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European
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Association

NEWS



Special Issue

This is a special issue of the NEWS to commemorate the visit of the EPEA Steering Committee (SC) to the Council of Europe (COE), and to provide members with an account of that visit and its outcome.

The background

What is the COE?

The COE is not the European Union, it is older and larger. However, the 15 EU states are all members of the COE. Many label the COE as 'the democratic conscience of Europe' because it is concerned primarily with the advancement of social and democratic issues by backing political, legislative and constitutional reform. It was set up in 1949 with 10 member countries; today there are 46 member countries with over 800 million citizens. Any European state can become a member if it accepts the principles of the COE, its treaties, conventions and rules and work towards achieving them.

What are its aims?

The main aims are to defend:

- human rights
- democracy
- justice
- the rule of law
- the natural environment

and to attempt to solve the major problems of modern society; (social exclusion, racism, organised crime, terrorism, drugs, etc).

What are the conventions?

Perhaps the COE is most famous for its various Conventions and Rules, these include:

- the European Convention on Human Rights
- the European Social Charter
- the Convention against Torture

Other COE texts are equally important and influence the adoption and amendment of conventions and treaties. The **European Prison Rules** and **Recommendation No. R (89)12 on Education in Prison** are of primary concern to the EPEA as they lay down the rights and policies on prison education agreed to by all member states.

How does it work?

The main bodies of the COE:

-**Committee of Ministers** is the decision-making body. It is comprised of the Foreign Affairs ministers of all member states, or their permanent diplomatic representatives. It meets twice a year.

-**Parliamentary Assembly** is often described as 'the engine' of the COE. It is comprised of 626 parliamentarians from the governments of the member states. It meets four times a year.

-**Congress of Local and Regional Authorities** is a consultative body of 306 members. It is comprised of representatives of the local and regional authorities of the member states.

-**NGOs** (see below).

-**European Court of Human Rights.** The Parliamentary Assembly elects its judges.

How is the EPEA involved in the COE?

The EPEA is a non-governmental organisation (NGO) with participatory status at the COE. NGOs are comprised of ordinary people, rather than elected parliamentary representatives, who represent the concerns of the organization. NGOs are one of the four pillars of the decision making structure of the COE. By adopting resolutions, setting up working groups, lobbying, participating in colloquy, seminars and meetings, NGO's directly contribute to the achievement of their aims and principles. NGOs are represented at the parliamentary assembly by a Liaison Committee of 24 members; one of which is the EPEA and thus we are now closer to the decision making process than ever before. Within the NGO's there are 10 Groupings working on specific areas, the EPEA is involved in two Groupings, **Human Rights** and **Education & Culture**, each of which meet twice yearly.

Ms. Janine Duprey Kennedy (COE Liaison Person) represents the EPEA and is thus a Special Advisor to the SC. She attends Liaison Committee meetings, Groupings meetings and the NGO's yearly Plenary Session. Ms. Duprey Kennedy posts reports of each meeting on the EPEA website and welcomes all suggestions and comments. Janine can be contacted at j.duprey.k@wanadoo.fr; agendas and full reports on all meetings can be found on the COE website, www.coe.int.



Happy Christmas  and Best Wishes for 2005 to all EPEA Members





The Invitation

The SC was invited to visit the COE in order to meet the head of NGOs Unit, the Chair of the Liaison Committee and a Head of Grouping. The SC was delighted to accept the invitation and decided to convene its second biannual SC meeting in Strasbourg in order to avail of the invitation.

The Aim

The intention of the SC was to become more familiar with the workings of the COE, to make direct contact with key personnel and to promote the aims and objectives of the EPEA within the COE.

The Visit

Following a guided tour of the building (during which the SC had the opportunity to sit in on a Parliamentary Assembly session), the SC met with Ms. Jutta Gutzkow, Head of the NGO Unit. Ms Gutzkow outlined the workings of the NGOs and their influence within the COE; she went onto suggest ways in which the EPEA could strengthen its presence within the NGO Unit. A meeting with Mr. Pierre Boulay, previous Chair of the Human Rights Groupings, followed. Mr Boulay stressed the tried and tested principle of 'strength in numbers' and advocated the importance of working in close cooperation with other NGOs rather than focusing overly on individual concerns. Otherwise he felt it was impossible to be heard in such a large organisation. Ms. Annelise Oeschger, Chair of the Liaison Committee, briefed the SC on recent and ongoing developments that are of particular relevance to the EPEA and also outlined future possibilities and directions. Following a working lunch with Ms Oeschger and Mr Boulay, the SC visited the Document Room and was impressed by this easily accessed repository of resources.

The SC is grateful to each COE representative for their welcome, and most importantly, for their practical and useful suggestions.

The Outcome

The visit was very useful in alerting COE representatives to the presence and objectives of the EPEA. Similarly, it highlighted constructive ways in which the SC can further the aims of the EPEA. For example, the SC has approached the Secretary General to bestow COE patronage on the May conference in Bulgaria. Not only would this increase the 'advertising' potential of the conference, it would grant it further legitimacy as the primary event for prison educators to share good practice, disseminate research findings and establish useful contacts. Furthermore, it emphasises the role prison education has to play in reducing social exclusion and widening democratic citizenship through the EPEA's active involvement in the 2005 European Year Of Citizenship Through Education. Other outcomes include the EPEA being invited to send a contribution to the 3rd Summit of Head of Government in Poland in May 2005. In addition, we are compiling a 'list of experts' in the field of prison education for use by the COE and welcome suggestions for inclusion. Also, the SC is extending an invitation to facilitate any EPEA member from Central and Eastern Europe to visit the COE during 2005. Further details can be obtained in the Spring issue of the EPEA Magazine.

What next?

1. Perhaps the most urgent matter for the EPEA is the COE redrafting of the **European Prison Rules**. It is imperative that the EPEA has a direct and prioritised input to this revision. We will devote more attention to this in the next EPEA Magazine, where we will outline the background to this development, the present position, and ways in which members can become actively involved in the redrafting process.

2. Finally, the EPEA has great pleasure in announcing a COE summer school on "Education in Prison", run by County Governor of Hordaland in conjunction with the University of Bergen, to take place in Norway in June 2005. It is open for 25 participants from the signatory States to the European Cultural Convention. More details on this unique event, and how to apply, will be outlined in the next EPEA NEWS.

