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June 2025

Policy Paper

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Shaping the Parliamentary Assembly's relations with the United Nations Human Rights Council

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1. Introduction

The evolving global human rights landscape demands stronger collaboration between international and regional institutions. In particular, the Human Rights Council (HRC) of the United Nations and the Council of Europe (CoE) share overlapping mandates and values yet often operate independently.

The following document explores the legal and operational foundations for increased coordination between these two bodies. It highlights the potential for joint assessments, shared resolutions, and formalized channels of communication that could enhance human rights protection across Europe. Emphasizing the importance of mutual recognition and structured cooperation, the paper proposes concrete steps to align agendas, improve institutional synergy, and strengthen the voice of European human rights mechanisms within the broader UN framework.

2. The United Nations and the Council of Europe: Shared missions

Paragraph 11 of the Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 15 March 2006, 60/251, on which the Human Rights Council is legally based, mentions the involvement of intergovernmental organizations.

Most of the social and humanitarian progress carried out in Europe was possible due to the intervention of the Council of Europe and the European Union. Due to the European Convention on Human Rights, the death penalty was abolished in 46 countries¹, which benefitted around 700 million citizens.

It is inevitable for such influential regional realities to be involved within the fields in which the U.N. operates. Such collaboration would be also useful to make the U.N.'s action within the region more effective. Some principles, such as freedom of religion and belief, are clearly stated both within article 9 of the European Convention on Human Rights and within the premises of the United Nation's General Assembly's resolution² which constitutes and defines the Human Rights Council.

3. Joint assessment effort

The Human Rights Council, while addressing the potential violations in Ukraine, stated that it: "Encourages relevant thematic special procedure mandate holders, within their respective mandates, to continue to pay particular attention to the situation of human rights in Ukraine stemming from the Russian aggression, and urges all relevant parties to cooperate with those mandate holders."³ This might be interpreted as a general reference to the work of organizations such as the Council of Europe. Such call-to-action fits, for example, with the reporting activity of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

Another point of junction between the two legal systems might be found in the provision within which the General Assembly of the United Nations stated that universal periodic reviews concern the "the fulfilment by each State of its human rights obligations and commitments"⁴.

¹ "The Council of Europe: [key facts](#)

² [Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 15 March 2006](#) [without reference to a Main Committee (A/60/L.48)] 60/251. Human Rights Council

³ Human Rights Council, Thirty-fourth special session, 12 May 2022. [Report of the Human Rights Council](#). Vice-President and Rapporteur: Ulugbek Lapasov (Uzbekistan)

⁴ [Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on 15 March 2006](#) [without reference to a Main Committee www.assedel.org

This wide definition might give the opportunity to include within the evaluation standards also the European Convention on Human Rights and the Council of Europe's conventions, while treating member states of the Council of Europe. If this interpretation is correct, the reporting activity carried out by the committees of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe might also be functional to provide a correct and complete picture of the human rights situation within a member State of the Council of Europe.

4. Improvement of the coordination between the delegates representing the member states of the Council of Europe and the Human Rights Council

Even if the national sovereignty and the right of nations to plan their diplomatic action are undisputed, within an institution based on values and aims which share multiple common parts with the Council of Europe, there is a need for member States of the countries to not forget the principles and guidelines to which they submitted once acting in a different organisation.

On May 2022, after Ukraine submitted a request⁵ to the Council for a special session of the Human Rights Council on the deteriorating human rights situation in Ukraine stemming from the Russian aggression, only 16 member States of the Human Rights Council and 36 observer states backed it. Among the Member States of the Council of Europe are: Albania, Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia, Cyprus, Czechia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Montenegro, Netherlands, North Macedonia, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Republic of Moldova, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, Türkiye, Ukraine and the United Kingdom. However, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Iceland, Monaco, San Marino and Serbia were still missing.

Even if most of the member States of the CoE aligned with the request, it is surprising to see that the consensus among them regarding the decision to adopt has not been reached. This is especially surprising given that only two months before the submission of the request, on the 16th of March 2022, the Committee of Ministers approved unanimously a resolution⁶ which removed the Russian Federation from the CoE.

This represents only one example of how much room for improvement there is in relation to the effectiveness of the coordination among the Council of Europe, its member States and the other international organisations involving them. In such cases, where voting sessions or submissions are involving member states of the CoE, the Chairman of the Parliamentary Assembly of the CoE might propose, under the input of the chairmen of relevant committees, to the Secretary General of the CoE to invite the Committee of Ministers to align with a common line under the principles of the CoE.

5. Enhancing Practical Engagement Between PACE and the UN Human Rights Council

In addition to institutional strategies, there are concrete engagement channels through which the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) can strengthen its participation in the UN Human Rights Council (HRC). The HRC meets three times a year for three- or four-

(A/60/L.48)] 60/251. Human Rights Council para. 5 (e)

⁵ [Letter dated 9 May 2022 from the Permanent Representative of Ukraine](#) to the United Nations Office at Geneva addressed to the President of the Human Rights Council

⁶ [Resolution CM/Res\(2022\)2](#) on the cessation of the membership of the Russian Federation to the Council of Europe

week sessions, with numerous opportunities for observer participation and side events. The PACE could ensure its visibility by actively participating through delivering oral interventions during general debates and organizing side events. Notably, while PACE is not a civil society actor per se, it can still adopt these tools in ways that reflect its unique institutional mandate.

For example, committees within PACE can coordinate with Special Procedures mandate holders when preparing reports or thematic recommendations. Furthermore, the UN maintains a public register⁷ of communications sent to governments under special procedures. PACE may consult these to align its country-specific work and may request information from OHCHR on non-public initiatives where overlap exists.

A particularly relevant mechanism for PACE's engagement is the Universal Periodic Review (UPR). The UPR is a peer-review mechanism under which the Human Rights Council periodically assesses the fulfillment by each of the 193 UN Member States of their human rights obligations and commitments. Each review is based on three sources: (a) a national report prepared by the State under review; (b) a compilation of UN information on the State by the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR); and (c) a summary of information submitted by other stakeholders—including civil society organizations, national human rights institutions (NHRIs), and regional organizations—also compiled by OHCHR.

The review takes place in Geneva during a session of the UPR Working Group, composed of the 47 HRC member States. It consists of an interactive dialogue between the State under review and all United Nations member states. Following the session, the Working Group adopts an outcome document, which is later considered and formally adopted by the Human Rights Council.

PACE could emulate civil society organizations and regional mechanisms by contributing to the UPR process as one of the “other stakeholders”⁸, submitting more input to the report of the Council of Europe for this Review. However, because of the fact that PACE itself is not an NGO, its participation can be channelled through its regional institutional character. Additionally, PACE can make oral interventions during the regular sessions of the Human Rights Council when the outcomes of the UPR reviews are discussed.

Finally, PACE may leverage the accredited status of the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights to gain access to relevant forums, helping to formalize its contributions and ensuring alignment with broader Council of Europe strategies.

6. The involvement of civil society

A similar strategy might be adopted by the PACE during its plenary sessions. NGOs in existence (officially recognized by a government) for at least two years, with established headquarters, a democratically-adopted constitution, authority to speak for its members, a representative structure, appropriate mechanisms of accountability and democratic and transparent decision-making processes have the right to obtain the consultative status in front of the UN Economic and Social Council, and then the accreditation⁹ to the HRC sessions. The completion of this process lets them participate to sessions through written and oral contributions and the organization of side events as moments of informal diplomacy.

⁷ [Communication report and search](#), OHCHR

⁸ [\(OHCHR 2025\)](#) 4th UPR cycle: contributions and participation of "other stakeholders" in the UPR

⁹ [ECOSOC Resolution 1996/31](#), PART VII participation of non-governmental organizations in international conferences convened by the United Nations and their preparatory process.

PACE may adopt a similar model, enhancing its visibility and policy impact without compromising its parliamentary mandate. An important part of this process would be to formalize calls for submissions in relation to the production of specific reports by PACE committees and give more space to the contributions of civil society organisations, such as the organisation of hundreds of side events during the Human Rights Council sessions.

Recognizing that the HRC emphasizes technical human rights monitoring over political debate, PACE should highlight its legislative oversight and monitoring role (focusing on the report production of the Assembly), avoiding framing its participation as political lobbying. This aligns with the HRC's function as a technical review body

7. Potential issues

Some actors may resist formalizing the participation of CoE entities in UN mechanisms, particularly the Universal Periodic Review, due to concerns over precedent or institutional autonomy.

Member States of both institutions may at times pursue diverging political and legal priorities, particularly in areas such as migration, national security, or judicial independence. In certain contexts, national governments express concern over what they perceive as excessive supranational influence or judicial overreach from regional mechanisms such as the European Court of Human Rights.

A clear illustration of this challenge is the open letter of 22 May 2025¹⁰, signed by the heads of government of Denmark, Italy, Austria, Belgium, the Czech Republic, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and Poland. While reaffirming their commitment to human rights and multilateralism, the signatories explicitly call for a reconsideration of how the European Court of Human Rights interprets the Convention. This particularly relates to the expulsion of criminal foreign nationals and the ability of democratic governments to protect public order and national security. The signatories argued that, in some cases, the Court's jurisprudence may have extended beyond the original intent of the Convention, thus limiting national sovereignty in sensitive policy areas. Their position reflects a broader political reality; even among states that are firmly committed to the European human rights system, there is growing pressure to recalibrate the balance between national discretion and international oversight.

8. Conclusion

The protection of human rights in an increasingly complex international landscape demands coordinated action between global and regional institutions. The Council of Europe, with its long-standing expertise and legal instruments, should be positioned to serve as a strategic partner to the United Nations Human Rights Council. The proposals outlined in this paper might represent concrete steps toward a more coherent and efficient human rights architecture.

¹⁰ [Letter](https://www.assedel.org/en/letter-addressed-by-9-member-states-of-the-council-of-europe-s-prime-ministers-to-the-council-of-europe-2025) addressed by 9 member states of the Council of Europe's Prime Ministers to the Council of Europe, 2025
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