

135th Session of the Committee of Ministers (Chişinău, 15 May 2026)

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 – Information document

1. Introduction

On 14 May 2025, the Committee of Ministers (CM) of the Council of Europe (CoE) (CM/Del/Dec(2025)134/3a) highlighted “the **steady impact of the 4th Summit** of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe in Reykjavík on the **value-based strategic partnership with the European Union (EU)**, which continues to intensify and deepen through co-operation and political dialogue, including at the highest level”.

During the reporting period, political dialogue, legal co-operation and programmatic co-operation continued to sustain the partnership as its **three pillars**.

The content and intensity of the dialogue were shaped by unprecedented and **accelerating geopolitical challenges**, both at continental and global level, which enhanced an even closer co-ordination and coherence of actions aimed at safeguarding a rules-based international order and preserving common fundamental values shared by the CoE and the EU.

This dialogue focused first and foremost on supporting Ukraine's pursuit of justice and **international accountability** in the face of Russia's aggression. The EU's political, substantial and financial support throughout this endeavour demonstrated, once again, the genuine strategic nature of the partnership between the CoE and the EU. The signature of the Convention establishing the International Claims Commission for Ukraine and the substantial progress achieved in the process of setting up a Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine, including the signature of an Agreement on the financing of an advance team to establish the Special Tribunal, are the concrete embodiments of the co-operation with the EU on this track.

During the reporting period, the EU **enlargement process** entered a new phase of acceleration, being considered by the EU as a geostrategic priority and a major contribution to European peace, security, stability and prosperity. The **EU Council Presidency Conclusions on Enlargement** adopted on 16 December 2025 ([16933/25](#)) clearly state that “Progress on the fundamentals remains the key benchmark for progress towards EU membership”. In this context, the CoE's role as a “benchmark for human rights, the rule of law and democracy in Europe”, as stipulated in §10 of the MoU of 2007, is of particular value and must be continuously reinforced.

Due to geopolitical turbulence, the reporting period was profoundly marked by an increased perception across the continent that **democratic security** is the first line of defence. In this context, the ongoing processes of shaping a **New Democratic Pact for Europe** and the implementation of actions envisaged by the **European Democracy Shield (JOIN(2025)791)** clearly demonstrate the **common understanding of new challenges and threats** and the complementarity of the envisaged approaches. These factors create fertile ground for further synergies between the CoE and the EU.

The process of the **EU's accession to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR)** advanced further, with the European Commission having formally requested the Court of Justice's opinion on the negotiated accession instrument on 21 November 2025.

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.

2. Political and institutional dialogue

2.1. Political dialogue

During the reporting period, the political dialogue between the CoE and the EU developed further after the successful establishment of personal contacts between their new political leaderships in early 2025.

All relevant CoE institutions efficiently contributed to this dialogue. This high-level dialogue, notably in the context of public events, was also much more visible in the media than in the past. The **Secretary General** held several meetings with the High Representative, Ms Kallas¹, Commissioners Brunner ("Internal Affairs and Migration"), McGrath ("Democracy, Justice, the Rule of Law and Consumer Protection") and Kos ("Enlargement"). He maintained a dialogue with the President of the European Council, Mr Costa. He also met the President of the European Parliament, Ms Metsola, as well as the Director of the EU Agency for Fundamental Rights (FRA), Ms Rautio, and the EU Special Representative for the Belgrade–Pristina Dialogue, Mr Sørensen. The established practice of the Secretary General's participation in the bi-annual meetings of the European Political Community provides a regular opportunity for informal exchanges with the EU's leadership.

The **Deputy Secretary General** met with the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, Ms Ollongren, and with the Secretary-General of the European Economic and Social Committee (EESC), Ms Le Galo Flores.

An exchange of views between the Ministers' Deputies and Commissioner Kos on 11 February 2026 resumed this positive practice after a break due to the institutional changes in late 2024. The practice of regular exchanges of views of the Ministers' Deputies with high-level EU officials should be maintained in the future.

The **Commissioner for Human Rights**, Mr O'Flaherty, maintained regular contacts with different EU counterparts, including the Executive Vice-President of the European Commission, Ms Virkkunen ("Tech Sovereignty, Security and Democracy"), Commissioners Brunner, Kos and McGrath and the Vice-President of the European Parliament, Mr Ștefănuță. He maintained a regular dialogue with the EU Special Representative for Human Rights, Ms Ollongren, and addressed the European Parliament's various Committees on several occasions.

The **President of the European Court of Human Rights (the Court)**, Mr Guyomar, met Commissioner McGrath, who also participated in the opening of a Conference on the CoE Convention for the Protection of the Profession of Lawyer, organised by the CoE in Strasbourg.

The **Congress of Local and Regional Authorities** actively engaged with its counterpart, the European Committee of the Regions (CoR), as well as with other relevant interlocutors, including FRA. The Congress' President, Mr Cools, attended several events organised by the CoR.

Enhanced co-operation between the **Special Representative of the Secretary General (SRSG) on antisemitism, anti-Muslim hatred and all forms of religious intolerance** and the European Commission Coordinator on combating antisemitism and fostering Jewish life, as well as with the European Commission Coordinator on combating anti-Muslim hatred, continued throughout the reporting period.

The **Special Envoy of the Secretary General on the situation of children of Ukraine**, Ms Gylfadóttir, held meetings with Commissioner McGrath and the EU's Special Envoy for Ukrainians in the EU, Ms Johansson. She also held exchanges with Committees of the European Parliament.

¹ SG Berset and HR Kallas also issued a joint statement on the occasion of the European and World Day against the Death Penalty on 10 October 2025.

The President of the Group of States against Corruption (**GRECO**), Mr Meyer, and the President of the **Venice Commission**, Ms Bazy-Malaurie, met Commissioner McGrath.

The Council working party on relations with the CoE and the OSCE (**COSCE**) conducted a two-day visit to the CoE's headquarters and held exchanges with several high representatives. The CM Presidency of the Republic of Moldova presented its priorities at a COSCE formal meeting.

The high-level consultations **mainly addressed the consequences of the Russian Federation's war of aggression against Ukraine** and related issues, in particular accountability for crimes committed by Russia. They also focused on various risks for Europe's democratic resilience. In this regard, discussions focused on the progressive deployment of the **New Democratic Pact for Europe**, the situation in different CoE member states, the functioning of the European human rights protection system, including the **EU's accession to the ECHR**, rule of law-related challenges, modalities of the EU participation in the CoE conventions and geopolitical challenges facing Europe.

This dialogue also addressed the co-operation in the **EU Enlargement and Neighbourhood regions**, as well as opportunities for extended co-operation in EU candidate countries. Against this background, CoE representatives reiterated that the CoE is committed to providing full support to the candidate countries and to potential candidates in their EU accession processes, thereby contributing to compliance with CoE standards. As regards neighbouring partners East and South, particular accent was put on the most appropriate ways to fully use the CoE's expertise in the fields jointly identified by the beneficiary countries and the EU.

All these meetings proved highly valuable for sharing the priorities of both the CoE and the EU, ensuring consistency of approaches in relevant fields and, by doing so, consolidating the common European agenda.

2.2. Institutional dialogue

The high-level political dialogue was accompanied by a structured institutional dialogue, with the continued practice of the **"Senior Officials Meeting"** (SOM), held on 8 July 2025 in Brussels. The SOM focused on key issues of common interest in the context of the strategic nature of the CoE-EU partnership. The SOM was preceded by the **Scoreboard meeting**, held on 7 July 2025, addressing various aspects of programmatic co-operation. The institutional dialogue also included the 58th and 59th consultation meetings between the CoE and the EU (Chair of the Coordinating Committee in the area of police and judicial co-operation in criminal matters (**CATS**), the European Commission and the EEAS), held respectively on 26 June and 11 December 2025. The latter focused on legal standards and policies related to criminal matters, including the promotion of CoE conventions in non-European States (see below). These three complementary mechanisms of institutional dialogue enabled a more strategic and structured approach to co-operation.

The European Commission's **Rule of Law Report 2025** continued the practice, for the second consecutive year, of integrating four candidate countries (Albania, Montenegro, North Macedonia and Serbia) and placed increased emphasis on risks posed to media pluralism, judicial independence and information integrity.

The European Commission's **2025 Enlargement Package** offered a detailed assessment of the state of play and the progress made by candidate and potential candidate countries. The country reports provided an assessment on key reforms for each enlargement partner on their path towards the EU. They demonstrated that the accession of several candidate countries is increasingly within reach. Progress has been made in implementing necessary reforms, particularly in the areas of democracy, the rule of law and fundamental rights, though further efforts are required.

The CoE continued the well-established **practice of preliminary consultations with the European Commission, both on the Rule of Law Report and the Enlargement Package**. CoE legal instruments, recommendations and the findings of monitoring bodies were offered by the CoE as relevant benchmarks to be taken into account. The increasingly growing attention paid by the EU institutions to fundamental values, both with respect to the EU enlargement process and its own members, is further raising the value of CoE contributions and serves as practical recognition by the EU of the benchmarking role of the CoE.

The participation of CoE representatives in EU Council preparatory bodies expanded, particularly in working parties covering criminal justice, fundamental rights and counterterrorism. The successive EU Council Presidencies extended 11 such invitations to CoE representatives in 2025.

Providing expertise to EU Council preparatory bodies supports consistency between new EU secondary legislation and CoE standards, while also raising awareness of the CoE's ongoing policy and normative developments.

CoE representatives were frequent guests at numerous meetings organised by various **Committees of the European Parliament** (Director General for Human Rights and Rule of Law, President of the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations, GRECO and Venice Commission Secretariats and representatives of numerous Secretariats in charge of artificial intelligence, education, Cultural Routes, children's rights). This practice contributed to a better understanding of the nature of actions undertaken by the CoE in different areas and also contributed to greater synergies in different policy areas.

A number of Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (**PACE**) **rapporteurs** proactively engaged with EU representatives in the context of the preparation of their reports. The **General Rapporteur on Democracy for PACE**, Mr Papandreou, participated in the EU Parliamentary Democracy Forum at the European Parliament. Additionally, the PACE Monitoring Committee held institutional consultations in the framework of the preparation of country-specific monitoring reports. The EU Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process, Mr Bigot, and the EU Special Representative for the Gulf region, Mr Di Maio, participated in hearings of the PACE Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy.

PACE and the Congress participated in **international election observation missions** held jointly with the European Parliament and the OSCE/ODIHR.

Co-operation with the **EESC** was maintained. The EESC President participated in the opening of the Conference on Social Rights organised by the CoE in Brussels on 5 June 2025. He also attended a PACE conference on the cost-of-living crisis on 5 December 2025 in Paris.

The enhanced practice of **regular CoE contributions to calls for evidence and public consultations launched by the European Commission** has proven to be a useful tool for ensuring consistency between CoE standards and EU secondary legislation, as well as related policy guidelines. This approach also enhances the visibility of the CoE. Eight such contributions were provided by the Secretariat in 2025.

The already established practice of regular study visits to the CoE Headquarters by the **European Union Diplomatic Academy** (EUDA) and the **European Union Diplomatic Programme for the Enlargement Region** (EUDP) continued successfully.

3. Legal co-operation

Regular consultation meetings between the EU² and the CoE continued twice a year (26 June and 11 December 2025) 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. Consultations on respective normative work in areas of common interest, such as the protection of the environment through criminal law, the smuggling of migrants and asset recovery and mutual legal assistance (MLA), remained at the core of these meetings.

3.1. Ukraine, accountability and justice

The EU has been a strong supporter of the **Register of Damage** caused by the Aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine (hereinafter "the Register"), an Enlarged Partial Agreement, since its inception. The EU's sustained support as a Participant in the Register further demonstrates its strong commitment to the Register itself and to its mandate, while contributing to its financial stability. Through high-level and institutional dialogue, the EU has also been instrumental in advancing outreach efforts to expand the Register's membership beyond Europe, with a view to achieving a truly global mechanism.

² Chair of the Coordinating Committee in the area of police and judicial co-operation in criminal matters (CATS), the European Commission and the EEAS.

The EU participated actively in the preparatory meetings and the formal negotiations on the draft **Convention establishing an International Claims Commission for Ukraine**. Upon the adoption of the Convention at the Diplomatic Conference held on 15-16 December 2025 in The Hague, **the EU**, together with 34 States, **signed it** at its opening.

Furthermore, on 25 February 2026, the European Commission adopted a proposal for the EU to become a founding member of the International Claims Commission.³

After the Core Group on the Establishment of a Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine⁴ ended its work at the technical level in March 2025, the Foreign Ministers of the Core Group States politically proclaimed their support for the Special Tribunal on 9 May in Lviv in the presence of HR Kallas⁵ and Commissioner McGrath.⁶ Since the respective formal request by Ukraine at the 134th Ministerial Session of the CM on 14 May 2025, **the process towards the establishment of the Special Tribunal has continued in the framework of the CoE with sustained political support from the EU**. On 25 June 2025, the bilateral Agreement on the Establishment of the Special Tribunal was ceremonially signed in Strasbourg. The establishment of an Enlarged Partial Agreement on the Management Committee of the Special Tribunal that will, among others, establish its budget is still underway. On 23 January 2026, **the EU and the CoE signed an agreement on the financing of an advance team to establish the Special Tribunal**, within the framework of the CoE. By allocating a **contribution of over € 10 million** to fund a project implemented by the CoE concerning preparatory work for the establishment of the Special Tribunal in 2026 and 2027,⁷ the EU is acting swiftly to prevent any delays in setting it up.

On 24 February 2026, the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission and the President of the European Parliament, on the fourth anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, expressed their commitment to operationalise the Special Tribunal and the International Claims Commission, both within the framework of the CoE, as soon as possible.

The EU's active and regular participation in the work of the **CoE Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine (CGU)** contributes to its efficient functioning.

3.2. EU participation in or accession to CoE instruments, including the ECHR

The CM, at its 2025 Ministerial Session, *inter alia* **"encouraged EU participation in or accession to CoE conventions and bodies**, as appropriate, to further strengthen coherence and complementarity, while recognising that participation by the EU in CoE convention bodies will require an assessment to ascertain if amendments to the rules of procedures, which preserve equitable voting rights, are needed".

i. EU accession to the ECHR: state of play

The **EU's accession to the ECHR remains a strategic goal** for both the EU and the CoE. Both organisations continue to follow the process, including at the highest level.⁸

The CM, at its 2025 Ministerial Session, recalled *inter alia* that "accession of the EU to the ECHR will enhance coherence in human rights protection in Europe; in this connection, welcomed the continuous judicial dialogue between the European Court of Human Rights and the Court of Justice of the EU; took note with satisfaction of the EU's continued commitment to the process of accession to the ECHR and encouraged the EU to continue it by referring the revised draft accession agreement to the Court of Justice of the EU for opinion in view of the adoption of the revised accession instruments".⁹

³ The proposal for the Council decision to conclude the Convention will need to be adopted by the Council of the EU and approved by the European Parliament.

⁴ 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 European Commission, the EEAS and the CoE to seek justice for Ukraine in the face of the Russian Federation's aggression.

⁵ <https://newsroom.consilium.europa.eu/events/20250509-informal-meeting-of-foreign-affairs-ministers-may-2025>

⁶ https://enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/international-coalition-agrees-establishment-special-tribunal-crime-aggression-against-ukraine-2025-05-09_en

⁷ Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine: Council of Europe, European Union agree to set up advance team - Portal

⁸ 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".

⁹ CM/Del/Dec(2025)134/3a.

At its meeting in November 2025, the Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH) “welcomed the recent **submission by the European Commission of a request to the Court of Justice of the EU for an opinion on the compatibility of the revised draft accession agreement with the EU treaties.**”

ii. Other instruments

The EU played a prominent role in the negotiations of the **CoE Convention on the Protection of the Environment through Criminal Law**, which was adopted on 14 May 2025. The EU signed it the same day it was opened for signature, on 3 December 2025.

The European Commission, on behalf of the **EU, actively participated in the negotiations of the Protocol amending the CoE Convention on the Prevention of Terrorism** that was adopted by the CM on 9 July 2025 and will be opened for signature on 26 May 2026.

On 11 March 2026, the European Parliament is expected to give its consent to the conclusion of the Framework Convention on Artificial Intelligence and Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law, signed by the EU on 5 September 2024.

Following the entry into force of the **CoE Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence** (CETS No. 210, “the Istanbul Convention”) 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 submitted a consolidated report to GREVIO on 24 November 2025.**

An evaluation visit to EU institutions, bodies and agencies is planned for the second quarter of 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 a 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.

The EU also participates in a number of CoE **Partial and Enlarged Agreements**. Discussions have continued regarding the EU’s full participation in **GRECO**.¹⁰ Further to the current “observer” status, its full membership would bring significant added value to the EU, its institutions and its member States as a whole. Furthermore, the **Pompidou Group and the European Union Drug Agency** are currently in the process of revising their co-operation modalities in the spirit of renewing the existing MoU framework established almost ten years ago.

Additionally, 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.

The European Commission has expressed to the European Parliament its **intention to withdraw its proposals to sign and accede to the CoE Convention against the Manipulation of Sports Competitions** (CETS No. 215). It is expected that this move will lift the institutional deadlock that has prevented a number of EU member States from ratifying the Convention in recent years, due to the lack of unanimity within the Council and the understanding that EU member States ratifying the Convention prior to a Council decision could face infringement proceedings. In practice, this risk now appears to have receded, as 16 EU member States have signed the Convention and eight others have already ratified it.

3.3. Close co-operation on normative and policy developments

The EU actively contributed, through the Commission, to the drafting and the finalisation of the Additional Protocol **to the CoE Convention on Laundering, Search, Seizure and Confiscation of the Proceeds from Crime and on the Financing of Terrorism**. The text of the Additional Protocol was finalised in December 2025. The EU is also considering acceding to the mother Convention (CETS No. 198).

In parallel, the EU is conducting internal consultations towards the signing of the newly adopted Convention for the Protection of the **Profession of Lawyer** and the third Additional Protocol to the **MLA Convention**.

¹⁰ While the EU was granted observer status with GRECO in July 2019.

The EU, through the Commission, actively participates in regular meetings of the **Venice Commission and GRECO**. The Commission also engages in close contact with and co-operation in various forms with **MONEYVAL and CEPEJ**.

Further to its involvement in the drafting of new CoE legally binding instruments and its co-operation within specialised bodies, the EU, through the Commission, is actively taking part in the development of new CoE policies across the various CoE fields of action covered by the different Steering Committees.

The EU's involvement and participation continued in areas covered by the European Committee on Crime Problems (CDPC), such as **mutual assistance in criminal matters** and enhancing the legal framework for transnational investigations and prosecutions, the penological field, technology-facilitated violence against women and girls, asset recovery and restorative justice. These developments reflect the CoE and the EU's commitment to addressing shared **criminal law challenges** through robust legal frameworks and complementarity.

Regarding AI, the EU actively contributed to the **work of the Committee on Artificial Intelligence (CAI)** in 2025. Its input was notably fundamental for the adoption of the HUDERIA Model (context-based risk analysis resources) at the 14th plenary meeting of the CAI (Strasbourg, 3-5 November 2025).

Also, the EU (DG CONNECT and DG JUST) participated in the drafting work in the Steering Committee on Anti-discrimination, Diversity and Inclusion (CDADI) and the Gender Equality Commission (GEC) of the CM **Recommendation on equality and AI**, while striving to ensure compatibility with the EU AI Act and other EU norms and standards. In this context, the EU Council adopted on 13 November 2025 a Council Decision on the position to be taken on behalf of the EU, which states that in the joint plenary session of the GEC and the CDADI, as well as in the relevant CM meeting, EU member States will not object to the approval and adoption of the Recommendation and Explanatory Memorandum.

In addition, the EU (DG CONNECT) participated in the drafting of a CM **Recommendation on accountability for technology-facilitated violence against women and girls** by the GEC and the CDPC.

Co-operation has also advanced on **countering the smuggling of migrants**. The EU (DG HOME) actively participated in the 3rd International Conference on Migrant Smuggling, organised by the CoE, which emphasised the need for enhanced international co-operation to address this challenge.

Various exchanges also took place concerning **migration-related developments**, including the CoE's participation in a number of fora¹¹ and the participation of EU representatives in meetings of the CoE Network of Focal Points on Migration. The European Commission also follows the discussions held under the CDDH towards a "political declaration" on the application of the ECHR to migration related issues, to be adopted at the next Ministerial meeting in May 2026 in Chisinau.

Regarding the **environment**, the EU is listed among the participants in the new Steering Committee on the Environment (CDENV) set up by the CM in May 2025 and which will hold its first meeting on 24-25 March 2026.

Co-operation between the CoE and the European Commission (DG EMPL) on **social rights** further deepened, with the CoE responding to two consultations - on the new Action Plan for the European Pillar of Social Rights and on the new EU Anti-Poverty Strategy.

The European Commission participated in the work of the Drafting Group on the **Safe Third Country Concept** of the Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH-PTS), which is preparing a study on the need for and feasibility of updating the 1997 CM Recommendation on the issue.

The **Office of the European Ombudsman** participated in the Workshop on Ombudsperson institutions and national human rights institutions organised by the CDDH on the occasion of its plenary meeting in November 2025. The workshop forms part of the CDDH's preparation of a report on the implementation of the relevant CM recommendations.

¹¹ Such as the in the Consultative Forum of Frontex and the Consultative Forum of the EU Agency for Asylum (EUAA). Also, the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings (GRETA) held meetings with representatives of the European Border and Coast Guard Agency (Frontex) and the EU Asylum Agency (EUAA) in the context of country evaluations.

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 Committee of the Parties of the CoE Convention on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse (Lanzarote Committee). The CoE also participates in the EU Network on the Rights of the Child. Co-operation projects with SG REFORM and DG JUST address child-friendly justice and response mechanisms to violence against children (“Barnahus model”) in Belgium, Croatia, Finland, Ireland, Poland, Slovenia and Spain.

Co-operation with the EU on promoting **equality** and the **fight against discrimination, racism and intolerance** and on combating hate crime has also been strengthened,¹² and the relevance of the work of ECRI highlighted.¹³ Both the CoE and the EU have maintained regular exchanges on their respective work on a number of other issues, for example on youth, freedom of expression and countering information manipulation. Exchanges on policy developments and the promotion and implementation of the “Reykjavik Principles for Democracy” continued.

Several exchanges have been held with the European Parliament Intergroup on Traditional Minorities, National Communities and Languages to present and disseminate the work of the Committees of independent experts under the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages and the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities.

The **European Heritage Days** continued to draw millions of visitors.

Co-operation with FRA at operational level has been particularly active in many areas, taking various forms, including regular data and information exchanges in the preparation of respective documents and reports, FRA's participation as part of the EU delegation in several CoE bodies (for instance CDADI, CAI, CEPEJ, CDDH and the Consultation Group on the Children of Ukraine), participation in respective civil society structures and the elaboration of joint documents.

The **high-level biennial meeting between the CoE and FRA Secretariats** took place on 18 June 2025 in Strasbourg, with the participation of the Director of FRA, the CoE's Director General of Human Rights and Rule of Law, the CoE's Director General for Democracy and Human Dignity, representatives of the FRA management team and the respective contact persons.

In the context of the prevention of torture and ill-treatment, the Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT) regularly exchanged with FRA on the situation of persons deprived of their liberty in prison, police and immigration settings, and with the Fundamental Rights Officers of Frontex in the context of migration. The President of the CPT and its Executive Secretary also met the Executive Director of Frontex and Frontex senior management on 26 September 2025.

The CoE-FRA-ENNHRI-EQUINET Collaborative Platform on Social and Economic Rights held its 15th meeting in October 2025 in Edinburgh, marking its 10th anniversary.

3.4. Promotion by the EU of relevant CoE instruments

The EU Council conclusions on “EU priorities for cooperation with the Council of Europe in 2025-2026” provide that the EU will continue to promote the accession of non-European States to the most relevant CoE conventions. In practice, the EU has continued to promote accession of its member States and third countries to relevant CoE conventions and in particular those on international **co-operation in criminal matters**, contributing to extending CoE standards beyond Europe. The **modalities of this promotion have been a key focus within the CoE-EU institutional dialogue** (i.e., SOM, CATS).

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.

¹² Including with respect to LGBTI persons and hate speech and in the fields of Roma women inclusion and AI and non-discrimination.

¹³ The EU has observer status with ECRI.

4. Programmatic co-operation

The EU-CoE co-operation through **Joint Programmes (JPs)** 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 and the Southern Mediterranean. They consist mainly of country-specific- or regional interventions but also include thematic programmes covering a wide array of countries.

As of 31 December 2025, the global volume of the EU-CoE active multi-annual co-operation agreements amounted to € 225.2 million, with an annualised envelope of € 58 million (prorated).¹⁴

The annual receipts generated by the implementation of these programmes amounted to € 41.4 million in 2025. With an additional € 1.5 million of receipts from the co-operation undertakings other than JPs, the EU's share in the CoE's revenue from all extra-budgetary contributions for 2025 corresponded to 46.5 %, confirming that the **EU remains the largest single donor** to the CoE's technical co-operation activities.

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

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 period¹⁵. The fifth phase of the South Programme ended in October 2025, and the sixth phase started in November 2025.

Moreover, the facilities are being **complemented** by country-specific and regional thematic interventions: two new country-specific projects for Albania¹⁶ and Serbia¹⁷ were launched respectively to support the electoral cycle and to improve the treatment of inmates with mental health issues and, increasing the efficiency and quality of alternative sanctions and post-penal care. Since 2016, Intercultural Learning Exchange through Global Education, Networking and Dialogue (iLEGEND)¹⁸ - implemented by the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity (North-South Centre, NSC) has engaged youth and civil society from EU, candidate and potential candidate countries, as well as from third countries from the Southern Mediterranean and Africa, providing them with training and networking initiatives to reinforce their knowledge, skills and competencies to understand, claim and advocate for their own rights and the rights of others, having the CoE's standards as reference.

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 rapidly evolving developments have required **flexibility in planning and implementation**. The EU-CoE programmatic facilities proved sufficiently adaptable to accommodate these evolving circumstances, allowing the joint co-operation framework to respond to emerging needs in a timely, effective and efficient manner. In particular, the CoE adjusted its ongoing support to Ukraine by reallocating resources, adapting project activities and introducing targeted interventions within existing JPs. This ensured that priority areas, such as strengthening democratic institutions, safeguarding human rights and supporting resilience in the justice and rule of law sectors, continued to receive appropriate assistance despite the challenging and unpredictable context. The same flexibility allowed for the adjustment of co-operation in Azerbaijan and the swift continuation of activities

¹⁴ For details, see Addendum CM(2026)32-addprov “JPs between the CoE and the EU in 2025”.

¹⁵ The next phases of the Horizontal Facility and the Partnership for Good Governance are in an advanced stage of negotiations.

¹⁶ “Support to the Electoral Cycle in Albania” (2025-2028).

¹⁷ “Improving the treatment of inmates with mental health issues and increasing efficiency and quality of alternative sanctions, and post-penal care (2025-2028).”

¹⁸ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/north-south-centre/ilegend>

following the authorities' resumption of technical co-operation under the Action Plan for Azerbaijan 2022-2026. In Georgia, the European Commission decided to halt technical assistance directly benefiting Georgian authorities until further notice. The decision affected all bilateral support benefiting the Georgian authorities under EU-CoE JPs and required respective adjustments. However, the CoE continued its support in a challenging and complex environment by providing targeted assistance to civil society organisations, the media and citizens, while maintaining constructive dialogue with national authorities outside the EU/JPs.

The decision by the EU to **open accession negotiations with Ukraine, the Republic of Moldova and Bosnia and Herzegovina** continued to be an **impetus for strengthening the joint co-operation**. The assistance that the CoE can provide to these countries through the JPs (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 shaping co-operation priorities. These priorities are based on the recommendations of the CoE's monitoring and advisory bodies, the case-law of the Court and the 2025 Communication on EU enlargement policy and the respective country reports. In this context, targeted support has been provided to Ukraine to help advance the implementation of EU criteria, particularly in relation to strengthening the protection of national minorities in line with European standards. Likewise, in the Republic of Moldova, joint efforts have supported progress on justice sector reforms, ensuring closer alignment with EU and CoE benchmarks and contributing to improved institutional independence, integrity and efficiency. The Partnership for Good Governance programme also continues to support Armenia and Azerbaijan. Specific support has been provided to the representatives of Belarusian democratic forces and civil society in the field of gender equality and is being pursued in the field of non-discrimination. Targeted JP support to reforms required to advance Bosnia and Herzegovina's EU accession path will further continue in the broader framework of the CoE Action Plan for Bosnia and Herzegovina 2026-2029.

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 especially for the joint co-operation for Ukraine and the Republic of Moldova. This co-operation, including via cross-regional actions supported jointly by the Horizontal Facility and the Partnership for Good Governance (PGG), 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. In Morocco, the EU-CoE MA-JUST (2024-2027) JP is currently being implemented with a view to improving access to justice for all, including the most vulnerable, and increasing the efficiency of justice. 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 (2022-2025), expertise has been deployed to align national legislation with CoE standards in Jordan, Lebanon, Libya and Morocco, whilst co-operation has been intensified with the Algerian and Egyptian authorities at the start of the new, **sixth phase of the Programme (2025-2028)**.

The achievements of EU-CoE co-operation in the Southern Mediterranean have laid the foundations for strengthened collaboration in other regions, with existing CoE external co-operation mechanisms, such as the NSC.¹⁹

¹⁹Drawing on its experience in Africa, particularly in the youth sector through joint management agreements and programmes with the European Commission 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).

Importantly, co-operation and **technical assistance programmes targeting the EU member States** continued in 2025, although the number of projects adjudicated to the CoE for implementation is being reduced; nonetheless, important country-specific and multi-country projects are still being adjudicated in important areas of co-operation.

The EU-CoE structured co-operation framework funded under the EU Technical Support Instrument (TSI) (SG REFORM) continued to support the capacity of the EU member States 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, artificial intelligence and gaming and gambling addiction in children and youth), the rule of law (including reform of the judiciary and the fight against economic crime) and 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 co-operation on supporting the **implementation of financial sanctions and assets freezes**, 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 European Commission services, notably DG JUST and DG EAC.²⁰ An agreement was concluded between the CoE's European Directorate for the Quality of Medicines and HealthCare (EDQM) and the European Medicines Agency on strengthening quality control of medicines in Africa.

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

Almost three years after the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government of the CoE in Reykjavík and following the consolidation of the institutional changes in both the **CoE and the EU**, the **value-based strategic partnership continues to deepen**, through political dialogue, including at the highest level, and legal and programmatic co-operation. Co-operation between the EU and the CoE in supporting **Ukraine's pursuit of justice and international accountability** in the face of Russia's aggression was further strengthened and received significant visibility in the media. The signature of the Convention establishing the International Claims Commission for Ukraine and substantial progress achieved in the process of the setting up of the Special Tribunal for the Crime of Aggression against Ukraine are tangible expressions of this co-operation. The timely entry into force of the Convention referred to above, the increase in the number of its Parties and the finalisation of steps related to the establishment of the Special Tribunal will remain in the focus of the dialogue with the EU.

The process of the **EU's accession to the ECHR** advanced further with a formal **request for an opinion on the accession instrument made by the European Commission to the Court of Justice of the EU**. The accession **remains a strategic goal** for both the EU and the CoE and will be of central importance for the coherence of the European human rights protection system.

The **signature by the EU of the CoE Convention on the Protection of the Environment through Criminal Law** represents another important landmark step in consolidating joint endeavours. The CoE continues to **encourage 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 must be continued at both strategic and operational levels.

The co-operation in the context of the **EU Enlargement and the Rule of Law Cycle within the EU and candidate countries** continues to advance, showcasing the practical recognition by the EU of the CoE's expertise, standard-setting and monitoring role. It also further emphasises 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 and CEPEJ, in the fields of the execution of the

²⁰ For details, see Addendum CM(2026)32-addprov "JPs between the CoE and the EU in 2025".

Court's judgments, media, civil society, social rights and several others, is expected to remain a central priority for the years to come, both with regard to EU member States and EU candidate countries,. The CoE will, in particular, continue to utilise its unique set of instruments to accompany candidate countries and potential candidates on their EU path and reform agendas.

Co-operation within the framework of **EU-CoE JPs** remains one of the pillars of the strategic partnership between the CoE and the EU and reflects their mutual commitment to promoting common values in our respective membership and beyond, towards non-European States. The EU remains the largest single donor to the CoE's technical co-operation activities. Particular attention must be paid to the visibility of such JPs in order to raise public awareness.

In the face of major geopolitical shifts, the CoE and the EU have been stepping up dialogue and seeking **new synergies to address both existing and emerging challenges, particularly democratic stability and security**. The progressive deployment of the New Democratic Pact for Europe will offer opportunities to identify further synergies with the EU. At the current geopolitical juncture, the CoE and the EU must be considered as natural partners to defend the rules-based international order.