



**HUMAN RIGHTS,
DEMOCRACY
AND THE RULE OF LAW**

COUNCIL OF EUROPE



CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

**DROITS DE L'HOMME,
DÉMOCRATIE
ET ÉTAT DE DROIT**

The democratic mission of higher education Perspectives from the Council of Europe

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Vice-Chair of the COE's Steering Committee for Education
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COE and higher education: framework

- Education programme based on the **European Cultural Convention** (1954)
- Extensive higher education programme with focus on the **right to quality higher education** and **public responsibility** to safeguard/enable this right
- Attention for the **broad mission** of (higher) education: personal fulfilment, preparation for world of work, preparation for civic participation, advancement of the knowledge base of society
- Possibility to develop **legal instruments**
- Work overseen by the **CDEDU and subsidiary bodies** related to HE topics (WG HE, AR, Democratic mission...)

COE and higher education: activities

- ***Recognition of qualifications***

secretariat of Unesco/COE Lisbon Recognition Convention and Qualifications framework for the EHEA,

European Qualifications Passport for Refugees,
exploratory work on automatic recognition

- ***Democratic mission of higher education***

Publications (COE HE series), Global fora (in cooperation with i.a. US) with focus on public responsibility, academic freedom and institutional autonomy, local reach-out and insertion of this perspective in legislative work.

- ***Contribution to the Bologna Process/EHEA***

COE and the democratic mission of HE

Rationale

The Council of Europe's concern about backsliding of democracy
(Cf. **Reykjavik Summit**, May 2023 with reference to education)

- ▶ The role of higher education in reinvigorating democratic societies
- ▶ Council of Europe's Strategy 2024-2030: "Learners First"

Emphasis on the need for higher education to:

- Prepare citizens for active participation in democracy
- Contribute to the transformation of institutions and societies

COE and the democratic mission of HE

Key themes 2024-2027

- (1) Academic Freedom
- (2) Democratisation of Science and the Local Dimension of Higher Education
- (3) Digital/AI Challenges in Higher Education

1. Academic freedom: COE references

- 2019 Declaration of the Global forum on Academic Freedom, Institutional Autonomy and the Future of Democracy
- Recommendation CM/Rec (2012)7) on the responsibility of public authorities for academic freedom and institutional autonomy “as intrinsic values of higher education which are essential to the overarching values and goals of the Council of Europe –democracy, human rights and the rule of law”
- PACE 2020 Report on threats to academic freedom and autonomy of higher education institutions in Europe –call on the CM to “assess the need for and feasibility of a binding instrument”

1. Academic freedom: activities 2024-2027

- Mapping of the level of protection of academic freedom in member states, in line with the CM Rec (2012)7, in order to formulate recommendations for public authorities in charge of higher education policies
- Assess the need for and feasibility of a binding instrument on academic freedom and institutional autonomy
- Develop guidelines for public authorities and higher education institutions

2. Democratisation of science/local dimension of HE

Challenges

- Increasing public access, participation, and understanding of scientific knowledge
- Avoiding politisation, ensuring autonomy and transparency
- Fostering inclusivity, transparency, and stakeholder engagement

Activities 2024-2027

- Feasibility study and action plan in 2024
- Global Forum event in 2025
- Local community engagement and good practices
- A study on a possibility to create the Council of Europe policy framework in 2026 –on higher education's research mission and engagement with society; cooperation with local communities

3. Digital/AI challenges

Focus Topic 1: Academic Freedom and the Digital

- New threats to academic freedom from online harassment, cancel culture, and misinformation.
- Addressing self-censorship, monitoring, and surveillance on social media.
- Promoting free speech, open dialogue, and digital literacy to mitigate threats.

Focus Topic 2: Algorithmic Discrimination

- Challenges related to AI potential for bias and discrimination
- Confidentiality of student data and measures to prevent unintentional discrimination

Digital/AI challenges

Activities 2024-2027

- Research publications (launch Q4 2024)
- 2024: Round Table on Academic Freedom in the digital era with policy recommendations
- 2025: Round Table on Algorithmic Discrimination with policy recommendations