

Informal Conference of Ministers of Justice

10 December 2025, Strasbourg, France

Speech by Theodoros Rousopoulos
President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Honorable participants,

Allow me to begin with an image that today feels unthinkable.

In early 18th-century England, the pillory was a wooden device of public punishment, where a person's head and hands were locked between two boards, leaving them exposed for hours to mockery or even violence from the crowd. It was a form of public humiliation and torture of course.

In 1703, Daniel Defoe, the author of *Robinson Crusoe*, was placed in the pillory. He was punished for a satirical pamphlet that ridiculed the fanaticism of his time. And yet the public did not jeer at him; they applauded him. That moment became an early symbol of the struggle for freedom of expression.

Three centuries later, we must ask ourselves what it means when, in Europe today, we hear calls to reconsider Article 3 of the European Convention on Human Rights — the absolute prohibition of torture — and to restrict the application of Article 8 in migration cases.

But the data tell a very different story. The Convention does not obstruct migration policy: only a tiny fraction of human-rights appeals succeed, and only 0,07% of applicants ultimately remain in a country because of the ECHR.

Let me give a random example: Taking the figures from the last 10 years, there has only been 6 judgments concerning expulsion/ immigration against the UK. And in only one of these cases the Court has found a violation.

Is this ONE case enough to change the Convention?

We should recall that at Reykjavík, only two years ago, all 46 Heads of State and Government unanimously reaffirmed the full authority of the Convention.

Yet today some of the same voices call for it to be “reconsidered”.

This is not merely a legal issue; it is a political one.

It is also worth noting that the European Union and the United Nations often apply stricter standards than the ECHR, especially on procedural safeguards and protection from ill-treatment.

The Convention is therefore not a maximum constraint but Europe’s minimum common standard. And Protocol No. 15 has already strengthened national courts by embedding subsidiarity and the margin of appreciation into the Preamble — clear evidence that the system adapts to States’ concerns — without weakening fundamental rights.

I am not opposed to any discussion about the future of our system.

But such a discussion must not be driven by political spectacle, by populism, or by the pursuit of short-term gains. It requires calm reflection, depth, and intellectual honesty.

In this spirit, I welcome the Secretary General's initiative to bring us together today.

This is the right place, and the right way, to engage in a thoughtful conversation about the Convention and our shared responsibilities. A conversation rooted not in fear, but in our commitment to the values that have defined Europe for 75 years.

I 've started with History, I 'll end my speech with literature Bertolt Brecht in his famous poem about Mr. Keuner writes: They asked once Mr. Keuner what Is he doing now, and he replied I am planning my next big mistake...

Let us not do the same!

Thank you.