgian authorities.

Following the coup attempt which took place in **Turkey** in July, the Committee of Ministers and its Chair followed the situation closely, condemning the coup attempt, expressing support for the democratically elected authorities and reiterating the readiness of the Council of Europe to continue to provide assistance to Turkey on the basis of the principles of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. It was recalled that Turkey is bound by all the commitments deriving from the European Convention on Human Rights and its additional protocols. In early August, the Ministers' Deputies held an informal meeting during which they were informed by the Secretary General of his visit to Ankara and in September the committee held an exchange of views with Mr Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Turkey, attended by several foreign affairs ministers and other high-level representatives of member states.

Concerning co-operation with other member states, the committee took note of a progress report on the implementation of a Programmatic Co-operation Document with **Albania** for 2015-2017. It welcomed the progress made in implementing the document and called for the rapid achievement of all the objectives set therein. It reviewed the state of implementation of the commitments entered into by **Armenia**, welcoming the constant progress made by the country in fulfilling statutory obligations and specific commitments entered into as a member of the Council of Europe, as well as the commitment of the Armenian authorities to further reforms aimed at strengthening the protection of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Having taken note of a progress review report on the implementation of the Action Plan for **Azerbaijan** 2014-2016, the committee decided to extend the action plan until the end of 2017 to enable all the objectives contained therein to be achieved. The Committee of Ministers also approved a pre-electoral assistance programme in support of the local elections scheduled for October 2016 in **Bosnia and Herzegovina**. Later in the year, in the light of a report on respect for the obligations and commitments undertaken by Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Committee of Ministers welcomed the adoption by the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina of a series of strategic documents, and called upon them to implement the specific recommendations on the outstanding commitments.

■ The committee also approved an electoral assistance programme for the presidential elections scheduled in the **Republic of Moldova** and noted with satisfaction a final report on the implementation of the Action Plan 2013-2016 for that country. Finally, at the political level, the committee held an exchange of views with Andrzej Duda, President of **Poland**.

■ 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 and condemned executions carried out in the United States and in Japan, two Council of Europe observer states, as well as in Belarus.

■ Important developments took place in other priority areas in 2016. In the field of anti-terrorism, the committee held a thematic debate entitled "Rising extremism, radicalisation and xenophobia in the **fight against terrorism**: Building inclusive societies as a cure/The need for collective action". It also adopted **Guidelines for prison and probation services regarding radicalisation and violent extremism** and an action plan (2016-2020) on transnational organised crime. In the legal and judicial field, the Committee of Ministers adopted a plan of action, **Strengthening judicial independence and impartiality**. It also endorsed the **Rule of Law Checklist** drawn up by the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) and invited governments, parliaments and other relevant authorities in the member states to make use of the checklist and to disseminate it widely in the relevant circles.

■ Early in the year, the committee approved the Council of Europe **Internet Governance Strategy 2016-2019**, which aims to tackle the challenges facing human rights, democracy and the rule of law in the rapidly evolving online environment. It also approved the Council of Europe Strategy for the **Rights of the Child (2016-2021)** and, in the autumn, the **Council of Europe Disability Strategy 2017-2023**. In the field of Roma, the committee approved a **Thematic Action Plan on the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers (2016-2019)**. It also took a number of decisions endorsing the establishment of a European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture, in particular welcoming the invitation of the German Government to locate the European Roma Institute for Arts and Culture (ERIAN) in Berlin.

■ Several legal instruments were adopted during the year, including the **Council of Europe Convention on an Integrated Safety, Security and Service Approach at Football Matches and Other Sports Events**, the **Protocol amending the European Landscape Convention** and the **Council of Europe Convention on Cinematographic Co-production (revised)**.

■ The **2016 Exchange on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue**, held in early November in Strasbourg, focused on the role of education in the prevention of radicalisation leading to terrorism and violent extremism.



Committee of Ministers Meeting,
22 November 2016

Co-operation with other international bodies remained an area of attention. At its Ministerial Session, the Committee of Ministers noted with satisfaction the development of co-operation between the Council of Europe and the **European Union**. Exchanges of views also took place during the year with Mr Michael O’Flaherty, Director of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights, and Mr Stavros Lambrinidis, EU Special Representative (EUSR) for Human Rights. In February, the committee held its annual exchange of views on **human rights questions within the framework of the United Nations** with international experts, during which a thematic discussion took place on human rights in culturally diverse societies. With regard to the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), the co-ordination group linking the two organisations held two meetings in 2016 to review co-operation. A number of exchanges of views also took place with representatives of other international bodies.

As regards external relations, 2016 saw positive developments in the Organisation’s policy towards neighbouring regions. At the Ministerial Session, the Committee of Ministers welcomed the progress made in the implementation of its policy and instructed its Deputies to consolidate it on the basis of the Council of Europe’s principles. During the year, the Committee of Ministers took note of an interim report on the implementation of the “Neighbourhood Co-operation Priorities for Kazakhstan 2014-2015: co-operation activities on Council of Europe’s conventions in criminal matters”, and instructed the Secretariat to continue to implement these priorities. It also endorsed priorities for co-operation with Palestine¹ for 2016-2017 and took note of an interim progress report on the implementation of the Neighbourhood Partnerships for 2015-2017 with Jordan, Morocco and Tunisia, as well as of the interim report on the priorities for co-operation with the Kyrgyz Republic. Finally, the Committee of Ministers approved a Council of Europe Action Plan for Belarus for the period 2016-2017.

1. This designation shall not be construed as recognition of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of Council of Europe member states on this issue.



126th Session of the
Committee of Ministers
(Sofia, 18 May 2016)
Daniel Mitov, Minister for
Foreign Affairs of Bulgaria,
Marina Kaljurand, Minister
of Foreign Affairs of Estonia



Handover of the chairmanship
of the Committee of Ministers
of the Council of Europe
from Estonia to Cyprus.
Ioannis Kasoulides, Minister
for Foreign Affairs of Cyprus,
and **Jürgen Ligi**, Minister
for Foreign Affairs of Estonia
(Strasbourg, 22 November 2016)