

# Contribution to the open call for input for the 4th Council of Europe Summit

20 February 2023

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## Background

Both founded in the course of The Hague Congress of Europe in 1948, European Movement Germany (EM Germany) and the Council of Europe are historically interlinked. Against this background and in the context of the current need for a strong institution in wider Europe, EM Germany is presently strengthening its lobbying and communication to the continent's oldest pan-European institution and has submitted the following contribution to the open call for input for the summit of heads of state and government in Reykjavik, Iceland on 16 – 17 May 2023.

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### 1. How can the Council of Europe expand its strategic and political role in order to become more capable of promoting and protecting fundamental values?

In this time of war and the rise of anti-democratic movements, the Council of Europe's objectives to promote democracy, human rights and the rule of law are more important than ever. Now that Russia has had to leave the Council of Europe, there is a window of opportunity for reform to strengthen the democratic DNA of the institution. However, the reform process should not focus on a substantive reorientation, but on strengthening existing pillars.

Against this background, we aim at highlighting three proposals:

- **Strengthen existing structures:** There is a clear need to strengthen the institutions in the Council of Europe that promote rule of law and anti-corruption, notably the Venice Commission and the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO). Member states have a particular responsibility to increase funding for the Council of Europe and to ensure that they fully implement the Council of Europe's recommendations, conventions and the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights.
- **Institutionalise leadership:** As proposed by the high-level reflection group, we support the idea of institutionalising the summit of Heads of State and Government and holding it at regular intervals. This will give the Council of Europe more visibility and strengthen the strategic direction of the institution.

- **Involve social actors:** The Council of Europe is already a strong actor in strengthening and establishing independent democratically constituted and representative social forces. The Council of Europe and its member states should further enhance their cooperation with social forces and their capacity-building activities.

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## 2. What role can the Council of Europe take in ensuring the prosecution of war crimes related to Russia's aggression against Ukraine?

In line with the recommendations of the high-level reflection group of the Council of Europe, we see the need to strengthen the dialogue and cooperation between the Council of Europe and the non-judicial bodies of the United Nations. Moreover, the Council of Europe should consider empowering the role of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights.

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## 3. How can the Council of Europe provide a framework for effective measures to address current and future challenges (i.e. issues relating to the environment and human rights, inequality and digitalisation)?

The Council of Europe is little known for its role as pioneer in setting standards and values, e.g. in artificial intelligence, robotics, genetic engineering and data protection. Against this background, it is important to reinforce the synergies between the EU and the Council of Europe in this framework.

- **First**, it will be important to complete the negotiations of the EU's accession to the European Convention on Human Rights and to come to a political agreement at the 4<sup>th</sup> summit of heads of state and government.
- **Second**, it is crucial that the EU and its members states will accede to the fundamental conventions, notably the European Social Charter (revised), the European Cultural Convention and the Council of Europe Convention on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (Istanbul Convention).

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## 4. What role should the Council of Europe play in the rapidly evolving multilateral architecture within Europe and world politics?

- **First**, there is the need for a clear understanding of the respective roles and tasks of the two international organisations EU (high degree of supranationality) and Council of Europe (with a high level of legal impact for citizens). In addition, the informal cooperation in the European Political Community reached a high level of public interest. In this environment, the Council of Europe members states should clarify the respective roles of the three institutions and identify synergy opportunities at the 4<sup>th</sup> summit. In this respect, the Council of Europe and the EU should revise their 2007 Memorandum of Understanding as a follow up of the summit.
- **Second**, the Council of Europe and its institutions should be even more involved in the EU enlargement process. The Council of Europe is the outer layer in concentric circles of European political integration, and the EU candidate countries are usually already member states of the Council of Europe, which provides a foundation of human rights, democracy and the rule of law on which the accession process can build.

- **Third** and as mentioned above, the Council of Europe should strengthen the institutional support and capacity building instruments for representative and democratic social forces in the EU candidate countries.

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## 5. How can the Council of Europe become a more modern organisation with an appropriate framework to improve the support for member states as well as respond to current and future challenges?

The Council of Europe should be a promoter of structured democratic dialogue in a multilevel Europe. It is the only pan-European institution with a high-level exchange between democratic representatives on all political levels and civil organisations.

- **First**, in this democratic matrix, a crucial prerequisite is a financial strengthening of the Council of Europe by its member states. In regard to the current democratic challenges, the institution is more important than ever and this should be reflected in the member states' contributions.
- **Second**, there is lack of leadership and ownership at the level of the heads of state and government. As mentioned above, we suggest institutionalising the summit of heads of state and government.
- **Third**, the institution should strengthen its outreach activities in order to promote the work of the Council of Europe and its structured democratic pan-European dialogue. The INGO Conference of the Council of Europe, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe as well as the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities brings together different actors that are firmly rooted in society down to the local and grassroots levels and whose role as promoters of the Council of Europe is still too little used.