

Address of the President of Latvia, Egils Levits, at the discussion 'Latvia and Council of Europe: today's challenges and future perspectives' marking the 25th anniversary of Latvia's membership in the Council of Europe

Published: 10.02.2020.

[Egils Levits](#)



Dear colleagues and friends,

Just a moment ago Mr Teikmanis pointed out that the Council of Europe (CoE) is an organisation whose main task is to ensure and develop the standards of rule of law. That was also the purpose for creating CoE in 1949. CoE was established to counterbalance the part of Europe controlled by the Soviet Union at the time. CoE was meant to consolidate these standards and demonstrate that we are not 'them', and we have our own shared values. CoE was built on and still operates on the basis of values like the rule of law and democracy. To become a member of the organisation, you had to be able to demonstrate compliance with these standards. Even some Western European countries like Turkey, Portugal, Greece and Spain were admitted to the organisation only when all of these standards were met by them. These are countries that did not join upon founding of CoE, they were admitted only later when they demonstrated their adherence to these standards. Numerous other newly established or re-established independent countries joined the CoE in 1989 after the collapse of the Soviet Union, and that is what the organisation looks like today. Generally speaking, CoE was the first and still is the only organisation that unites only democratic countries from all over European continent, not only EU member states.

However, we must also recognise that at times compliance with these standards was forgotten in the process of enlargement. We should also acknowledge the recent efforts of Latvian delegation to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, and not all countries have done that. When I worked as a judge at the European Court of Human Rights, we had huge problems with Turkey and Russia. Nowadays it is mostly Russia causing biggest problems, but Turkey and some other countries are hard to handle too.

I believe the CoE is no longer as homogenous as it were in 1989. We, Latvia, belong to those Council of Europe countries who call for strict adherence to values around which CoE was built.

Latvia has already presided over CoE once on the rotational basis. We coordinated CoE work from November 2001 – May 2001. In three years from now, in 2023, we will have this privilege again.

And I am happy to see here today at this Silver Jubilee all those who were there 25 years ago, on 10 February 1995. Everyone who back then and later contributed to Latvia's membership in the Council of Europe and, of course, all those who represent us now. Although a rather small, compact group, you represent different generations of Latvia's representatives in the CoE. Together you have done so much for the organisation.

Mr Andrejevs and Mr Birkavs shared their memories of the time when Latvia was going through accession to the organisation, which became our 'big ticket' to the EU. Once CoE had ascertained our compliance with standards, EU could admit us without further vetting.

Our role today is different. We develop these standards ourselves here in Latvia. We adopt laws, maintain these standards, as well as promoting and helping others to develop these standards internationally. I mostly mean the EU and, of course, other international organisations. We have to also 'push and shove' with others in CoE. That is why I would like to congratulate everyone who is still active in CoE. Latvia and you personally contribute to stronger rule of law and democracy in Latvia and also all over Europe. In the broadest of senses.

Thank you!



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