

## ANNEX

### The Council of Europe

The Council of Europe is a European intergovernmental organisation founded in 1949 and based in Strasbourg, France. It is the largest of the exclusively European institutions, representing 40 member countries. The Council of Europe performs a mandate to promote increased unity in Europe through:

- the protection of democratic principles;
- the rule of law and human rights;
- the cooperation in initiatives aimed at improved living conditions, solving major social issues, and increasing Europe's cultural identity; and
- support for facilitating the political and legal transition of Europe's new democracies.

Membership is open to any European State considered to be in observance of the rule of law and the protection of human rights. While closely related, the Council of Europe's membership and mandate remain distinct from those of the institutions of the EU.

Heads of State or Government of the 40 Member States participate in a Summit Meeting twice yearly. The Summit Meeting provides a forum at the highest level for discussion of major political and social issues, and the progression of European integration.

The Council of Europe's decision-making body, the Committee of Ministers, consists of Foreign Ministers from each of the Member States. The Committee Presidency rotates between the Member States, alphabetically, every six months. The Committee's role is to address political issues of common interest among the Member States leading to decisions on action to be taken. Committee decisions are made as conventions - with binding affect on the signatory Member States - or recommendations. Examples of conventions are :

- the European Convention on Human Rights;
- the European Cultural Convention;
- the European Social Charter;
- the Convention on the Prevention of Torture; and
- the European Charter for Regional Minority Languages.

The Parliamentary Assembly of the Council is responsible for making policy recommendations to the Committee of Ministers. It meets for a week, four times yearly, in Strasbourg, and for a further week in one of the Member States. The Assembly Presidency is a three-year position elected by the Assembly membership. The Assembly consists of representatives of the main political parties in each Member State, appointed

to the Assembly by their national Parliaments. The number of representatives from each Member State is based on population. These representatives tend to reflect the prevailing views of their party affiliation rather than presenting single unified national positions to the Assembly.

There are 13 committees within the Assembly which address specific policy issues in the following areas :

- politics, economics and development; social health and family matters; legal and human rights; culture and education; science and technology; regional planning and local authorities; agriculture; relations with European non-Member States; migrants, refugees and demography; parliamentary and public relations; and rules of procedure, budget and intergovernmental work programmes.

The written recommendations adopted by the Assembly for presentation to the Committee of Ministers have considerable influence on the work of the committee and ultimately on the Member States' governments.

Resolution (93)26, adopted by the Committee of Ministers in May 1993, allowed any state (including non-European states) willing to accept the principles of democracy, the rule of law, human rights and fundamental freedoms, and wishing to co-operate with the Council, to be granted observer status. In June 1996, Canada was notified of the Council's decision to grant observer status. This status allows Canada to appoint a permanent observer to attend meetings of Ministers' representatives, and as well to send observers to committees of experts and to conferences of specialized ministers. The Parliament of Canada was also granted observer status with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on May 1997. Observer status will provide a parliamentary bridgehead for Canadian parliamentarians who will have opportunities to speak on issues of importance to Canada and be able to participate in the work of some of the Parliamentary Assembly committees.

#### For more information:

<http://www.dfait-maeci.gc.ca/eu-mission>

<http://qsilver.queensu.ca/~ecsac/>

<http://www.europa.eu.int>

<http://www.weu.int>

<http://www.coe.fr>

Text of the Treaties can be found at the following website:

<http://europa.eu.int/eur-lex/fr/treaties/index.html>