



NEWSLETTER

DG Human Rights and Rule of Law (DGI)

March 2023

CPT

The CPT held its 110th [plenary](#) meeting in Strasbourg from 6 to 10 March 2023, during which 9 reports were adopted.

The CPT carried out an ad hoc visit to [Serbia](#) from 21-30 March, and to Bulgaria from 21-31 March. In addition, an ad hoc visit to [Georgia](#) was carried out from 25-27 March.

On 24 March, the CPT published its report on the 2022 periodic visit to [Italy](#), together with the response of the Italian authorities.

On 29 March, the Council of Europe anti-torture Committee announced [periodic visits to eight countries](#) in 2024.

In its [32nd General Report](#), published on 30 March, the CPT calls for an end to unlawful pushback practices and the ill-treatment of foreign nationals deprived of their liberty in the context of forced removals at borders.

Venice Commission

The Venice Commission held its [134th plenary session](#) on 10 – 11 March 2023, the [76th meeting of the Council of Democratic Elections](#) (CoE tripartite body comprising representatives of the PACE, the Congress and the Venice Commission) on 9 March and the 20th meeting of the Bureau of the [World Conference on Constitutional Justice](#) on 11 March, in Venice.

In March the Commission received and started working on the following **request for opinion**:

- **Germany** - the draft law on the amendment of the German Federal Election Act and its compliance with Council of Europe standards (joint opinion with the OSCE/ODIHR) – PACE President – 3.03.2023

On 15 March the Commission organised the **8th coordination meeting of the UniDem Med** project (University for democracy for the Southern Mediterranean) in Lisbon (**Portugal**), after the launching event of the joint EU and Council of Europe programme "Protecting human rights, rule of law and democracy through shared standards in the Southern Mediterranean" (South Programme V).

A delegation of the Venice Commission accompanied the PACE election observation delegation to advise on the legal framework of the **presidential election of 19 March in Montenegro**.

On 27 March, Mme Claire Bazy-Malaurie, President of the Venice Commission, participated in the opening of the event devoted to the **100th anniversary of the adoption of the 1923 Constitution of Romania**.

The Commission published issue [2022/2](#) of its electronic Bulletin on Constitutional Case-Law ("**e-Bulletin**").

Implementation of Human Rights, Justice and Legal Co-operation Standards

The CEPEJ published its Resource Centre on Cyberjustice and AI, its goals being: to take stock of functional judicial AI systems in Europe, serve as a publicly accessible point of reliable information on AI and other cyberjustice tools, and a place to examine the benefits and risks of these systems. In **Albania**, the CEPEJ organised an expert-led mediation assessment mission and a workshop on communication of the judiciary with the High Judicial Council. The CEPEJ secretariat organised missions with experts to **Bosnia and Herzegovina** and **Serbia**.

Key activities of the Division of Co-operation Programmes in March: on **Ukraine**, the Director General's participation in the [United for Justice conference](#) in Lviv and in the [Justice ministers conference](#) in London; on **Türkiye**, a visit of the Constitutional Court to Strasbourg; on **Kosovo***¹ and **North Macedonia** a [workshop](#) for their Constitutional Courts (photo); on **Montenegro**, a communications workshop for the Judicial and Prosecutorial Councils; on **Azerbaijan** and **Georgia**, a visit of their authorities on execution issues to Strasbourg.



A cross-border [launch](#) of the Council of Europe HELP course "Ethics for Judges, Prosecutors and Lawyers" was organised in **Lithuania** under the EU-CoE "HELP in the EU" project. HELP was showcased as an innovative action in reinforcing capacities of institutions and professionals in the EU-CoE launch of the "South Programme V" in **Portugal** ([DSG speech](#)). A **HELP Training-of-Trainers (ToT)** was organised in **Italy** (photo). The development of HELP courses on International Humanitarian Law and Human Rights; and on AI started.



In the context of the joint EU/CoE project in support of the **Moroccan** NPM, three capacity building trainings took place in Rabat in March. A training was also organised in Tunis for members of the **Tunisian** NPM on the revised Istanbul Protocol. This was the final activity under the joint EU/CoE programme "Support Project to Independent Bodies in Tunisia", closed in Tunis on 30 March 2023. A workshop was organised under the [TJENI](#) project with the Ministry of Justice of **Poland** to discuss the needs, possible solutions and practical steps to facilitate effective access to the ECtHR's case-law and the ECtHR Knowledge-Sharing. Bilateral discussions between the **Croatian** Ministry of Justice and judiciaries and **French** Court of Cassation ([Cour de Cassation](#)), the Council of State ([Conseil d'Etat](#)), the Ministry of Justice and the Inter-ministerial Digital Directorate ([DINUM](#)) were also held during a study visit under the Project "[Digital by Default](#)".

¹ *All references to Kosovo, whether the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations' Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

Execution of Judgments of the ECtHR

The Department for the Execution of judgments met with Mr Magdalinchev, representing the Supreme Judicial Council of **Bulgaria** and a group of judges, whose visit was organised under the “Justice” Programme of the Norwegian Financial Mechanism. The Department will also meet representatives of the **Supreme Administrative Court of Bulgaria** at the end of the month.

The Department met online with the **Danish Institute for Human Rights** and the organisations Dignity and Better Psychiatry to discuss various issues related to the execution of the *Aggerholm v Denmark* case. The Department also met with the organisation LGBT+ Denmark to give an introduction to the working methods of the Department, the system of execution of judgments and discussed cases related to LGBTI issues.

A study visit was organised by the Department for members of the **Romanian Government Agent** Office and met representatives of CSOs for exchanges on cases concerning rights of persons with mental health conditions and disabilities. It took also part in meetings with stakeholders in the EEA/Norway Grants Programmes for Romania to exchange on relevant cases pending for execution. Finally, it participated in a workshop for Roma and Pro-Roma CSOs on the execution supervision process and civil society interventions.

The Department carried out a mission to **London**. A training session on the Convention system, execution of ECHR judgments and best practices on drafting action plans/reports was held and attended by 70 participants from across **various ministries in England and Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland**. Separate meetings were held with responsible policy leads (Home Office, Northern Ireland Office, Scottish Government, Department of Justice in Northern Ireland, Crown Prosecution Service, Scottish Prosecution Service, College of Policing). A meeting was also held with the Equality and Human Rights Commission, the Scottish Human Rights Commission and the Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission to raise awareness of the execution system and the role of civil society, and a Roundtable was organised for the same purpose by the Bingham Centre with the participation of numerous civil society organisations based in London.

Lastly, the Department held a meeting with the **Delegation of the European Union to the Council of Europe** to discuss the implementation of the Court’s judgments against Ukraine in the context of accession of **Ukraine** to the EU and held online meetings with the Ministry of Internal Affairs of **Ukraine**, the High Council of Justice of Ukraine and the Secretariat of the Ukrainian Parliament Commissioner for Human Rights to exchange information on recent developments in the implementation of the Court’s judgments.

Social Rights

GT-CHARTÉ concluded its work on the [reform](#) of the European Social Charter system. The Chairperson of the working party, Ambassador Panos Beglitis, informed the Ministers Deputies who endorsed the [report](#) on longer-term substantive and procedural issues and adopted a number of [decisions](#).

31 March 2023: The [Academic Network on the European Social Charter and Social Rights \(ANESC\)](#) organised the second edition of a “Moot Court” related to the [European Social Charter](#). This bilingual (French-English) competition is based on a fictitious collective complaint and includes a written phase and an oral phase (a simulated « hearing » before the [European Committee of Social Rights](#)).

The final phase took place on **31 March 2022**, at the **University of Ferrara (Italy)**.



23 March 2023: The Council of Europe project on “Enhanced social protection in Ukraine” was launched during [an event with high-level participation](#). The Project covers the period of 1 January 2023 – 31 December 2024 within the framework of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine “Resiliency, Recovery and Reconstruction” for 2023-2026. Its aim is that people from

vulnerable groups, including war-affected population in Ukraine, enjoy improved levels of social rights and social protection.



22 March 2023: The European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR) published its [Conclusions 2022](#) in respect of 33 States on the articles of the European Social Charter relating to **Labour Rights**.

In the framework of the [reporting procedure](#), the ECSR adopted 611 conclusions: 255 conclusions of conformity with the Charter and 245 conclusions of non-conformity. In 111 cases, the ECSR was unable to assess the situation due to insufficient information (“deferrals”). For more information about the conclusions please read the [Press article](#).

8 March 2023 : The President of [European Committee of Social Rights](#), Aoife Nolan, issued a [statement](#) on the occasion of the International Women’s day, underlining the fact that the European Social Charter makes clear that women must enjoy their rights on an equal basis to men in all contexts, including employment, social protection, housing and health and that it is crucial that States Parties to the Charter place women’s full and equal enjoyment of all [European Social Charter](#) rights front and center in their law and policy-making.

Police, Detention, Drugs and Addictions

Participation of the Pompidou Group in the 66th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (**Vienna, Austria**, 13-17 March 2023): As every year, the Pompidou Group participated in the high-level session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND), the UN's primary policy-making body on drug-related matters. On 13 March, Alfredo Mantovano, Under Secretary to the Presidency of the Council of Ministers of Italy, delivered a statement in the plenary session on behalf of the Group’s Italian Presidency, focusing on its priorities for the next three years.

In addition, the Pompidou Group organised one side event on “Children whose parents use drugs” and co-sponsored a record number of eleven other side events, on different priority topics such as ‘Assessment of drug policies in the light of human rights’, ‘The right to recovery: an approach for a true care path for the reintegration of persons addicted to substances’, ‘Building professional competences for drug policy implementation and management’, ‘Approaches to Actively Reduce Stigma - Sharing Experiences’, ‘A Gender-sensitive Drug Policy, What Does It Entail?’ and ‘The role of research in the development and implementation of drug policies’. Finally, the Pompidou Group also held an information stand during the whole week, which strongly contributed to its visibility. [Active participation of the Pompidou Group in the 66th Session of the Commission on Narcotic Drugs \(CND\) \(Vienna, 13-17 March 2023\) - Pompidou Group \(coe.int\)](#)

The second edition of the Drug Policy Executive Course (7-10 March 2023, **Florence, Italy**) organised within the Pompidou Group's International Drug Policy Academy brought together participants from 21 countries. The Module focused on developing competences in the area of drug and addiction related sciences.

Co-operation in Police and Deprivation of Liberty Unit (CPDL):

In **Armenia**, two new projects – “Strengthening the Protection of the Rights of Persons in Detention” and “Strengthening the Probation Service” – held their first and joint Steering Committee Meeting on 15 March, which marked their official launch.

During a training session on 1-2 March, 23 specialists from all 17 prisons of the **Republic of Moldova** updated the skills needed for implementing the new Policy and Standard Operating Procedures on treatment of vulnerable groups of detainees, including measures of identifying such detainees, providing them with protection and treatment appropriate to the needs and risks, thereby contributing to a safer prison environment. On 20-22 March, the governors of all prisons of **Moldova** enhanced their knowledge and skills in leadership and management by exploring practical ways to effectively implement international standards and ensure safe, secure and humane custody in their respective institution.

On 28 February, a draft Strategy and its Action Plan for attracting more medical personnel in the prison system in **Romania**, developed over eight months, was agreed and presented to the main stakeholders. Once finalised, it will be submitted to the relevant authorities for adoption and implementation. Furthermore, on 2 and 3 March, 14 medical personnel from the **Romanian** prison service have been trained to be trainers for their peers on the standards of medical ethics. The topics included, among other, medical examination and care provided to inmates upon admission, standards of consultation, screening of injuries and documentation of ill-treatment, with a special attention given to ethical treatment of vulnerable groups.

Human Rights, Justice and Legal Co-operation Standard-Setting activities

Human Rights Intergovernmental Co-operation: The CDDH drafting group on human rights in situations of crisis ([CDDH-SCR](#)), at its [3rd meeting](#) (8-10 March) held an [exchange of views](#) with independent and national experts on human rights impact assessments, and continued working on a draft Committee of Ministers' Toolkit for human rights impact assessment of the measures taken by the State in situations of crisis.

The CDDH ad hoc negotiation group “[46+1](#)” on EU accession to the ECHR held its [18th meeting](#) on 14-17 March. It concluded that it had resolved all of the issues that it was expected to address and noted the EU's intention to resolve internally the outstanding issue relating to the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy. On this basis, it adopted its [report](#) to the CDDH.



The [Access Info Group](#) established under the Convention on access to official documents ([Tromsø Convention](#)) held its [2nd meeting](#) on 22-24 March. It continued preparation of its baseline evaluation report on the first 11 Parties' implementation of the convention and agreed on a provisional timetable for its future activities.

Legal Co-operation: The Committee of Experts on the Protection of Lawyers (CJ-AV), at its [4th meeting](#) (1-3 March), continued examining the draft provisions of the future convention and exchanging on possible options for its implementation and follow-up mechanism; discussions will continue from 3 to 5 July.

The CDCJ working group on migration (CDCJ-MIG) finalised the draft guide for practitioners on administrative detention of migrants and asylum seekers, which should be examined and adopted by the CDCJ at its 100th meeting in May.

The CCJE and CCPE experts have started work on thematic studies, respectively, on lessons learnt as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and how they changed the administration of justice, and on digitalisation in the work of the prosecution services and international co-operation.

Information Society – Action against crime Directorate

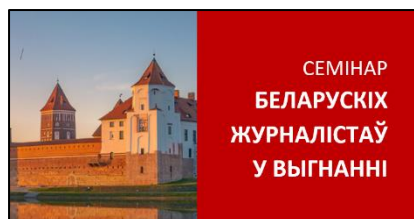
Media



The up-coming [Council of Europe Campaign for the Safety of Journalists](#) was presented to the Partners of the Safety of Journalists Platform in **Brussels**. Avenues for cooperation under the Campaign were also discussed with the European Commission. The [MSI-INF meeting](#) assessed progress on an Information note on combating online disinformation.

Artemiza-Tatiana Chisca, Head of the Media and Internet Division, represented the Council of Europe at the OSCE meeting on Media Freedom as a Central Pillar of Comprehensive Security.

Cooperation on Freedom of Expression



Some 30 [Belarus journalists in exile](#) met in Strasbourg at a workshop organised by the Council of Europe and the Group of Friends on the Safety of Journalists and Media. A thematic workshop on freedom of expression, pluralistic media and access to information was organised with **MENA region** participants in Lisbon, as part of the [launching event of the South V Programme](#). The closure event of the four years

project [PAII-T](#) (Support Program for Independent Bodies in **Tunisia**) highlighted its key achievements. Consultations with six beneficiaries in **Western Balkans** have been organised to discuss the implementation of the action plan HFIII PROFREX. In **North Macedonia**, following the JUFREX 2's intervention, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs initiated a procedure for the ratification of the [Tromsø Convention](#) on Access to Official Documents.

Artificial Intelligence



Kristian Bartholin, Secretary to the Committee on Artificial Intelligence (CAI), met with the **Slovenian** Minister of Digital Transformation, Dr Emilija Stojmenova Duh, in Ljubljana to discuss the future Convention on AI and a test run of the methodology for risk and impact assessment of AI systems (HUDERIA). [CAI Bureau](#) held its meeting in **Paris**. CAI Secretariat participated in the Conference "The future is Digital: Getting up to Speed for the Digital World"

at the College of Europe and held meetings in **Brussels** with representatives of EU Commission, NATO and the U.S. Department of Justice to discuss the future Convention on AI and coordination on AI/human rights/humanitarian law and rule of law-related issues. Patrick Penninckx, Head of the Information Society Department, presented the Council of Europe work on Artificial Intelligence at the OECD's [Global Forum on Digital Security and Prosperity](#) and in the **Dutch** Parliament. He also addressed the PACE Committee on Culture,

Science, Education and Media in Paris, presenting the [Metaverse's impact](#) on human rights, democracy and the rule of law. A [brochure on Council of Europe work on Artificial Intelligence](#) has been published in 5 languages.

Data Protection



March finished with another [ratification of Convention 108+, and by the host country, France](#) on 27 March. The [T-PD Bureau held its 58th meeting](#) in Paris from 22 to 24 March. The Data Protection Unit intervened in a panel on both EU and Council of Europe data protection frameworks i.e. the GDPR and Convention 108+, by the Delegation of French Bar Associations on 10 March in **Lyon**, and on 14 March. On the occasion of the official opening of an office in the European Parliament premises in Strasbourg, the European Data Protection Supervisor reaffirmed his strong support to the European countries in their ratification process of Convention 108+. As regard the PAII-T cooperation programme, a [training in Tunis](#) on privacy and data protection gathered some 90 Tunisian journalists and media professionals on 2, 3 and 3 March, and some 30 professionals involved in the fight against human trafficking and the care of victims to personal data protection, on 8 March. Furthermore, Convention 108+ was presented to representatives of **MENA countries** during a workshop held in the framework of the [launch of the South V programme](#) in **Lisbon**, on 13 and 14 March with the objective of fostering future accession.

Cybercrime



[International Conference on cybercrime and e-evidence in Africa](#), held in Bouznika, **Morocco**, on 6 and 7 March 2023 was jointly organised by the Council of Europe and the Ministry of Justice of Morocco. More than 200 participants from 34 countries, including representatives of academia, private sector and international organisations attended. Topics such as emerging cybercrime threats and trends in Africa and ways to address them through capacity building activities and international cooperation were discussed during the conference. The conference concluded with a "[Bouznika Call to Action](#)" encouraging African countries and all stakeholders to make use of existing treaties, such as the [Budapest Convention](#), and to carry out other actions dedicated to the implementation of relevant treaties. As in previous months, the Cybercrime Programme Office ([C-PROC](#)) supported capacity building activities in all regions of the world.

GRECO

During its 93rd [Plenary Meeting](#) on 20-24 March 2023, GRECO adopted 2 evaluation reports relating to the 5th evaluation round (**Azerbaijan** and **Portugal**) and 9 compliance reports relating to the 4th evaluation round (**Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Czech Republic, Denmark, Hungary, Republic of Moldova, Monaco, Poland, and Ukraine**). The 5th evaluation round deals with preventing corruption and promoting integrity in central governments (top executive functions) and law enforcement agencies, while the 4th evaluation round covers prevention of corruption and promotion of integrity in respect of members of parliament, judges and prosecutors. GRECO also published two Evaluation Reports on [Austria](#) and [Bosnia and Herzegovina](#), two Compliance Reports on [Albania](#) and [Germany](#) and the Second Compliance Report on [Slovenia](#), all relating to the 5th Evaluation Round. Moreover, GRECO published two reports relating to the 4th Round: the Interim Compliance Report on [Ukraine](#) and the Second Compliance Report on [Monaco](#).

Moneyval



MONEYVAL held on-site visits to **Azerbaijan** (1-17 March) and **Montenegro** (6-17 March), including meetings with operational and high-level officials, as well as a meeting with the Prime Minister of Montenegro Mr Dritan Abazović. Face-to-face meetings were held with representatives of **Romania** (7-9 March) and **North Macedonia** (15-17 March) in Strasbourg. The Annual Typologies meeting was held on 31 March in virtual format, involving more than 100 participants from member States and territories, as well as MONEYVAL observers, and focusing on the topic of money laundering with the use of cryptocurrencies. Bureau meetings of MONEYVAL and the Conference of the Parties to the CETS 198 were held.

Economic Crime and Cooperation Division (ECCD)

Trained more than 300 public officials in **Albania** on the use of Electronic System of Assets and Conflict of Interests' Declaration, developed within the Horizontal Facility programme.

Trained representatives of financial and non-financial sectors in **Kazakhstan** on international standards and recent developments regarding identification of beneficial ownership of legal entities.

Provided advice and recommendations to the Assembly of **Kosovo*** on the development of the legislative framework on virtual assets and virtual assets service providers in view of its alignment with international standards and good practices in the anti-money laundering/countering financing of terrorism (AML/CFT) area.

Conducted a set of peer-to peer mentoring activities for the Financial Intelligence Unit and the Central Bank of **Kosovo*** aimed at enhancing operational capacities to carry out AML/CFT risk-based supervision.

Organised a Conference on "Preventing Abuse of Virtual Assets Service Providers for Evasion of EU Sanctions" and a workshop on "Role of VASPs, banks and legal professionals in the effective implementation of EU Sanctions – suspicious transactions reporting and risk mitigation practices" in **Malta**. The two events brought together more than 300 representatives of **twenty-two EU member States** and private sector entities across the EU.

Organised two workshops for **Polish** competent authorities involved in the Money Laundering and Terrorist Financing (ML/TF) National Risk Assessment (NRA) process. The workshops provided an opportunity to discuss findings and provide advice to further improve the ML/TF NRA Methodology of Poland, including the data sources used for informing the NRA, as well as the data collection and analysis process.

Held a workshop for representatives of **Slovak, Polish** and **Ukrainian** authorities focusing on the effective assessment and mitigation of money laundering and terrorism financing risks related to organised crime and cross-border threats, based on previously produced guidelines on risk assessments in these areas.

* This designation is without prejudice to positions on status, and is in line with UNSCR 1244 and the ICJ Opinion on the Kosovo Declaration of Independence

Criminal Law

The PC-CP WG held its 31st meeting in Strasbourg on 7-9 February 2023. The participants considered further the draft CM Recommendation on the Ethical and Organisational Aspects of the Use of AI by the Prison and Probation services as well as the first scoping paper on a future CM Recommendation on the Management of Mental Disorders and the Promotion of Positive Mental Health by the Prison and Probation Services. Penal Reform International presented their Europe wide comparative study on non-custodial sentences and outcomes of several European projects run by them.

The scientific experts and the PC-CP Chair met on 23 February 2023 in Strasbourg to redraft the CM Recommendation on the Ethical and Organisational Aspects of the Use of AI by the Prison and Probation Services in preparation of the 32nd meeting of the PC-CP WG (3-5 April 2023).

MEDICRIME, Trafficking in Human Organs and Cultural property

The [MEDICRIME Convention](#) was introduced to: a) customs authorities during different online training sessions organised by the World Customs Organisation (7 February in English; 9 February in French; 14 February in Spanish); b) central authorities from the South Mediterranean countries in the framework of the launching of a course on *international cooperation in criminal matters* within the [South Programme](#). According to the statistics on HELP self-learning courses, training on *Pharmaceutical crime and MEDICRIME* remains the best tool for promoting and disseminating the MEDICRIME Convention among the key actors combating the counterfeiting of medical products and other similar crimes involving threats to public health. The Committee of the Parties to the Santiago de Compostela Convention adopted its Rules of Procedure (24 February 2023). The information document of the [Nicosia convention](#) has been published in English, French and Spanish.

Counter-terrorism

At the beginning of February, the Committee of Ministers adopted the new [Council of Europe Counter-Terrorism Strategy for 2023–2027](#). The Strategy envisages the implementation of 24 actions targeted at strengthening preventive, repressive and protection capacities of national authorities through the development of a set of binding and non-binding legal standards, analytical reports, and model tools. In line with the findings of the [2022 Report on Emerging Terrorist Threats in Europe](#), these actions will look to address new challenges for counter-terrorism professionals, including the rise of the violent far-right and intersection of terrorism and the violation of the rules of armed conflict, while continuing to ensure sufficient attention to activities inspired or led by ISIL (Daesh), Al Qaeda, and affiliate groups.

The Council of Europe Committee on Counter-Terrorism (CDCT) organised a Digital Conference on "[Countering Terrorist Communications: Terrorist Propaganda, Public Provocation, Recruitment and Radicalisation](#)", on 31 January to 1 February 2023. The Digital Conference focused on ways to monitor and counter activity by terrorist groups online and offline, particularly efforts by terrorist groups to recruit and gain support among their targeted constituencies, as well as those aimed at providing the means and the know-how to carry out terrorist attacks.

On 21 February 2023, the Council of Europe Network for Victims of Terrorism held its 5th meeting in-person in Paris. This meeting provided an opportunity to foster relations between all Contact Points and international and regional organisations, explore national structures in this field through thematic presentations and to review its functioning and areas for development.

The 5th meeting of the Council of Europe 24/7 Network of Contact Points on Foreign Terrorist Fighters was held on 22 February 2023 in-person in Paris. The meeting aimed to establish relations between existing and new Contact Points and relevant international and regional organisations and examined its means of operating following the postponement of its meetings since 2019.



European Audiovisual Observatory

March 2023 Wrap up: <https://t.co/6n1L1dYIQJ>