

## 134<sup>th</sup> Session of the Committee of Ministers (Luxembourg, 13-14 May 2025)

### Co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Union Summary report on co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Union

Document prepared by the Directorate of Political Affairs and External Relations

#### 1. Introduction

On 17 May 2024,<sup>1</sup> the Ministers' Deputies of the Council of Europe (CoE) welcomed the “**new impetus** given by the 4<sup>th</sup> Summit of Heads of State and Government of the CoE in Reykjavík to the strategic partnership with the European Union” (EU). In practice, this impetus has led to a new **intensity of co-operation and political dialogue**, including at the highest level following institutional changes in both organisations. The **dialogue focused on support to Ukraine**, notably through the establishment first and the operationalisation thereafter of the Register of Damage, as well as on ensuring **accountability** for the crimes committed in the context of the war of aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. During the reporting period, the CoE and the EU joined efforts to achieve considerable progress in this field, including on the future establishment of a Claims Commission and the setting-up of a Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine.

The reporting period was, *inter alia*, marked by a **change of leadership** in both organisations.<sup>2</sup> New leaders on both sides have stressed their **commitment to further deepening the strategic partnership** between the CoE and the EU.

The present reporting period, as of May 2024, has remained shaped by **profound challenges**, first and foremost but not exclusively linked to the war of aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and its far-reaching consequences. It was also marked by a continuation of important EU decisions with respect to its enlargement process. The EU confirmed that the CoE's expertise, standard-setting and monitoring role is crucially important in the context of the EU's annual Enlargement Package and the Rule of Law Cycle.

The co-operation has continued to focus on the follow-up of relevant issues covered by the **Reykjavik Declaration** and has further developed through the three pillars of the partnership, namely political dialogue, legal co-operation and programmatic co-operation. The CoE Liaison Office to the EU and the EU Delegation to the CoE continued to play a key role in reinforcing the dynamics of the co-operation and its visibility.

<sup>1</sup>CM/Del/Dec(2024)133/3

<sup>2</sup>Mr Alain Berset was elected Secretary General of the CoE on 25 June 2024, and he assumed his role on 18 September 2024, succeeding Ms Marija Pejčinović Burić. Concerning the EU, the 6-9 June 2024 European elections were the first step in a broader renewal of the leadership of all of the EU's main institutions.

The Conclusions of the EU Council on “**EU Priorities for cooperation with the Council of Europe in 2025-2026**”, adopted on 17 December 2024,<sup>3</sup> maintain, as in the previous Priorities (2023-2024),<sup>4</sup> that the EU is the CoE's main institutional partner in political, financial and legal terms. Whilst reaffirming the qualification of the EU's partnership with the CoE as “strategic”, the most recent Priorities elaborate on this concept by stressing that the EU will aim to further position this partnership as a “key example of effective multilateral co-operation on human rights, democracy and the rule of law, while promoting regional peace, stability and prosperity” in the “current context of continued pressure on the multilateral institutional system”. The broad scope and wealth of topics covered by the EU Priorities showcase the complementarity of the work of the two organisations.

## 2. Political and institutional dialogue

### 2.a *Political dialogue*

The intense political dialogue between the leaders of the CoE and EU continued during the reporting period, notwithstanding the change in the institutional cycle. The dialogue confirmed the strategic nature of their partnership and focused mainly on the concrete follow-up to the Reykjavik Declaration. Personal contacts were established between the respective new CoE and the EU leaderships.

All relevant CoE institutions efficiently contributed to this dialogue. The Secretary General held regular exchanges of views with EU representatives, in particular with then European Commission (EC) Vice-President, Ms Jourová (“Values and Transparency”) on 26 November 2024, with High Representative/Vice President, Ms Kallas and with EU Commissioner, Mr McGrath (“Democracy, Justice, the Rule of Law and Consumer Protection”) on 4 February 2025. The Secretary General held exchanges with the President of the European Council, Mr Costa.

Then EU Special Representative for the Belgrade-Pristina Dialogue and other Western Balkan regional issues, Mr Lajčák had an exchange of views in Strasbourg with the Committee of Ministers (CM) on 5 June 2024. President of the Venice Commission, Ms Bazy-Malaurie participated in an Interparliamentary Committee meeting on the situation of the Rule of Law in the EU, organised by the Committee on Civil Liberties, Justice and Home Affairs (LIBE) of the European Parliament (EP) on 12 December 2024 in Brussels. Congress President, Mr Cools addressed a high-level debate in the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC) on “Regions shaping the future European Agenda” on 3 December 2024 in Brussels. Deputy Director-General at the EC's Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion Mr Olsson participated in the High-level Conference on Social Rights organised by the Lithuanian Presidency of the CM in July 2024 in Vilnius.

Furthermore, on 18 February 2025, Commissioner for Human Rights, Mr O'Flaherty attended the meeting of the LIBE Committee and the meeting of the Subcommittee on Human Rights (DROI) of the EP in Brussels and held a number of meetings with EU officials.

Former SRSG for Migration and Refugees, Mr Best held a series of meetings with the EU institutions on 30 and 31 May 2024.

Special Envoy of the Secretary General on the situation of children of Ukraine, Ms Gylfadóttir held an initial meeting with EU Commissioner McGrath on 12 February 2025 in Strasbourg in order to initiate close co-operation.

The high-level consultations **mainly addressed the consequences of the war of aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and related issues**, in particular accountability for crimes committed by the Russian Federation. They also focused on the situation in various/different CoE member states, the functioning of the European human rights' protection system, including the EU accession to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), modalities of the EU participation in the CoE Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (“Istanbul Convention”), the CoE Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence (AI), rule of law-related challenges and various risks for democracy, as well as geopolitical challenges facing Europe.

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<sup>3</sup>The full Council conclusions on “EU Priorities for cooperation with the Council of Europe in 2025-2026” can be accessed by clicking [here](https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/01/30/conclusions-on-eu-priorities-for-cooperation-with-the-council-of-europe-2023-2024/).

<sup>4</sup><https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/press/press-releases/2023/01/30/conclusions-on-eu-priorities-for-cooperation-with-the-council-of-europe-2023-2024/>

This dialogue also increasingly addressed the co-operation in the **EU Enlargement and Neighbourhood regions**, as well as **opportunities for extended co-operation** in view of the increased number of candidate countries. Against this background, CoE representatives reiterated that the CoE is **committed to providing full support to the candidate countries and potential candidates** in their accession processes, thereby contributing to compliance with CoE standards. As part of the well-established practice of consultations with the EC on the EU's enlargement process, CoE legal instruments, recommendations and monitoring bodies' findings were offered by the CoE as relevant benchmarks to be taken into account. In implementing the CoE-EU programmatic co-operation, priority is being given to the reforms in the fields of fundamental freedoms being benchmarked in the respective EC Enlargement Reports.

As regards **neighbouring partners East and South**, particular accent was put on the most appropriate ways to fully use the CoE expertise in the domains jointly identified by the beneficiary countries and the EU.

A dialogue has also been initiated at the highest level on an increased CoE-EU co-operation to promote the respect of the rule of law by the EU member States.

## *2.b Institutional dialogue*

The high-level dialogue was accompanied by a **more structured institutional dialogue** with the continued practice of the "**Senior Officials Meeting**" (SOM), held on 21 October 2024 in Strasbourg. The SOM focused on key issues of common interest in the context of the strategic nature of the EU-CoE partnership. The SOM was preceded by the **Scoreboard meeting**, held on 19 June 2024, addressing programmatic co-operation. The institutional dialogue also included the consultation meetings between the EU<sup>5</sup> and the CoE (held on 27 June and 9 December 2024) on legal standards and policies related to criminal matters (see below). These complementary sequences of institutional dialogue gave a more strategic and structured approach to co-operation.

In addition, consultations have multiplied at expert level, both on thematic and country-specific issues. In this context, the CoE and the EC have continued to hold their two **joint annual consultations**, with the CoE contributing to the EC's annual Enlargement Reports and the annual Rule of Law Report. In 2024, for the first time, the Rule of Law Report included four candidate countries (Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia). The already well-established practice of such consultations is a practical recognition by the EU of the benchmarking role of the CoE.

The reporting period was marked by an increased frequency of the participation of CoE representatives in different **preparatory bodies of the Council of the EU** at the invitation of the rotating presidencies. Such practice positively contributes to the quality of exchanges within the EU Council and reflects the strategic nature of the CoE-EU partnership.<sup>6</sup>

CoE representatives were frequent guests at numerous meetings organised by various **Committees of the EP**.<sup>7</sup> This practice contributed to a better understanding of the nature of actions undertaken by the CoE in different areas and contributed to synergies in different policy areas.

Regular exchanges were also held with then EU Special Representative for Human Rights, Mr Skoog and with the Chair of the EU Council Working Party on the OSCE and the CoE ("COSCE"). The situation in different CoE member states and support to Ukraine, as well as to Belarusian civil society and human rights defenders were, *inter alia*, at the core of this dialogue.

The Venice Commission Secretariat provided a professional training for DG JUST staff in September 2024. Similarly, the Secretariat of the Committee on the Prevention of Torture (CPT) participated in a meeting organised by DG NEAR for its staff in Brussels and in EU Delegations in December 2024. This new practice was appreciated by the EC and should be continued as it contributes to a better knowledge of the CoE by EC staff.

A number of PACE rapporteurs have been proactive in engaging with the EU's institutions and agencies on various issues in preparation for their reports. Additionally, the PACE Monitoring Committee has held institutional consultations in the framework of the preparation of country-specific monitoring reports.

<sup>5</sup>Chair of the Coordinating Committee in the areas of police and judicial co-operation in criminal matters (CATS), the EC and the EEAS.

<sup>6</sup>During the reporting period, CoE representatives participated in the meetings of Working Parties on Consular Affairs (COCON), on Fundamental Rights, Citizens' Rights and Free Movement of Persons (FREMP).

<sup>7</sup>For instance participation in the Audiovisual and Media, as well as of the Cultural Affairs Committee.

The Congress participated in an international election observation mission held jointly with the EP and the OSCE/ODIHR to observe the October 2024 local elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Exchanges were also held with the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC). The EESC President participated in the CoE's parallel event, "Empowering the Future: Making the Social Rights of Youth Real", held in the margins of the UN Future Summit Action Days on 20 September 2024 at the United Nations headquarters and delivered a statement at the event "Social rights are human rights: the European Social Charter and the European Pillar of Social Rights", following the Vilnius and La Hulpe Declarations, on 12 December 2024 in Brussels.

The reporting period saw a newly introduced practice of **consultations on administrative matters** between the Secretariat and the EEAS, namely on issues related to local staff and the security of external offices, which were beneficial for both parties.

Co-operation to jointly address **global issues** has also continued. On 10 October 2024, the CoE and EU leaders reiterated their firm opposition to capital punishment, including any reintroduction thereof, in all cases and in all circumstances, through a traditional annual joint statement.

### 3. Legal co-operation

The **shared responsibility** of the CoE and the EU to enhance the **coherence and efficiency** of the European **human rights' protection system** lies at the heart of their value-based strategic partnership.<sup>8</sup> Legal co-operation has covered an ever-larger spectrum of CoE activities, with an increasing focus on support to Ukraine and accountability, on respective standard-setting work, on rule of law-related issues and on outreach efforts. Areas covered by legal co-operation highlighted overarching efforts to develop more sustainable and resilient democracies in Europe and beyond. Regular consultation meetings between the EU<sup>9</sup> and the CoE continued twice a year<sup>10</sup> in order to exchange information and discuss the development of legal standards and policies on issues mostly related to law enforcement and judicial co-operation in criminal matters. Early consultations on respective normative work in the areas of common interest, such as the protection of the environment through criminal law, have remained important.

#### 3.1. Ukraine and accountability

In the context of the follow-up to the Reykjavik Summit and joint efforts to support Ukraine and accountability, the EU has been a strong supporter of the **Register of Damage** caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine ("Register") - an Enlarged Partial Agreement - from its inception. In July 2024, the EU changed its status in the Register from Associate Member to Participant, which was welcomed by the CoE. The change of status is a further testament to the EU's strong support for the Register and its commitment to ensuring that all violations of international law committed by the Russian Federation will be duly compensated. The change of status also contributes to the financial stability of the Register as the EU commits to providing a mandatory annual financial contribution. Through high-level and institutional dialogue, in particular the SOM, CoE and EU representatives committed to continuing their strong support for the Register and agreed on the importance of co-ordinated action to promote outreach in order to extend the Register's membership to non-European states so as to achieve a truly global mechanism.

Furthermore, CoE and EU representatives have regularly held consultations in order to ensure the complementarity of their respective actions on accountability, including continuing to work, in co-operation with Ukraine, towards the establishment of a future international compensation mechanism (of which the work of the Register is intended to constitute an essential first step) and on support for a special tribunal on the crime of aggression, as well as on initiatives regarding the children of Ukraine. Concerning the latter, the CoE welcomed the EU's active participation, through a co-ordinator designated by the EC, in the CoE Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine (CGU) as a direct outcome of the Reykjavik Summit.

<sup>8</sup>In this context, it shall be recalled that the 2007 Memorandum of Understanding provides that the "the EU regards the CoE as the Europe-wide reference source for human rights" and that "the CoE will remain the benchmark for human rights, the rule of law and democracy in Europe".

<sup>9</sup>Chair of the CATS, the EC and the EEAS.

<sup>10</sup>27 June and 9 December 2024.

Following progress reached at the 4<sup>th</sup> preparatory meeting on an international instrument to establish a Claims Commission for Ukraine, which was held from 28 to 30 January 2025 in The Hague, the EC adopted, on 4 February 2025, a Recommendation to the Council to participate, on behalf of the EU, in the formal negotiations<sup>11</sup> of the international instrument setting up an **International Claims Commission for Ukraine**.<sup>12</sup> The establishment of the Claims Commission will be a crucial step towards the compensation of victims of the war of aggression.

Likewise, a major step forward towards creating a **Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine** was reached on 4 February 2025 in Brussels, when the 13<sup>th</sup> meeting of the international Core Group<sup>13</sup> of senior legal experts, with a leading role by Ukraine, the CoE, the EC and the EEAS representatives, had agreed on the legal foundations of the future Special Tribunal, including key elements of its statute. In the press statement that followed the meeting, the CoE Secretary General, High Representative Kallas<sup>14</sup> and Commissioner McGrath,<sup>15</sup> together with the Deputy Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine, Iryna Mudra, welcomed a major step towards holding the Russian Federation accountable for its war of aggression against Ukraine, acknowledging the central role of the CoE in the future formal adoption process.

### 3.2. EU participation in or accession to CoE instruments

The CM, at its 2024 Ministerial Session, *inter alia*, “further encouraged EU participation in or accession to CoE conventions and bodies, as appropriate, as a way of achieving coherence and complementarity and promoting synergies; and recalled in this respect that appropriate voting arrangements must be found in the responsible treaty bodies”.<sup>16</sup>

#### i. EU accession to the ECHR

On 17 May 2024, the CM “took note with satisfaction of the revised draft instruments for the accession of the European Union to the European Convention on Human Rights, as unanimously provisionally agreed; noted the European Union’s intention to resolve the outstanding issue relating to acts in the area of the Common Foreign and Security Policy internally; reiterated the commitment to the timely adoption of the revised accession instruments; and recalled that accession of the EU to the European Convention on Human Rights is of central importance for the coherence of the European human rights protection system”.<sup>17</sup>

At the meeting of the Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH) in November 2024, the EC confirmed its strong commitment to the process of EU accession to the ECHR and stated that, in the light of recent judgments of the Court of Justice of the EU (CJEU) relevant to the outstanding issue, it was now minded to refer the revised draft accession agreement to the CJEU for opinion, subject to the decision of the then-incoming College of Commissioners.<sup>18</sup> The EU’s accession to the ECHR remains a strategic goal for both the EU and the CoE. Both organisations continue to follow the issue, including at the highest level.<sup>19</sup>

<sup>11</sup>The first round of negotiations for the international instrument will start on 24 March 2025.

<sup>12</sup>The International Claims Commission for Ukraine will review, assess and decide on eligible claims recorded in the Register and determine the compensation due in each case.

<sup>13</sup>Created in 2023, the Core Group on the Establishment of a Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine is a group of senior legal experts from around 40 states who have been working with the Ukrainian authorities, the EC, the EEAS and the CoE to seek justice for Ukraine in the face of the Russian Federation’s aggression.

<sup>14</sup>[https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/ukraine/commission-and-high-representative-kaja-kallas-welcome-major-step-towards-holding-russia-accountable\\_en?s=232](https://www.eeas.europa.eu/delegations/ukraine/commission-and-high-representative-kaja-kallas-welcome-major-step-towards-holding-russia-accountable_en?s=232)

<sup>15</sup>[https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip\\_25\\_398](https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_25_398)

<sup>16</sup>CM/Del/Dec (2024)133/3.

<sup>17</sup>CM/Del/Dec(2024)133/3.

<sup>18</sup>CDDH(2024)R101.

<sup>19</sup>Cf also the Council conclusions on “EU priorities for cooperation with the Council of Europe in 2025-2026”, where it states that the EU “remains determined to accede to the Convention and looks forward to further advancing this important goal, enshrined in Article 6(2)TEU”.

## ii. Others instruments

Close co-operation has also continued on normative developments, in particular the ethical and human rights aspects of AI and digitalisation. Thus, on 5 September 2024, during the informal conference of CoE Ministers of Justice in Vilnius, the EC signed the **CoE Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and Rule of Law** on behalf of the EU. This Convention is the result of nearly two years of intensive negotiations in the CoE Committee on Artificial Intelligence (CAI), in which the EU actively participated. The CoE's Framework Convention and the EU's AI Act provide a crucial framework for reinforcing a human-centric and rights-based approach to AI throughout its lifecycle. Following the EU signing the Framework Convention, the next crucial steps will now relate to its ratification by the EU. In addition, the Commission is closely participating in the discussions regarding the drafting of a CoE Recommendation that is expected to be adopted by the end of 2025 on the impact of artificial intelligence systems, their potential for promoting equality - including gender equality - and the risks they may cause in relation to non-discrimination.

Following the entry into force of the **CoE Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence** (CETS 210) in respect of the EU on 1 October 2023, the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) launched its monitoring procedure of legislative and other measures taken by the EU institutions, bodies and agencies to give effect to the provisions of the Convention by transmitting its baseline evaluation questionnaire to the EU on 14 January 2025. In response to the questionnaire, the EU is expected to submit a consolidated report to GREVIO by the end of November 2025, after which an evaluation visit to EU institutions, bodies and agencies will be planned for 2026. GREVIO's baseline evaluation report, expected for publication in 2027, will offer a comprehensive and detailed assessment of the level of compliance of EU legislative, policy, strategic or other measures with the provisions of the Istanbul Convention, in the area of EU competence. As Party to the Istanbul Convention, the EU is equally represented in the Committee of the Parties, where the practical modalities of the EU participation in the Convention mechanism are being defined.

With regard to the **CoE Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime and on the Financing of Terrorism (CETS no. 198)**, to which it is a signatory, the EU reaffirmed in 2024 its intention to finalise the accession process in 2025. The EU has also taken an active role in the CoE's negotiations on the elaboration of an additional Protocol to the CETS no. 198.<sup>20</sup>

The EU also participates in a number of CoE **Partial and Enlarged Agreements**.<sup>21</sup> It was granted observer status with GRECO in July 2019. The EC underlined that it will further step up its engagement with GRECO by establishing a more regular and formal dialogue. As an observer, the EU was represented and took an active part in GRECO's plenary meetings. GRECO was represented in meetings held in 2024 by the EU Network against Corruption, which was launched in September 2023 as a consequence of the Joint Communication on the Fight against Corruption in the EU of May 2023. Numerous contacts and meetings took place between GRECO representatives and representatives of the EC and the EP. Moreover, the EC will continue looking into the possibility of moving towards full participation of the EU in GRECO; the latter confirmed its availability to discuss the modalities thereof. The EU's full membership in GRECO would contribute to further strengthening the rule of law and the fight against corruption across Europe. GRECO could also contribute to strengthening the integrity rules and oversight mechanisms within EU institutions, at their request.

In addition, discussions have continued in order to strengthen co-operation in promoting social rights in line with the European Social Charter and the EU Pillar on Social Rights and its Action Plan.

EU participation in or accession to CoE instruments, as appropriate, shall be further encouraged.

<sup>20</sup>Committee of Experts on Criminal Asset Recovery (PC-RAC). Mandated to represent its 27 member States in the negotiations, the EC's contributions to the PC-RAC's work build on its recently adopted Directive on asset recovery and confiscation.

<sup>21</sup>As a member of the European Pharmacopoeia since 1997 and the European Audiovisual Observatory, as an observer to the GRECO, as a participant in the International Co-operation Group on Drugs and Addictions (Pompidou Group) and the Co-operation Group for the Prevention of, Protection Against, and Organisation of Relief in Major Natural and Technological Disasters (EUR-OPA). The EU also plays a major role in the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity (North-South Centre) of the CoE. The "Conclusions on EU Priorities for cooperation with the CoE 2025-2026" refer to the role of the CoE's Southern Neighbourhood Policy and the North-South Centre in promoting stability in Europe and its neighboring regions. The EC takes part in the work of the Venice Commission. The EU joined the Register of Damage on 16 May 2023 as a founding associate member and became a Participant on 22 July 2024.

### 3.3. Close co-operation on normative developments, policies and democracy

Close co-operation has also continued on normative developments, in particular the ethical and human rights aspects of **AI** and digitalisation and on the protection of the **environment**, finalising the text of the future Convention on the Protection of the Environment through Criminal Law in the framework of the “Reykjavik process”. Concerning AI, the EU will participate in the development of a CoE Recommendation on equality and AI, whilst striving to ensure compatibility with the EU AI Act and other EU norms and standards.

Close co-operation in criminal matters and, more specifically, in the **fight against human trafficking**, migrant smuggling, terrorism, any form of torture and ill-treatment, radicalisation and cybercrime has also continued. Regular exchanges were held between GRETA and the EU Anti-Trafficking Coordinator, as well as between GRETA and Frontex. As regards increased **migration-related challenges**, the CoE’s former Office of the Special Representative on Migration and Refugees (SRSG) closely followed the negotiations leading to the adoption of the EU Pact on Migration and Asylum. The former SRSG was invited to present the CoE’s views during the European Migration Conference held in Brussels under the auspices of the Belgian presidency of the EU. The former Office of the SRSG has co-operated closely with the EUAA, Frontex and FRA to make relevant CoE expertise available for integration into training materials provided by these agencies to support the implementation of the Pact by EU member States.

Co-operation with the EC on promoting **equality** and the **fight against discrimination, racism and intolerance** has also been strengthened,<sup>22</sup> and the relevance of the work of ECRI<sup>23</sup> highlighted. The CoE and EU continued to exchange on policies and initiatives to combat racism, antigypsyism, antisemitism and anti-Muslim hatred. The EU, including FRA, actively contributed to the development of new and the implementation of existing standards by the Steering Committee on Anti-discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion (CDADI) and its subordinate committees. The CoE continues to participate in policy exchange with member States of the EU High-level Group on Combating Hate Speech and Hate crime whilst, as part of an EU-CoE joint project, the No Hate Speech Week was organised for the first time to exchange on policy developments and promising practices in preventing and combating hate speech between national authorities, civil society, media and national human rights institutions. Regular exchanges on the situation of national minorities in candidate countries to the EU have been held with DG NEAR.

Close co-operation with the EU continued in the area of the rights of the child, notably with DG JUST and DG HOME in the framework of the Steering Committee on the Rights of the Child (CDENF) and the Lanzarote Committee. The CoE also participates in the EU Network on the Rights of the Child. Co-operation projects with SG REFORM address child-friendly justice and response mechanisms to violence against children (“Barnahus model”) in Croatia, Finland, Ireland, Slovenia and Spain.

Both organisations have maintained regular exchanges on their respective work on a number of other issues, for example as regards the execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR), the situation of persons deprived of their liberty, both in prison and in the context of migration (through the CPT), issues related to disinformation and interference in elections, media freedom and pluralism, the safety of journalists and other media actors,<sup>24</sup> hate speech and hate crimes,<sup>25</sup> internet governance, children’s rights, youth,<sup>26</sup> sport and bioethics.

<sup>22</sup>Including with respect to LGBTI persons and hate speech and in the field of Roma women inclusion and the field of AI and non-discrimination.

<sup>23</sup>The EU has observer status with ECRI.

<sup>24</sup>Closer exchanges have taken place with the EC as regards the safety of journalists, media governance and strategic lawsuits against public participation (SLAPPs) in view of the implementation of newly adopted standards and legislation by each organisation.

<sup>25</sup>Through the participation of the Anti-discrimination Department in the EU High-Level Group on combating hate speech and hate crime, the EU LGBTI sub-group and joint co-operation programmes (JP), including the No Hate Speech Week and the JP on Combating anti-LGBTIQ violence and hate speech and strengthening awareness-raising and fact-based narratives about LGBTIQ persons.

<sup>26</sup>The Youth Partnership, established in 1998 as one of the most successful co-operation programmes, is currently implementing its 2024-2025 work plan, adding value and creating synergies for the EC on implementing the aims of the EU Youth Strategy and the legacy of the European Year of Youth and supporting the implementation of the European Youth Work Agenda; and for the CoE on the four priorities of its Youth Strategy 2030 and the implementation of the Reykjavik Declaration and Principles of Democracy.

Moreover, close co-operation between the CoE and the EC has continued in the field of education, youth, sport and culture through JPs like: the Roma Holocaust Remembrance and Education (“RomaMemory”) joint action, the European Heritage Days joint initiative, the EU-CoE Youth Partnership, the Balance S4 joint project, the HISTOLAB project, the INSCHOOL3 project, the All In Plus joint project and the European Centre for Modern Languages (ECML) through the Cooperation Agreement .

Furthermore, co-operation has continued in the area of **democracy**, with exchanges on policy developments and the promotion and implementation of the “Reykjavik Principles for Democracy”, in particular through multi-level governance reforms promoting good democratic governance, supporting decentralisation and strengthening the institutional capacity of local, regional and central authorities through projects implemented by the CoE’s Centre of Expertise for Good Governance. Civil society and elections are other areas where exchanges and synergies between the two organisations have continued. For instance, a member of the Secretariat of the Steering Committee on Democracy (CDDM) participated in the Strategy Seminar of the European Cooperation Network on Elections, held on 5 and 6 February 2025. Also, the EU participates in the work of the CDDM.

Co-operation with **FRA** at operational level has been particularly active in many areas, taking various forms including regular data and information exchanges in preparation of respective documents and reports, FRA’s participation as part of the EU delegation in several CoE bodies (for instance CDADI, CAI and CEPEJ), participation in respective civil society structures and the production of joint documents. In the field of civil society, for instance, the Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH) collaborated with FRA when examining the implementation of the relevant CM Recommendation.<sup>27</sup> Members of the Secretariat of several CoE bodies participated in FRA’s Workshop on Civic Space Monitoring and Protection, held in September 2024. The CoE was a major partner in the organisation of the 2024 Fundamental Rights Forum organised by FRA in Vienna. In January 2025, the Congress’ Standing Rapporteurs on Human Rights visited FRA to discuss human rights at local and regional levels and co-operation between the CoE and FRA.

### 3.4. Rule of law-related issues in Europe<sup>28</sup>

The CoE has continued to provide the EU with valuable input into rule of law-related matters, and contacts have continued to intensify between CoE bodies and relevant EU institutions. More specifically, the CoE continued to provide regular and substantial contributions to the EU Enlargement Package and the Rule of Law Report, by contributing to the 2024 report and being consulted for that of 2025.

Co-operation also continued through various CoE rule of law-related mechanisms, notably with the Venice Commission, GRECO (the EU being an observer), MONEYVAL<sup>29</sup> and CEPEJ,<sup>30</sup> to name but a few.

The close co-operation between the EU and the CoE Human Rights Education for Legal Professionals (HELP) Programme continued, with new courses developed on topics of common priority, such as the interplay between the ECHR and the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights, Judges Upholding the Rule of Law and others.

<sup>27</sup>Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)11 to member states on the need to strengthen the protection and promotion of civil society space in Europe.

<sup>28</sup>In their decisions of 17 May 2024, the CM underscored the leading role of the CoE in international standard-setting in respect of democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

<sup>29</sup>In December 2024, MONEYVAL issued a report analysing how the EU’s AML/CFT legislation, mechanisms and other initiatives have been assessed in MONEYVAL’s 5<sup>th</sup> round mutual evaluation processes, which took into account the EC’s input. For its 6<sup>th</sup> round, MONEYVAL continues to promote a consistent approach in assessing the EU’s AML/CFT measures, in close co-operation with the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) and the EC, through the development of a standard descriptive text on the EU framework to be included in all EU member States’ assessments. This aims to ensure that different assessment bodies (FATF, MONEYVAL and the IMF) have accurate and consistent information on the impact of EU supranational regulations/requirements and deal with these issues consistently in the mutual evaluation process.

<sup>30</sup>Through the different data collection exercises implemented by the CEPEJ in co-operation with the EU in the EU member States and accession countries (Scoreboard, EaP and WB dashboards, Eurostat), the CEPEJ provides qualitative and quantitative data about judicial performance and functioning of the judicial systems across Europe that are used in the EU assessment exercises, such as the Justice Scoreboard Report, the Rule of Law Report and accession reports. Through other co-operation frameworks, such as bilateral co-operation projects in EU member States and accession countries, the CEPEJ co-operates with the EU to provide tools, expert assessments and recommendations on efficiency, quality and access to justice and digitalisation of justice to judicial authorities and practitioners across Europe, which are instrumental in the judicial reforms conducted in the countries.



Online HELP courses include both CoE and EU frameworks and contribute to achieving the goals set by the European Judicial Training Strategy. The joint EU-CoE HELP actions support judicial training and promote digitalisation, while increasing the protection of fundamental rights and the rule of law in Europe, including in the digital environment and on the use of digital tools. Co-operation among legal professionals and training providers in EU member States and beyond is likewise enhanced.

The **EU enlargement process** gained momentum in 2023 and 2024.<sup>31</sup> In May 2024, the CM committed “to provide full support and to raise the level of preparedness of candidate countries and potential candidates for EU accession and reaffirmed the CoE’s readiness to provide the EU with valuable input into matters related to the rule of law, democracy and human rights in EU member States and beyond”. The EC appreciated the well-established practice of CoE contributions to the preparation of the Enlargement Package, which was successfully pursued during the reporting period.

### 3.5. Promotion by the EU of relevant CoE instruments

Both the EU Council “Conclusions on EU Priorities for cooperation with the CoE in 2023-2024 and in 2025-2026” provide that the EU will continue to promote the accession of non-European states to the most relevant CoE conventions. It is specified that a particular focus will be on those conventions through which judicial co-operation with third countries can be strengthened in the fight against serious cross-border crime, especially organised crime. The modalities of this promotion have been a key focus within the CoE-EU institutional dialogue (i.e. the SOM and CATS). In practice, the EU has continued to promote accession of its member States and third countries to relevant CoE conventions,<sup>32</sup> contributing to extending CoE standards beyond Europe.<sup>33</sup> In addition, the EU has deployed efforts to promote the Register of Damage with a view to accession of selected non-European countries and to achieving a truly global mechanism.

The CoE highly values the EU’s readiness to promote the accession of non-European states to the most relevant CoE instruments. It illustrates the CoE’s **growing standard-setting role and global impact**.

## 4. Programmatic co-operation

The EU-CoE JP co-operation is the **cornerstone** of the CoE’s technical co-operation dimension. The EU and the CoE collaborate through programmatic facilities, other structured frameworks and individual JPs implemented in South-East Europe and Türkiye, in Eastern Europe and the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine), EU member States, the Southern Mediterranean and Central Asia. They consist mainly of country- or regional specific interventions, but also include thematic programmes covering a wide array of countries. As at 31 December 2024, the global volume of the EU-CoE active multi-annual co-operation agreements amounted to € 240.3 million, with an annualised envelope of € 58.5 million (prorated).<sup>34</sup> The annual receipts generated by the implementation of these programmes amounted to € 51.5 million in 2024. With an additional € 3.3 million of receipts from the co-operation undertakings other than JP, the EU’s share in the CoE’s revenue from all extra-budgetary contributions for 2024 corresponded to 55.3 %, confirming that the **EU remains the largest single donor** to the CoE technical co-operation activities.

Over the years, JP co-operation has **grown considerably** and has brought **tangible results**.

<sup>31</sup>As also illustrated in the EC 2024 Enlargement Package.

<sup>32</sup>Such as the CoE Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence, the Convention for the Protection of Individuals with regard to Automatic Processing of Personal Data and its amending Protocol (commonly called “Convention 108+”), the Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (“Lanzarote Convention”), the Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (“Istanbul Convention”) and the Convention on the Manipulation of Sports Competitions (“Macolin Convention”), as well as the “MEDICRIME” Convention, the Convention on Cybercrime (“Budapest Convention”) and its Additional Protocols, the Convention against Trafficking in Human Organs (“Santiago de Compostela Convention”) and the Convention on Offences relating to Cultural Property (“Nicosia Convention”).

<sup>33</sup>The “EU Priorities for cooperation with the CoE in 2025-2026” also refer to the text of the new Convention on the Protection of Environment through Criminal Law, which was agreed by experts on 7 June 2024. The EU and the CoE will work together to gain political support for this ambitious text and promote the Convention to international partners.

<sup>34</sup>For details, see Addendum CM(2025)xx-add “JP between the CoE and the EU in 2024”.

In particular, **three large-scale multiannual multi Beneficiary programmes** (known as “regional programmatic facilities”) have been implemented, in successive phases since 2015, in South-East Europe and Türkiye and in the EU Eastern and Southern Neighbourhood. Two of these major co-operation programmes for the promotion of the rule of law and fundamental rights, namely the Horizontal Facility for the Western Balkans and Türkiye III (2023-2026) and the Partnership for Good Governance III (2023-2027), continued their implementation during the reporting period. The fifth phase of the South Programme started earlier, in September 2022.

Moreover, the facilities are being **complemented** by country-specific and regional thematic interventions: three country-specific projects were launched to support the justice reform in Morocco,<sup>35</sup> to improve economic governance by fighting corruption in Tunisia<sup>36</sup> and to foster quality of foreign language teaching in Türkiye,<sup>37</sup> as well as three regional programmes to enhance co-operation on cybercrime in South-East Europe and Türkiye,<sup>38</sup> in Eastern Europe and South Caucasus<sup>39</sup> and in the Southern Mediterranean region<sup>40</sup>. In addition, two new country-specific projects for Albania<sup>41</sup> and Serbia<sup>42</sup> were signed respectively in the fields of freedom of the media and local self-governance.

The consequences of the war of aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine have continued to impact the CoE’s co-operation activities, including JPs. The developments have required a **flexibility** that the EU-CoE programmatic facilities were able to offer, and the joint co-operation was thus able to respond to emerging needs in an effective and efficient manner. In particular, the CoE responded to the needs of Ukraine by adjusting its ongoing support, including through JPs. The same flexibility allowed for the adjustment of co-operation in Azerbaijan and Georgia, with an increased focus on co-operation with civil society.

The decision by the EU to open accession negotiations with Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Bosnia and Herzegovina created an **impetus for strengthening** the joint co-operation. The assistance that the CoE can provide to these countries through the JP (including through the Partnership for Good Governance and the Horizontal Facility) significantly contributes to the countries’ related reform agenda in the areas of democracy, the rule of law and human rights. The countries’ EU accession perspective is instrumental in setting the priorities for co-operation, based on the recommendations of the CoE’s monitoring and advisory bodies and the case-law of the ECtHR, as well as the 2024 Communication on EU enlargement policy and the respective country reports. The Partnership for Good Governance programme also continues to support Armenia and Azerbaijan. Specific support is provided to the representatives of Belarusian democratic forces and civil society in the field of gender equality and non-discrimination.

The **experience** of working together in the South-East European region (in particular through the Horizontal Facility, which is the largest EU-CoE JP) is key in particular for the joint co-operation for Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. This co-operation has led to tangible results in bringing support to reform agendas related to human rights, the rule of law and democracy. The contribution and relevance of the joint activities to the EU enlargement process have been confirmed.

In the **Southern Mediterranean**, joint co-operation towards the objective of the progressive creation of a common legal space between Europe and the region, based on the CoE standards, has facilitated the ratification of a number of the CoE conventions by the partner countries in the region. Despite a challenging implementing environment, regional programme activities, as well as country-specific programmes in Morocco and Tunisia, continued to achieve meaningful results. Moreover, requests from Southern Mediterranean partner countries for technical expertise to align national laws with CoE standards and for support in key areas of the CoE expertise have increased significantly. Through the Quick Response Mechanism (QRM) of the South Programme V, expertise has been deployed to support legal reforms in Jordan, Lebanon and Libya, whilst the Algerian authorities have requested to intensify co-operation.

<sup>35</sup> “Towards a more protective, accessible and effective justice in Morocco” – MA-JUST (2024-2027).

<sup>36</sup> “Improving Economic Governance by Fighting Corruption in Tunisia” - AGELA (2024-2027).

<sup>37</sup> “Enhancing Foreign Language Education Quality in Türkiye” (2024-2029).

<sup>38</sup> “CyberSEE - Co-operation on Cybercrime: Enhanced action on cybercrime and electronic evidence in South-East Europe and Türkiye” (2024-2027).

<sup>39</sup> “CyberEast+ - Enhanced Action on Cybercrime for Cyber Resilience in the Eastern Partnership states” (2024-2027).

<sup>40</sup> “Enhanced co-operation on cybercrime and electronic evidence in the Southern Neighbourhood Region” - CyberSouth+ (2024-2026).

<sup>41</sup> “Promoting Freedom of Expression in Albania through Open Dialogue” (2025-2026).

<sup>42</sup> “Human Resources Management in Local Self-Government - phase 3” (2025-2027).

The achievements of EU-CoE co-operation in the Southern Mediterranean have laid the foundation for strengthened collaboration in other regions, with existing CoE external co-operation instruments, such as the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity (North-South Centre - NSC).<sup>43</sup>

An important number of requests from partner countries in **Central Asia** for specialised expertise and assistance offered in the framework of the Central Asia Rule of Law Programme (which ended in June 2024) also illustrates the relevance of this joint co-operation to support reform efforts.

Importantly, co-operation and technical assistance programmes targeted at the **EU Member States** were characterised by a positive momentum in 2024. The EU-CoE structured co-operation framework funded under the EU Technical Support Instrument (TSI) (SG REFORM) continued to support the EU member States' capacity to sustain structural reforms, encompassing numerous projects in key areas of work, such as human rights (including children's rights, support to the National Prevention Mechanisms, the fight against discrimination, AI and gaming and gambling addiction of children and youth), the rule of law (including reform of the judiciary and the fight against economic crime), as well as anti-money laundering/counter financing of terrorism and proliferation financing. In addition, in the context of the war of aggression of Russia against Ukraine and of the increased scope of the EU restrictive measures ("sanctions"), the EU-CoE also continued cooperation on supporting the implementation of financial sanctions and assets freeze, addressing urgent and relevant needs faced by several EU Member States. Additionally, several new programmes have seen their negotiation concluded under funding instruments managed by the respective EC services, notably DG JUST, DG EAC and DG HOME.<sup>44</sup>

The CoE's co-operation with the EU, in Europe and beyond, further illustrated the Organisation's contribution to international order and global governance and to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (**SDGs**). For example, since 2009, the NSC has implemented a phased programme aimed at enhancing the capacities of young people across Europe, the Southern Mediterranean and Africa on issues related to human rights, democracy and the rule of law, aligning with the European Consensus on Development. Its current phase was launched in December 2022.

## 5. Conclusion

The 4<sup>th</sup> Summit of Heads of State and Government of the CoE in Reykjavík gave a new impetus to the strategic partnership with the EU. In the context of the follow-up to the Reykjavík Summit, this impetus resulted in a new intensity of co-operation and political dialogue, including at the highest level, notwithstanding, in the last few months, the change of institutional cycle. The personal contacts already established with the EU institutions' leadership were paramount for the strengthening of the political dialogue aimed at the further development of the CoE's strategic partnership with the EU, creating a significant momentum to develop new synergies, taking into account the new challenges facing Europe. The broad scope and wealth of topics, including new ones, covered by the most recent CoE initiatives and the EU Priorities, further illustrate the complementarity of the work of the two organisations.

Both organisations confirmed their commitment to multilateralism based on values and their unwavering support for Ukraine and for ensuring accountability for the crimes committed in the context of the war of aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. Joint efforts have led to important progress in this domain, notably on the establishment of the Register of Damage and its operationalisation, on the future establishment of an International Claims Commission for Ukraine and on the future setting-up of a Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine. Significant progress was achieved on other relevant challenges highlighted in the Reykjavík Declaration.

The process of the EU accession to the ECHR continued in 2024, and the new EU leadership has expressed its commitment to finalising the process during the current legislative cycle. The accession will be of central importance for the coherence of the European human rights' protection system.

<sup>43</sup>Drawing on its experience in Africa, particularly in the youth sector through joint management agreements and programmes with the EC since 2009, the NSC has adopted a new strategy to deepen co-operation with African countries. This strategy seeks to advance CoE standards across the African continent, with a strong focus on fostering the active participation of young people through focused new programmes such as HEY (Human rights Education for Youth).

<sup>44</sup>For details, see Addendum CM(2025)xx-add "Joint Programmes between the CoE and the EU in 2024".

The signature by the EC on behalf of the EU of the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law on 5 September 2024 is another landmark step in consolidating joint endeavours. The CoE encourages EU participation in or accession to CoE conventions and bodies, as appropriate, as a way of achieving coherence and complementarity and promoting synergies. At the same time, it highly values the EU's role in promoting the accession of non-European states to the most relevant CoE legal instruments. Joint efforts in this regard have to be continued.

The co-operation in the context of the EU Enlargement and the Rule of Law Cycle within the EU continues to be fruitful and is a practical recognition by the EU of the CoE's expertise, standard-setting and monitoring role. It also further emphasised its benchmarking role in human rights, the rule of law and democracy in Europe. Co-operation in this field, including with relevant bodies of the CoE, such as the Venice Commission, GRECO, MONEYVAL, CEPEJ and others, is expected to remain a central priority for the years to come, both with regard the EU member States and the EU candidate countries both within and outside the EU membership. The CoE will in particular continue to utilise its unique set of instruments to provide full support and to raise the level of preparedness of candidate countries and potential candidates for EU accession. Enhanced synergies are also envisaged to address existing challenges and attacks on democracy, including in the context of the forthcoming CoE Action Plan for Democracy and the EU's Democracy Shield initiative.

Co-operation within the framework of EU-CoE Joint Programmes remains one of the pillars of the strategic partnership between the CoE and the EU and mutual commitment to promoting common values. The EU remains the largest single donor to the CoE's technical co-operation activities.

2025 also marks both the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ECHR and the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the proclamation of the Charter of Fundamental Rights. It will be an opportunity for further joint efforts to highlight awareness and the central significance of human rights.