

The Council of Europe is composed of two main bodies: a Parliamentary Assembly and a Committee of Ministers, assisted by a Secretariat. What really makes the Council different from the other inter-governmental organizations is the fact that the Assembly is composed not of government representatives but of parliamentarians from each country. The Assembly is the first European parliament, and perhaps the first international parliament; it brings together 147 parliamentarians and symbolizes a new approach, the representation of peoples, not governments. Even though it has no legislative power, it promotes European ideals by adopting resolutions and by presenting the Committee of Ministers with recommendations that, because of the high priority given to improving the "quality of life", are often surprisingly bold and original. Even though it is only a consultative body, the Assembly acts, nevertheless, as an initiator, communicating to others its enthusiasm for European unity. It is, in fact, a "laboratory" for new ideas. It meets three times a year and once with the European Parliament. Its 13 special commissions sit more often. The Assembly deals, among other things, with all major international problems of the day, thus making Strasbourg a useful listening-post. It is no surprise that many statesmen — Churchill, Robert Schuman, Spaak, Senghor, Adenauer, De Gasperi and U Thant, to mention only a few — have addressed the Assembly because it is an excellent platform for the promulgation of European thought and action. The current Secretary-General of the United Nations, Kurt Waldheim, is to speak at the next session of the Assembly, in May.

European thought and action promulgated at Assembly

It is the function of the Committee of Ministers to follow up the Assembly's recommendations at the government level. The Committee, a diplomatic body in the traditional mould, is composed of the ministers of foreign affairs from all 18 member states. Each minister appoints a delegate, usually of ambassadorial rank, who also acts as permanent representative in Strasbourg. The ministers meet twice a year; the delegates, for roughly one week every month. Furthermore, the Committee has, over the last few years, promoted the organization of ministerial conferences in fields such as education, the environment, justice, culture, land use, family life and labour. As a general rule, the Committee has the decision-making powers required to resolve all questions involving the Council. The scope of its political activity is extensive. In particular, it approves the work program and the conventions drawn

up by committees of experts from various countries. It adopts common policies and sends resolutions to the various governments. An annual conference brings together the ministers and the heads of the Assembly's commissions to discuss the question of major importance. It must be admitted that the Assembly sometimes clashes with the Committee of Ministers, criticizing them for failing to go as far as fast as it wishes on intergovernmental questions. The conception of politics, the art of the possible has a clear indication here.

The Secretariat is small — barely 100 officers, compared to 7,000 in the Commission for the European Communities but does work of a high standard. Its task, that of serving the Assembly and the Committee of Ministers, is a delicate and thankless one. With perseverance, it manages to run the Council's general program efficiently, but the initiatives it takes are sometimes considered too idealistic and are not accepted immediately. The Council also has offices in Paris and Brussels.

Work of the Council of Europe

While most international organizations have a more-or-less-clearly defined sphere of activity assigned to them, the member states of the Council agreed to set up an organization that could concern itself with virtually all areas of human activity. Essentially, the Council's aim is to improve the quality of life and to defend human values in Europe. The task is a major one and will take a long time to carry out, because of the marked differences among the 18 states involved. Hardly a year after the Council had been founded, it was wishing to deal with the most pressing postwar problems, it adopted the European Convention on Human Rights. For the first time, such an instrument provided an effective guarantee of basic liberties. No one has served ever since as an example in other areas of the world. All members of the Council are bound by the Convention, which has succeeded in translating the general principles of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights 1948 into genuine legal obligations enforced by a Commission and a Court, both of which are independent bodies, and by the Committee of Ministers. It should be noted that, in most of the member countries, a person alleging that a contracting state has violated the Convention may institute proceedings before the Commission. At the time, the "direct impact" of the Convention represented a most significant development in the field of international law. The originality of the system