
1555th meeting, 25 March 2026

1 General questions

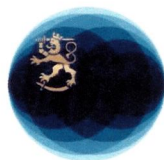
1.6 Deputy Secretary General – Interviews with candidates

The Secretariat recalls that, on 10 December 2025 (1546th meeting, item 1.6), the Deputies adopted the timetable for the election procedure of the Deputy Secretary General. The closing date for the submission of candidates was fixed at 12 March 2026.

By letter dated 18 December 2025, the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland informed the Secretary General that the Finnish government proposed the candidature of Ms Marja Ruotanen-Bourdages for the post of Deputy Secretary General (cf Appendix).

On 18 March 2026, the Secretary General forwarded this candidature to the President of the Ministers' Deputies.

APPENDIX



Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland

Helsinki, 18 December 2025

H.E. Alain Berset
Secretary General
Council of Europe

Dear Secretary General,

In accordance with the Regulations relating to the appointment of Secretary General, Deputy Secretary General and Secretary General of the Parliamentary Assembly and following the Committee of Ministers' Deputies decision at their 1546th meeting (10 December 2025) on the procedure for the election of the Deputy Secretary General, I have the honour to submit the candidature of Ms Marja Ruotanen-Bourdages for this post.

Ms Ruotanen-Bourdages is a staff member of the Council of Europe having served Europe's leading human rights body for 35 years, including 20 years holding senior leadership positions in the intergovernmental sector, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Private Office of the Secretary General. In her various capacities, she has contributed to major achievements in the key Council of Europe functions, such as standard setting, monitoring and cooperation activities. Through her work, she has gained a unique insight and experience that she has used to initiate and lead reforms with tangible results in line with the Organisation's priorities and the member States' decisions.

Ms Ruotanen-Bourdages has an exceptional profile to serve as Deputy Secretary General. Her values, integrity, strategic vision, strong leadership and management skills together with a drive for excellence and results constitute valuable assets for the Council of Europe to rise to today's challenges and thrive through change and reform. Therefore, I strongly support her candidacy.

Please accept the assurance of my highest consideration.

Elina Valtonen
Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland



MARJA RUOTANEN-BOURDAGES

Director General of Democracy and
Human Dignity

Council of Europe

Over **35 years of comprehensive professional experience** in the Council of Europe, including 20 years as senior manager leading major intergovernmental and cooperation programmes (DG1 and DG2), supporting the Parliamentary Assembly Committees' work and facilitating high level political negotiations as Director of the Private Office of the Secretary General. Participated in the **development of standards**, supported the establishment and supervision of **intergovernmental and monitoring bodies**, and increased the relevance, efficiency and impact of **cooperation projects**. Determined to maximise the potential of **team work** at the level of the Organisation, developed and implemented transversal multi-annual strategies, adapting working methods and identifying priorities to increase impact. Led **change management**, initiating, designing and managing reforms resulting in efficiency gains, increased coherence and better outcomes. Steered and engaged staff in a constructive way to achieve positive change. Command and strict respect of Council of Europe's administrative and financial rules, regulations and processes.

Values driven, firm, fair and respected leader with strong negotiation skills and proven ability to make different views converge in the Organisation's best interest.

Recognitions: Knight, First Class of the Order of the Lion of Finland, by the President of the Republic of Finland (6 December 2025).

McGill University and Université du Québec Master of Arts degree (economics, international relations, law, political science).

Finnish nationality (from Rovaniemi). Fluent in Finnish, English and French; intermediate German and Swedish.

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE

► Leading flagship programs and large teams

Several leadership positions in flagship programs, notably efficiency of justice, prosecutors, police, children's rights, gender equality, youth, sport integrity and combating violence against women, trafficking in human beings, discrimination, racism and intolerance. Developing standards and policies, monitoring the implementation of conventions and recommendations, and supporting member states through co-operation programs in these areas. Currently leading a team of 600 staff members with 38 nationalities (permanent, temporary, seconded), and managing budgets over 120 million euros (Ordinary Budget, extra-budgetary resources).

Examples of achievements

- Setting up of the Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine to efficiently follow up on the Reykjavik Summit's call to support children of Ukraine and focus on most pressing aspects and Council of Europe's added value. Support to the Special Envoy of the Secretary General on the situation of children of Ukraine.
- Strategic direction to work in the area of violence against women, focusing on promoting the entry into force and wide ratification of the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention) and on the setting up of its monitoring mechanism. Global visibility and impact; avoidance of double standards.

► Steering reforms and leading through change

As Director of Co-operation (former DG Human Rights and Justice, DG1), used opportunities to maximise the Council of Europe's capacity to respond to States' requests for assistance, resulting in legislative and policy changes required to align with key human rights treaties. Initiated first phase of cooperation with the EEA/Norway Grants, leading to multi-million multi-annual contracts. As Director of Human Dignity and Equality (DG Democracy and Human Dignity DG2), triggered reforms to increase the performance of several sectors, promoting transversal work and synergies and multiplying impact through strategic partnerships. Most recently (2024), as Director General of Democracy and Human Dignity, designed and led negotiations of a major restructuring of the Directorate General by streamlining activities and structures to increase impact. Redesigned work to enhance interaction with civil society and consolidate youth participation in the work of the Organisation.

Marja RUOTANEN-BOURDAGES
Director General Democracy and Human Dignity, Council of Europe

Examples of achievements

- Creation of a new intergovernmental committee on democracy in a budget neutral manner (discontinuing other less relevant committees and structures) through open dialogue with member States and other stakeholders. Streamlined DG2 work and creation of structures within existing budgetary allocations, to ensure results addressing evolving needs and priorities in this field, including within the process towards a New Democratic Pact for Europe.
- Transformation of the former Steering Committee on Gender Equality (CDEG) into a new and innovative transversal program on gender equality resulting in a broad mobilisation of key stakeholders, effective mainstreaming in virtually all Council of Europe policies and work, increased impact and visibility of results.
- Conditions for transversal teamwork across the Organisation and the preparation of an Action Plan to integrate the youth perspective in the Council of Europe intergovernmental work and other deliberations
- Reform to increase synergy and efficiency in the work of the anti-discrimination mechanisms (ECRI, Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities, European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages).
- Use of sport as a leverage for the promotion of Council of Europe values and the development of new strategic partnerships resulting in the signature of MoU with UEFA and FIFA with strong commitments for sport integrity and human rights.

► **Strengthening the links with other Organisations: Positioning the Council of Europe in the international scene**

Led work towards the interconnection of global and regional agendas, initiated systematic reference to the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in areas under her responsibility, notably gender equality and children's rights and introduced the concept in the work of the Parliamentary Assembly. Ensured complementarities with the EU on several topics and strategies; initiated and participated in discussions on the EU accession to the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence.

Examples of achievements

- Cross-regional meetings of international and regional mechanisms (7 at present) on violence against women institutionalised (Platform of Independent Expert Mechanisms on Discrimination and Violence against Women; GREVIO to chair in 2026).

Marja RUOTANEN-BOURDAGES
Director General Democracy and Human Dignity, Council of Europe

PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE (CHRONOLOGICAL OVERVIEW)

- September 2022 – present: **Director General of Democracy and Human Dignity**. Areas of responsibility: anti-discrimination, diversity and inclusion, gender equality, violence against women, trafficking in human beings, children's rights, education, youth, freedom of expression, civil society, culture and heritage, audiovisual and cinematographic cultural support; manages budget of 120 million € and staff of 600, 38 nationalities.
- June 2018 – August 2022: **Director of the Committees, Parliamentary Assembly** of the Council of Europe. Prioritisation, supervision, and coordination work of parliamentary committees.
- January 2014 – May 2018: **Director of Human Dignity and Equality** (DG Democracy). Areas of responsibility: children's rights and sexual violence against children (Lanzarote Convention), trafficking in human beings (Anti-trafficking Convention, GRETA), gender equality, violence against women (Istanbul Convention, GREVIO), rights of persons with disability, LGBTI rights, minority rights (FCNM, ECRML), Roma, racism and intolerance (ECRI), sport and ethics.
- January 2012 - December 2013: **Director of Justice and Human Dignity** (DG Human Rights and Rule of Law). Areas of responsibility: Legal co-operation (CDCJ), Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ, CCJE, CCPE), gender equality trafficking in human beings, children's rights.
- September 2009 – December 2011: **Director of Cooperation** (DG Human Rights and Rule of Law). Areas of responsibility: judicial reform, efficiency of justice, police and prosecutors, prison reform, cybercrime.
- *September 2005 – August 2009*: **Director of the Private Office of the Secretary General** (Terry Davis). Areas of responsibility: management and co-ordination of Private Office, relations with the Committee of Ministers and national governments and delegations. Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights, senior recruitment/staff matters, Directorate of Political Affairs (DPA), Secretary to the Senior Management Group, co-ordination of the Secretary General's agenda and communication, official visits and high-level contacts; development of reforms, implementation and follow-up.
- *September 2004 – August 2005*: **Deputy Director of the Private Office** (Terry Davis). Areas of responsibility: Directorate General of Administration (DGA), staff committee, Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB), Third Summit (16-17 May 2005, Warsaw, Poland), Private Office Budget (CCM), development of reforms, implementation and follow-up.
- July 2003 - August 2004: **Secretary to the Political Affairs Committee**, Parliamentary Assembly.
- January 2003–June 2003: **Adviser, Private Office of the Secretary General** (Walter Schwimmer). Areas of responsibility: Directorate General of Administration (DGA), Staff Committee, Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB).
- March 1999 –December 2002: **Secretary to the Political Affairs Committee**, Parliamentary Assembly.
- April 1996 – February 1999: **Adviser, Private Office of the Secretary General** (Daniel Tarchys). Areas of responsibility: culture, education, youth, Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB), social cohesion, Social Charter, social policies, health, Pharmacopoeia.
- April 1990 – March 1996: **Secretary to various Parliamentary Assembly Committees** (Migration and Refugees, Economic Affairs and Development, Equality between Women and Men) and Executive Assistant to the Clerk of the Parliamentary Assembly.