

Information Documents

SG/Inf(2022)5

29 March 2022

Enhancing the co-ordination, effectiveness and impact of monitoring mechanisms – Secretary General’s report and proposals

Introduction

Improving the relevance of the Council of Europe and the impact of the Organisation’s activities through enhanced co-ordination is a longstanding key objective of the Organisation’s reform. A critical part of the Council of Europe’s activities is carried out by its monitoring mechanisms set up by specific treaties or Committee of Ministers’ resolutions. Their work has proven to be crucial for upholding human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Europe and for advancing reforms in member states.

Against this background, the Secretary General held, on 25 October 2021, the 9th meeting with the chairs of the monitoring and advisory bodies of the Council of Europe. This meeting followed the 131st session of the Committee of Ministers held in May 2021, which expressed its appreciation for the Strategic Framework of the Council of Europe prepared by the Secretary General ([CM/Del/Dec \(2021\)131/2a](#)) and invited her to submit relevant proposals for approval by its Deputies and to regularly report on its implementation. In their decisions, the Ministers also endorsed the conclusions of the “Report on the Council of Europe monitoring – strengthening cohesion and synergies” ([CM\(2021\)50-final](#)) focusing on the monitoring and advisory bodies’ rapid reaction capacity, follow-up procedures, reporting, joint visits and co-operation with other international organisations. The Ministers invited the Secretary General to continue her regular dialogue with the chairs of the monitoring bodies with a view to strengthening synergies and co-ordination and to report back in time for the Ministerial Session in May 2022.

The present report, prepared in response to the Committee of Ministers’ invitation, sets out the positive experiences and practices put in place by the monitoring and advisory bodies of the Council of Europe, as well as practical steps to further optimise their work.

1. Co-ordination and synergies

The enhanced co-ordination and optimal synergies between monitoring mechanisms remains an important factor in continuously improving the Organisation's effectiveness and impact.

From a practical perspective, the sharing of information and best practices in certain types of monitoring activity, has been a constant feature of this co-ordination. Practical steps have been taken in this direction comprising systematic sharing of information at Secretariat level, increased cross references and joint actions, including joint visits of different monitoring mechanisms. Monitoring mechanisms have frequently closely followed the European Court's caselaw which, in turn, in the process of "cross-fertilisation", has found useful sources of information in the monitoring reports for its decisions. The process of "cross-fertilisation" and "cross-referencing" is also visible in the interactions between various monitoring mechanisms, such as those between the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) and the Consultative Council of European Judges (CCJE), between the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO) and the Committee of Experts on the Evaluation of Anti-Money Laundering Measures and the Financing of Terrorism (MONEYVAL), or between the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) and the Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees and the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO), which take into account each other's findings and recommendations.

Moreover, the interaction between monitoring mechanisms and intergovernmental committees has constantly grown. The European Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) interaction with the Council of Europe Conference of Directors of Prisons and Probation Services and the Commissioner for Human Rights illustrates this co-ordination potential. Similarly, GREVIO strengthened its ties with the Gender Equality Commission (GEC) and the Commissioner for Human Rights, garnering support and visibility for its work, in particular in relation to the digital dimension of violence against women. The enhanced co-operation between the Committee of Experts under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the Advisory Committee under the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities (FCNM), including the setting up of a joint division – the Division for minority rights and minority languages within the Directorate General of Democracy (DGII) – is an important, positive development.

Co-ordination and synergies are also strengthened further with external partners and other international organisations. Among these, links with the EU, the UN and OSCE are of particular interest. For instance, designated contact persons were nominated to facilitate exchanges between the Lanzarote Committee and the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (decision no. 25, 34th meeting, 4-7 October 2021). The co-ordination with the UN Special Rapporteur on the sale and sexual exploitation of children has further been intensified. The CPT has maintained close co-ordination with the European Commission and FRONTEX. Collaboration with other organisations is also pursued, such as collaboration with the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) in developing standards and monitoring in sport or membership of MONEYVAL in the Financial Action Task Force (FATF). GRECO carried out annual co-ordination meetings with the monitoring mechanisms under the UN, the OECD and the Organization of American States (OAS) anti-corruption conventions, and undertook a joint visit with the OECD's Working Group on Bribery. The Platform of Independent Expert Mechanisms on Discrimination and Violence against Women ([EDVAW Platform](#)) gathers seven United Nations and regional independent expert mechanisms on violence against women and women's rights. It aims to strengthen institutional links and thematic co-operation with a view to improving the implementation of international norms on combating violence against women and discrimination. The EDVAW is currently chaired by GREVIO.

These practical steps of co-ordination and synergy will continue and intensify, and will be further supported by efforts aimed at reducing the burden on member states' authorities, avoiding duplications, and increasing the number of countries – including non-member states whenever advisable – joining various Council of Europe conventions.

2. Stronger impact through increased visibility

Increased visibility of the monitoring results strengthens the impact of the Council of Europe and nurtures its relevance. To this end, a better use of modern technology will facilitate raising awareness and publication of monitoring results. The use of social media is particularly helpful as it can reach a significant audience. In this context, a major reform of the use of social media at the Council of Europe is ongoing with a view to developing a transversal, topic driven social media architecture to increase visibility, prevent duplication and maximise impact, as well as to draw up clear and enforceable rules related to their use within the Organisation.

Other practical steps already implemented to increase the monitoring process and the visibility of its results include:

- increased participation of chairpersons and other expert members of monitoring bodies in various meetings and conferences with a view to flagging the monitoring results and relevant standards, including via online conferencing;
- outreach to the general public via targeted media campaigns, statements and – most importantly – by expanding the languages and availability of visibility materials (leaflets, toolkits, sourcebooks, online HELP courses, country or thematic profile sheets);
- making use of modern technology and qualitative data analysis to make monitoring results more accessible through user-friendly databases and platforms (HUDOC databases are presently operational for the CPT, European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI), European Social Charter (ESC), FCNM, GRECO, GRETA and GREVIO; an online database of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages – CELMI – is also available and proposals to include it in the HUDOC database are under consideration).

Reflection on how to further improve visibility is ongoing. For instance, the CPT has recently set up a Working Group on Impact to reflect on how the presentation of its reports can enhance its impact and effectiveness.

However, beyond the individual efforts deployed by the monitoring and advisory bodies, developing a unified platform allowing all of them to publish their findings could be helpful to achieve better visibility of their work, better understanding of the interrelations of their recommendations, and enhanced and more efficient responsiveness from the relevant state authorities. Furthermore, this will facilitate the access of civil society to the work of the Organisation in line with the Helsinki process. This proposal was supported by the chairs of the monitoring and advisory bodies of the Council of Europe at the meeting held on 25 October 2021, highlighting that consideration could be given to creating a monitoring portal on the Council of Europe website that functions as a “one-stop shop” to facilitate access to information on the various bodies’ procedures, activities and findings.

3. Increased efficiency through innovative working methods

The pandemic has prompted monitoring bodies to adapt to the circumstances and embrace innovative working methods. This development demonstrated that new technology can improve both the efficacy and efficiency of their work. Online or hybrid working meetings have prevailed in the pandemic period saving *prima facie* both resources and time. Due to the pandemic, some monitoring committees have not convened in person. On the other hand, experience has shown that online country visits and online plenaries have not contributed to increased efficiency. Physical country visits and face-to-face meetings facilitate trust building and provide an avenue for a meaningful human connection, better mutual understanding and impact. In some cases, such as the CPT, it is not possible to appropriately monitor a place of detention remotely. The possibility of innovation through online or hybrid meetings thus remains subject to the practical feasibility within the context of a given monitoring mechanism.

Innovative working methods remain however helpful in devising monitoring tools such as online questionnaires and national reporting requirements. The cloud and information sharing technologies have also been used to prepare the evaluation visits by the Monitoring Group of the Anti-doping Convention (T-DO). Some monitoring mechanisms embarked on reviewing their working procedures (see, for instance, for the Lanzarote Committee in document [CM\(2021\)50-final](#)). As part of these reflections, the Lanzarote Committee decided for its next monitoring round to allow parties and civil society to respond online to the thematic questionnaire. It is also looking into the possibility of creating country profiles in electronic format, which would allow parties to update the section on their legal framework/policies online. These are good practices which could also be taken on board by other monitoring bodies.

Conclusion

The work of the Council of Europe monitoring mechanisms is highly valued and they are an important part of the Council of Europe *acquis*.

The difficult pandemic period demonstrated clearly that monitoring mechanisms were able to evolve and adapt their working methods and rise to the challenges posed. To this end, constant and concrete efforts have been made to enhance co-ordination between the monitoring mechanisms themselves and with other parts of the Organisation, as well as with other international organisations and external partners. Modern technologies have increasingly been used to boost the efficiency and visibility of the monitoring mechanisms and to facilitate dialogue with the member states and reporting. Good practices in these areas have been highlighted and should be spread across the monitoring bodies.

Whilst these efforts are to be welcomed and will continue¹, the creation of a monitoring portal on the Council of Europe website that functions as a “one-stop shop” to facilitate access to information, activities and results of the monitoring processes of the Organisation and increase their visibility will further facilitate co-ordination and coherence. The concrete details of this portal will be discussed with the chairs of the monitoring and advisory bodies and the relevant departments of the Secretariat in 2022 with a view to its implementation in 2023.

In order to enable the Secretary General to closely follow the developments, report to the Committee of Ministers whenever required, and devise further action, in close co-operation with the Organisation’s monitoring and advisory bodies, the meetings of the Secretary General with their chairs will continue on a regular basis.

¹ An evaluation of the monitoring mechanisms is currently being undertaken by the Directorate of Internal Oversight (DIO). This evaluation will be published in the course of the year. It is being prepared in accordance with DIO’s 2021-2022 work programme, of which the GR-PBA has taken note on 2 February 2021 ([GR-PBA\(2021\)CB1](#)).