

# Committee of Ministers

*The texts adopted by the Committee of Ministers in 2018 can be consulted at: [www.coe.int/cm](http://www.coe.int/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 2019, the Committee of Ministers was chaired by Finland until 17 May, then by France until 27 November and thereafter by Georgia.**

**T**he year was marked by the 70th anniversary of the Council of Europe, celebrated on 5 May 2019, and commemorated by a solemn celebration in the presence of the President of the French Republic on 1 October. A re-enactment of the first Committee of Ministers meeting also took place in the Strasbourg City Hall.

■ The 129th Ministerial Session was held in Helsinki (Finland) on 16 and 17 May 2019, when the Committee reaffirmed the importance of the Organisation as a unique pan-European platform for dialogue and co-operation. It also enabled the Committee to take important decisions for the future of the Organisation with a view to ensuring respect for rights and obligations, principles, standards and values of the Council of Europe by all member states.

■ The Committee of Ministers reiterated its firm commitment to the **European Convention on Human Rights** (ETS No. 5, the Convention) and its unique system for the protection of human rights in Europe. It welcomed the positive results achieved since 2010, while noting with concern that the Convention system continues to face significant challenges, notably linked to serious or widespread violations, to systemic and structural problems of human rights in states parties and to the situation in unresolved conflict zones. The Ministers examined measures to secure the long-term effectiveness of the European Convention on Human Rights system.

■ In Helsinki, the Committee of Ministers also reaffirmed the importance of social rights across the continent and decided on measures with a view to strengthening the protection of human rights defenders and enhancing co-operation between civil society and the Council of Europe. It called for augmenting the Council of Europe's achievements by addressing major challenges (artificial intelligence, human trafficking, freedom of expression, inequality and discrimination, migration, social rights, combating violence against women and domestic violence), setting strategic objectives to meet the challenges ahead, ensuring the sustainability of the Organisation and continuing the ongoing structural and administrative reforms.

■ The Ministers held two informal working sessions entitled "Current challenges to the future of the Council of Europe" and "Fighting inequalities and protecting social rights in Europe".

■ Finally, the Committee of Ministers examined the Council of Europe's policy towards neighbouring regions and co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Union.

Address by Pedro Sánchez,  
Spanish Prime Minister, at a  
Committee of Ministers meeting  
(Strasbourg, 7 February 2019)



During its four specific human rights meetings devoted to the supervision of the execution of the judgments and decisions delivered by the European Court of Human Rights (the Court) in 2019, the Committee of Ministers closed its supervision of 2 048 cases, thus leaving 5 245 cases pending at the end of the year (compared to 6 152 cases the previous year). It also held a thematic debate on member states' obligation to investigate violations of Article 2 (Right to life) and Article 3 (Prohibition of torture and inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment) of the European Convention on Human Rights by law-enforcement officials.

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. It also made decisions regarding the selection and election process of judges of the European Court of Human Rights.

Important developments took place in other priority areas in 2019. The Committee of Ministers held two exchanges of views on the **European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT)**, which provided an opportunity to take stock of any good practices and encourage, as necessary, any further action that may be needed to achieve close dialogue and co-operation between the CPT and national authorities.

Regarding **social rights**, the Committee adopted a series of decisions mainly concerning possible reforms of the monitoring mechanisms of the European Social Charter (ETS No. 163).

In the field of **minority rights**, the monitoring mechanism of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (ETS No. 157) was significantly reformed by Committee of Ministers Resolution CM/Res(2019)49 on the revised monitoring arrangements under Articles 24 to 26 of the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

The Committee of Ministers adopted two declarations in **the field of media and the information society** on the manipulative capabilities of algorithmic processes and on the financial sustainability of quality journalism in the digital age, respectively. The Committee also adopted terms of reference for an **Ad hoc Committee on Artificial Intelligence (CAHAI)**, the first task of which will be to complete a feasibility study and produce the potential elements, on the basis of broad multi-stakeholder consultations, of a legal framework for the development, design and application of artificial intelligence, based on the Council of Europe's standards.

In the legal field, the Committee adopted the **Guidelines on electronic evidence in civil and administrative proceedings** and expressed its support to the **European Ethical Charter on the use of artificial intelligence in judicial systems and their environment** adopted by the European Commission for the Efficiency of Justice (CEPEJ).

The Committee of Ministers invited several non-member states to accede to conventions (on cybercrime (ETS No. 185) and mutual assistance in criminal matters, ETS No. 30) thereby underlining their potential global outreach.

**The 129th Session of the Committee of Ministers** – Commemorative ceremony for the 70th anniversary of the Council of Europe – **Thorbjørn Jagland**, Secretary General of the Council of Europe (Helsinki, 16 May 2019)



■ Promoting and protecting the rights of the more vulnerable members of our societies remain a high priority for the Committee of Ministers, which *inter alia*, expressed its concern about the very high rates of child poverty in Europe and the growing inequalities that particularly affect children, by adopting a **Declaration on addressing child poverty**. It also took note of the final report of the Thematic Action Plan on the Inclusion of **Roma and Travellers**<sup>1</sup> (2016-2019) with a view to approving a new Strategic Action Plan for Roma and Traveller Inclusion (2020-2025) early in 2020.

■ Throughout the year, the Committee of Ministers reaffirmed its unequivocal opposition to the **death penalty**, including any reintroduction of it, in all places and in all circumstances. It reiterated the objective to create a death-penalty-free zone in Europe. The Committee deeply regretted that executions continued to be carried out in Japan and the United States, two observer states to the Council of Europe. It reiterated its call for Belarus to establish a moratorium on executions as a first step towards the abolition of the death penalty.

1. The term “Roma and Travellers” is used at the Council of Europe to encompass the wide diversity of the groups covered by the work of the Council of Europe in this field: on the one hand a) Roma, Sinti/Manush, Calé, Kaale, Romanichals, Boyash/Rudari; b) Balkan Egyptians (Egyptians and Ashkali); c) Eastern groups (Dom, Lom and Abdal); and, on the other hand, groups such as Travellers, Yenish, and the populations designated under the administrative term “Gens du voyage”, as well as persons who identify themselves as Gypsies. The present is an explanatory footnote, not a definition of Roma and/or Travellers.

■ In May, the Committee endorsed the **Principles on the protection and promotion of the Ombudsman Institution** elaborated by the European Commission for Democracy through Law (**Venice Commission**). It also held an informal meeting on the contribution of **national human rights institutions and ombudspersons** to human rights and the rule of law.

■ Two other informal meetings were held on topical human rights issues: discrimination against LGBTI persons in Europe and **cyberviolence against women and girls**.

■ The situation in several member states was regularly discussed in the Committee of Ministers including co-operation activities aimed to accompany individual countries in their efforts to bring legislation, institutions and practice further into line with European standards in the areas of human rights, the rule of law and democracy. In this respect, it adopted a new Council of Europe Action Plan for Armenia covering the period from 2019 to 2022, which aims to help the country meet its obligations as a member state of the Council of Europe. The Committee also took note of a report on the state of implementation of the commitments entered into by **Armenia** (July 2015–December 2017) and agreed to proceed with monitoring through a regular review of the state of co-operation with that country, with a view to following the implementation of its outstanding commitments.





**The 129th Session  
of the Committee of  
Ministers in Finland**  
(Helsinki, 17 May 2019)

■ The Committee of Ministers held an exchange of views with Mrs Ivanna Klympush-Tsintsadze, Deputy Prime Minister for European and Euro-Atlantic Integration of **Ukraine**, on co-operation with the Council of Europe, including on the Action Plan 2018-2021 and the situation in Ukraine.

■ In May and November, the Committee held discussions respectively on the Secretary General's 19th and 20th consolidated reports on the conflict in **Georgia**. In May it adopted a series of decisions on this subject. It notably reiterated the unequivocal support of the Council of Europe member states for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Georgia within its internationally recognised borders. In November, the Committee approved an action plan designed to provide assistance to **Georgia** for the period from 2020 to 2023.

■ In 2019, the Committee of Ministers took note of a report on the Council of Europe's co-operation activities in **Kosovo**<sup>2</sup> and instructed the Secretariat to continue implementing them.

2. All reference to Kosovo, whether to 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.

■ In 2019, co-operation with other international bodies remained high on the agenda of the Committee. At the Ministerial Session in May, it took note with satisfaction of the developments in the co-operation between the Council of Europe and the **European Union**. In July, the Deputies granted the European Union observer status with the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO).

■ Regarding the **Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE)**, the co-ordination group between the two organisations held two meetings in 2019 to review co-operation. The Committee also held an exchange of views with Mr Miroslav Lajčák, Minister for Foreign and European Affairs of the Slovak Republic and Chairman-in-Office of the OSCE. In February, an exchange of views on co-operation with the **United Nations** on human rights questions was held with the participation of external experts.

■ As regards relations with non-member states, the Committee of Ministers approved a new action plan to provide assistance to Belarus for the period from 2019 to 2021.

Transfer of the Presidency of the Committee of Ministers between France and Georgia, meeting between France and Georgia, Committee of Ministers (Strasbourg, 27 November 2019)



■ Regarding the policy towards neighbouring regions, the Committee took note of the final report on the implementation of the Council of Europe Neighbourhood Co-operation Priorities for the **Kyrgyz Republic** and invited the Secretariat to continue the discussions with the authorities of the Kyrgyz Republic with regard to the preparation of a new co-operation document. The Committee also took note of the final report on the implementation of the Neighbourhood Co-operation Priorities with **Palestine**<sup>3</sup> (2016-2018) and invited the Secretariat to maintain contact with the authorities of Palestine with a view to preparing, in due course, a new co-operation document.

■ In March, the Committee of Ministers decided to submit to the Parliamentary Assembly the candidatures of Ms Marija Pejčinović Burić (Croatia) and Mr Didier Reynders (Belgium), in alphabetic order, for appointment to the post of Secretary General of the Council of Europe. In June, Ms Pejčinović Burić, was elected by the Parliamentary Assembly, succeeding Mr Jagland.

3. 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.

■ During the year, significant work was undertaken to strengthen the Council of Europe through improved consultation and co-operation between the two statutory organs in full respect of their respective mandates to allow for the possibility of joint action by the two statutory bodies in response to situations where member states seriously violate its Statute (ETS No. 1).

■ In November, the Committee of Ministers approved the Council of Europe's Programme and Budget 2020-2021, which reflects a move to zero real growth after six years of no adjustments for inflation (zero nominal growth). It also adopted a comprehensive reform programme for the coming year. Furthermore, the Committee of Ministers invited the Secretary General, in consultation with member states, to consider and prepare a four-year strategic framework reflecting the priorities for the Council of Europe's long-term mission.





Transfer of the Presidency of the Committee of Ministers from Finland to France – **Amélie de Montchalin**, Secretary of State for European Affairs of France and **Timo Soini**, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Finland (Helsinki, 17 May 2019)



Transfer of the Presidency of the Committee of Ministers between France and Georgia – **David Zalkaliani**, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Georgia and **Amélie de Montchalin**, France's Secretary of State for European Affairs (Strasbourg, 27 November 2019)