

Exhibition “Behind the wall: the CPT in action”

7 April 2025, Strasbourg (France)

Opening speech by Theodoros Rousopoulos
President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Ladies and gentlemen,

I would like to take you back to 1983, when a report by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe found that torture — the gravest violation of human rights — was taking place in a large number of countries around the world.

This realisation led PACE to recommend the adoption of a European Convention on the prevention of torture, which would include a unique preventive mechanism based on visits to places of detention.

At that time, the European Convention on Human Rights, which is often referred to as the "jewel" of the Council of Europe, already prohibited torture and inhuman or degrading treatment in its Article 3. But a jewel, no matter how brilliant, needs a strong setting to hold it in place.

This is why the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture was established, and by virtue of Article 1, the CPT came into being.

A true human rights system cannot rest on a single pillar, no matter how strong. It requires a framework of conventions, mechanisms, and institutions working together.

That is why the Convention for the Prevention of Torture and its Committee hold a pivotal place in the architecture of the Council of Europe.

They ensure that the fundamental promise of the European Convention on Human Rights — that no one shall be subjected to torture or inhuman or degrading treatment — is not merely words, but a reality that we actively enforce.

Since the establishment of the CPT, the Assembly has shown its unwavering support for its work, while taking into account its conclusions and recommendations in numerous reports and resolutions on various member States.

The Assembly also participates, in accordance with the Convention itself, in the procedure leading to the appointment of CPT members, by ensuring that the candidates to the CPT proposed by delegations to the Assembly are sufficiently qualified, independent and impartial.

Today, we gather to celebrate the work undertaken by the Committee for the Prevention of Torture over the past 35 years. This is both a joyful and solemn occasion — joyful because of the progress we have made, thanks to the tireless efforts of the CPT, and solemn because the fight against torture is far from over.

Torture is the ultimate violation of human dignity. Its prohibition is absolute — without exceptions, without justification. No matter the circumstances, no matter the threats we face, the Council of Europe has always stood firm in rejecting torture as an unacceptable stain on our values. This principle is a cornerstone of our civilization and of our democratic way of life.

Yet today, we must also acknowledge the dark realities that persist.

The war of aggression launched by Russia against Ukraine has once again shown us the horrific consequences of disregarding these fundamental principles. Prisoners of war and unlawfully detained civilians are subjected to daily torture, inhuman treatment, and brutal violence.

These are not just violations of international law — they are attacks on the very essence of human dignity. In a world increasingly in flux, where values are challenged and certainties are shaken, some principles must remain untouchable. The absolute prohibition of torture and inhuman and degrading treatments is one of them.

It defines who we are as Europeans. It is a measure of our humanity. And it is a commitment we will never abandon. So today, we do not only celebrate the achievements of the CPT — we reaffirm our duty to uphold its mission.

We stand together in saying: torture has no place in Europe, no place in our world, no place in our future. We are proud of this commitment, and we will stand by it — now and always.

Thank you.