

Campaign
to Uphold Rights
in Europe



FOR A STRONG AND EFFECTIVE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

Open Letter by the CURE Campaign to the Council of Europe

CURE condemns in the strongest terms possible the outrageous military aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. It is the most brazen violation of international law and the principles and norms of the Council of Europe. We are appalled by numerous reports about bombing of and shelling at civilian buildings by Russian troops, the use of indiscriminate weapons, killing of civilians and other violations of international humanitarian law and human rights.

We endorse the firm and principled position of the Committee of Ministers, the leadership of the Parliamentary Assembly and the Secretary General on Russia's aggression against Ukraine, expressed in the [decision of the Committee of Ministers](#) of 25 February, the [joint statement of the Council of Europe leaders](#) of 8 March, and the [decision of the Committee of Ministers of 10 March](#). This letter focuses on proposals for the future activities of the Council of Europe relating to Russia, beyond the likely end of the country's formal membership in the organisation.

We call on the CoE to use all the instruments at its disposal to monitor and assess human rights compliance in relation to the conflict, document violations of human rights, and support accountability. The CoE should actively cooperate in doing so with other intergovernmental organisations, including the United Nations and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe. Apart from the European Court of Human Rights (see below), the mandates of the Committee for the Prevention of Torture, the Commissioner for Human Rights and other CoE monitoring bodies offer certain possibilities to this effect. Such treaty-based and other arrangements may continue to exist, and should be used in an optimal fashion.

It is important that individuals, groups and organisations from Ukraine, Russia and other countries that suffer human rights violations by the Russian state continue to have a possibility to appeal to international mechanisms to vindicate their human rights if the national court system does not provide an effective remedy. The ECtHR provides this opportunity, and Court judgments relating to Russia do contribute to a vindication for the victims and to the documentation of human rights violations committed by Russia, and provide elements for a programme of more systemic changes in policy and practice in a future Russia.

Procedures dealing with complaints submitted under the ECtHR until a Russian withdrawal or expulsion from the CoE becomes effective will continue to satisfy this demand for truth and justice. In addition and beyond this, CURE calls on the CoE to investigate the options for preserving access of all individuals under Russia's effective control to a complaints mechanism as similar as possible to the current procedure, and create a special mechanism for reaching conclusions on these complaints.

We urge the CoE to reach out to the Russian public and to Russian citizens in exile with a direct and strong message, underlining the importance of key CoE principles and norms, expressing support to and solidarity with those Russians who raise their voices against the Russian government's aggression and specifically with those who face retaliation for exercising their rights to freedoms of assembly, association and expression.

A major challenge for the CoE lies in continuing and expanding its outreach to civil society and individuals in Russia and Russian citizens living in exile on the importance of the CoE's principles and values and in engaging with those who support these principles and values. All possibilities to significantly expand this work should be explored and utilized, both through online channels and live contacts (even if these have to take place outside the country). Practical day-to-day use of aspects of CoE treaties and guidelines that can be implemented at the community and local level regardless or in spite of national legislation should be one of the subjects to promote and discuss in this work. Therefore, CURE calls on the CoE to develop new and much broader than existing programmes of engagement and cooperation with Russian civil society, legal community, pro-democracy municipal and regional deputies, journalistic community, opposition politicians, and others who oppose the Kremlin's invasion of Ukraine and continue to stand for CoE values and principles despite the odds. While contacts with the Russian authorities will necessarily be minimal until there is a return to the norms of international law, cooperation and dialogue with Russian non-state actors should be enhanced and intensified, to lay down the path of a new democratic Russia based on respect of rule of law and human rights, which would eventually be able to return to the CoE.

A similar approach could possibly be applied to Belarus, where a range of broadly supported political and societal actors, who stay in the country or are living in exile, with much greater legitimacy than the governing regime stand ready to engage in cooperation with the CoE.

The current tragic situation requires a fundamental reconsideration of approaches and programmes of the Council of Europe to protect and promote human rights and democracy in Europe. It is vitally important that it shows its leadership, viability and worth. As a civil society initiative, we stand ready for discussion about the specifics of possible new approaches and for cooperation with the CoE to find and implement effective strategies of response.

The Steering Committee of the CURE Campaign:

- Agnes Ciccarone, Programme and Finance Manager, European Implementation Network
- Gunnar M. Ekeløve-Slydal, Deputy Secretary General, Norwegian Helsinki Committee
- Milan Filipović, Legal Advisor, Lawyers Committee for Human Rights (YUCOM)
- Karinna Moskalenko, Director, Centre de la Protection Internationale
- Róisín Pillay, Europe and Central Asia Director, International Commission of Jurists

About CURE Campaign:

On 26 January 2022, a coalition of 14 civil society organisations started a new international initiative, the Campaign to Uphold Rights in Europe (CURE). The campaign was launched in Strasbourg, the seat of the Council of Europe, the inter-governmental organisation specifically dedicated to the promotion and protection of human rights, rule of law and democracy and uniting 47 member states from across the European continent. The overall goal of the CURE is to make the Council of Europe strong and effective in fulfilling its statutory role of protecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, upholding the rule of law and genuine democracy. The campaign's founding Manifesto raises the alarm over the increasing challenge to this role.

More information is available on [our website](#) and [Twitter](#)