

International Parliamentary Assemblies

The Council of Europe

Creation

5 May 1949 (Treaty of London)

Composition

- 46 member countries (among which the member countries of the EU)
- 5 countries with the status of observer member of the Committee of Ministers (Canada, Holy See, Japan, Mexico, USA)

A country can only join the Council of Europe on the condition that it respects human rights, the democratic principles and the rule of law.

Objectives

- To defend human rights, the parliamentary democracy and the rule of law.
- To standardise the social and legal practices which differ from member country to member country.
- To promote awareness of a European identity based on shared values and cutting across different cultures.
- Since 1989, its main job has become:
 - acting as a political anchor and human rights watchdog for Europe's post-communist democracies
 - assisting the countries of central and eastern Europe in carrying out political, legal, constitutional and economic reforms
 - providing know-how in areas such as human rights, local democracy, education, culture and the environment.

Organs

- The Committee of Ministers
This is the decision-making body, consisting of the ministers of Foreign Affairs of the member states.
- The Parliamentary Assembly
This is the deliberative body of the Council.

Institutions

- The European Court of Human Rights
- The Commissioner for Human Rights
- The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities = the advisory body which represents local and regional authorities

Monitoring mechanisms implemented through specific bodies

The **European Commission against Racism and Intolerance** (ECRI) was established at the Vienna Summit in 1993. ECRI is an independent monitoring mechanism charged with assisting the Member States of the Council of Europe in the battle against racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and intolerance.

The **Group of States against Corruption** (GRECO) was set up in 1999 by the Council of Europe to oversee compliance by the Member States with anti-corruption standards that it puts in place. GRECO contributes to highlighting loopholes in political measures to fight corruption taken at national level, and encourages Member States to take the necessary legislative, institutional and practical reforms.

The **Venice Commission** issues legal opinions and assists the Member States in their efforts to adapt their legal and institutional framework to European regulation on democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

The Parliamentary Assembly

The Parliamentary Assembly was created simultaneously with the Council of Europe itself and has its headquarters in Strasbourg (Palace of Europe).

» Composition

The Parliamentary Assembly comprises 306 actual members and 306 substitutes.

They are appointed or elected by the national or federal parliaments among their own members. The balance of political parties within each national delegation must ensure a fair representation of the political parties or groups in their national parliaments.

» Working

The sessions of the Parliamentary Assembly are divided into four part-sessions, each lasting for about a week and taking place at the end of January, April, June and September. When the Assembly is not in session, the Standing Committee acts on behalf of it.

» Powers

The Assembly votes on recommendations, resolutions and advice. The parliamentarians speak in a personal capacity and do not bind their governments. They do however observe the voting instructions issued by the 5 political groups that make up the Assembly.

» Organisation

The work of the Assembly is prepared by eight specialised committees:

- Committee on Political affairs and Democracy
- Committee on Legal affairs and Human rights
- Committee on Social affairs, Health and Sustainable development
- Committee on Migration, Refugees and Displaced persons
- Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media
- Committee on Equality and Non-discrimination
- Committee on Rules of procedure, Immunities and Institutional affairs
- Committee on the Honouring of obligations and Commitments by member states of the Council of Europe

Council of Europe:
www.coe.int

Parliamentary Assembly:
<http://assembly.coe.int>