

Timișoara - Declaration by KOLPING EUROPA

on the promotion and further development of the Council of Europe on the occasion of the granting of observer status to Kolping Europe as an international non-governmental organisation (INGO) 50 years ago (11.3.1974 - 11.3.2024) and the 75th anniversary of the Council of Europe (5.5.1949 - 5.5.2024)

Based on its historical development and its programme, **Kolping Europe** feels a special connection to the European idea and the Council of Europe.

Kolping Europe was granted observer status in the Council of Europe as an INGO on 11 March 1974 in accordance with the **decision of the Committee of Ministers (CM/74/65)**. Thus, for 50 years, **Kolping Europe** has been authorised as an INGO through this status to participate in the cooperation between representatives of governments, parliaments, local authorities, and civil society.

Kolping Europe has expressed its views on questions of European unification in over 60 European declarations. An expression of these intensive European endeavours were the one-week **European seminars** held every year until 2011 **at the headquarters of the Council of Europe and the European Parliament in Strasbourg**. More than 2,500 future leaders familiarised themselves on site with the work of the Council of Europe and the EU as a contribution to strengthening European awareness.

Based on this long-standing commitment to Europe, **Kolping Europe** wishes to contribute to the promotion and further development of the Council of Europe with the following declaration on the occasion of the **75th anniversary of the Council of Europe and the granting of observer status 50 years ago**.

The dangers of falling back into the past

Today, the basic ideas of European unification are in danger. Conflicts and the questioning of jointly developed values and principles are creating new dividing lines:

- The most populous European state, Russia, invaded Ukraine, a sovereign neighbouring state, and declared the rest of Europe an enemy, thus dividing the continent once again.
- Other frozen conflicts flared up again (Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia) or harboured the risk of future military interventions (Moldova).
- The increasingly authoritarian style of government in some countries is increasingly breaking the rules of a pluralistic democracy and threatening the independence of the judiciary.
- Dreams of a powerful nation state, hyped up by the mass media, awaken the demons of the past.
- The practice of national glorification of history is increasingly taking the place of a common approach to history. Experts from the Council of Europe's Observatory for the Teaching of History in Europe warn against the tendency to return not only to existing differences of opinion, but also to the legacy of unhealed wounds, old prejudices, and a desire for revenge.
- The validity of the European Convention on Human Rights, which is binding for all member states of the Council of Europe, and the recognition of the judgements of the European Court of Human Rights are being called into question. In many places, the separation of powers (government, parliament, judiciary) to prevent the government from abusing its power is gradually being undermined.

This worrying development was confirmed in the declaration by the heads of state and government of the Council of Europe member states at the summit in Reykjavik in May 2023. The iron principle of "right before might" is once again in jeopardy.

Entry into a new era with necessary consequences for the promoters of the European project

The European project, the idea of a United Europe, is not only threatened from the outside, but its internal cohesion is also jeopardised. The 75th anniversary of the Council of Europe coincides with a new European turning point. The pan-European vision of European unification is confronted with a new dividing line, provoked by Russia's war - with Belarus as an ally - against Ukraine. The collective condemnation of this aggression by the rest of Europe is beyond question. In addition to the external threat, however, there are also crises and challenges within Europe that need to be combated and overcome.

The Council of Europe and the European Union (EU) are directly challenged as pillars of European unification. With its 46 member states, the Council of Europe remains the most geographically comprehensive European organisation. Recent developments threaten its core competences of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. They also require the strengthening of European awareness and a common European identity. These fundamental values and principles must be jointly defended by the Council of Europe and the EU.

In order to combat the external threat and the threat to Europe's internal cohesion, the Council of Europe and the EU must pool their political, legal and practical means of co-operation. Both must work much more closely together to achieve the common goal of a united Europe.

The way out of the current crisis could be based on the report written in 2006 by Jean-Claude Juncker, the then head of the Luxembourg government. It had the telling title "Council of Europe and European Union - A common endeavour for the European continent".

This report called for a partnership of equals between the Council of Europe and the EU to move Europe forward. In 2006, the EU's accession to the European Convention on Human Rights was also sought but has not yet taken place. The Council of Europe summit in Reykjavik in May 2023 once again emphasised the importance of the EU's future accession to the Convention on Human Rights.

The 75th anniversary of the Council of Europe in the face of the renewed division of Europe

The current crisis situation in Europe requires joint action. The 75th anniversary of the Council of Europe could be an opportunity to master the challenges ahead through even closer cooperation between the Council of Europe and the EU.

Russia's war against Ukraine threatens peace and the unity of Europe. Europe is threatened from the outside and internally torn apart to some extent because the values we have developed together are no longer respected. Collective security must be guaranteed, and democratic stability must be strengthened. In the past decades, the Council of Europe and the EU have been the bearers of the idea of a United Europe. In view of the threat posed by Russia's hostile attitude and claims to power, both organisations are called upon to face up to their shared responsibility for the rest of the pan-European area.

Due to its core areas of democracy, human rights and the rule of law, the Council of Europe is primarily called upon to safeguard these values and to strengthen European awareness through close co-operation in culture, education and youth welfare.

At a Vienna summit in 1993, the heads of state and government had already emphasised the Council of Europe's contribution to guaranteeing democratic stability and reminded the member states of their obligation to respect democracy, human rights and the rule of law and to cultivate and protect Europe's richly diverse common cultural heritage.

The heads of state and government added that Europe was the bearer of immense hope, which must by no means be destroyed through territorial claims, the resurgence of aggressive nationalisms, the persistence of spheres of influence and by intolerance or totalitarian ideologies.

30 years on, however, European unification is once again confronted with these dangers and problems. The Reykjavik Declaration of 2023 by the 46 member states of the Council of Europe does not conceal this threat

Declaration 50 years INGO and 75 years Council of Europe

and speaks of a shared responsibility to combat it. The declaration reaffirmed the commitment to respect the European Convention on Human Rights and the obligation to implement the judgements of the Court of Human Rights.

In view of the threat to the pluralistic democratic order, the summit adopted a comprehensive catalogue of democratic principles: Freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and association, separation of powers, an independent judiciary, the fight against corruption and the democratic involvement of civil society and young people.

The Heads of State and Government emphasised the importance of educating young people in order to instil democratic values and make them aware of the cultural diversity of society thanks to our common cultural heritage.

These are historic core areas of the Council of Europe. The guarantee of democratic stability and the strengthening of European awareness and a European identity require increased efforts on the part of all member states, the Council of Europe and the EU.

Closer cooperation and unified action between the Council of Europe and the EU would strengthen European common ground.

The recommendations of the 2006 Juncker Report appear more topical and necessary than ever.

Much closer cooperation between the EU and the Council of Europe would also pool competences, opportunities for action and budgetary resources, promote a targeted division of labour to strengthen European commonalities and enable progress to be made towards pan-European unification.

By expanding the existing cooperation between the EU and the Council of Europe, the competences (democracy, human rights, rule of law, culture, education, youth) of the Council of Europe for the remaining pan-European area (excluding Russia and Belarus) would be even better utilised. The EU could concentrate fully on its historical mission, namely, to fulfil the mission of its founding fathers by progressively deepening the internal market.

The 75th anniversary of the Council of Europe is not only an occasion for **Kolping Europe** to honour its great merits in the construction of Europe, but also to call on the 46 member states, in this time of renewed division in Europe, to promote the unification of Europe through much closer cooperation between the Council of Europe and the EU and to arm themselves against external temptations and challenges.

**Resolved at the meeting of the Executive Board of KOLPING EUROPA
on 16 March 2024 in Timișoara (RO).**

For the Executive Board of Kolping Europe

Vasyl SAVKA
Chairman

Istvan GÖDRI
European Praeses

Erich REISCHMANN
European Secretary

Anton SALESNY
European Representative

Kolping Europe

In 1849, the Catholic priest Adolph Kolping founded an association for single journeymen in Cologne with the aim of helping them to cope with the problems arising from the industrial revolution, which are summarised under the term "social question". From very small beginnings, Kolping International has developed into a Catholic worldwide social organisation in more than 60 countries with today approx. 9,600 local groups and more than 400,000 members worldwide. This growth has been achieved because the Kolping Society has always faced up to new social developments and circumstances in the most diverse ways and has thus always contributed to solving the social question at national and international level.

Kolping sees itself as a Catholic social organisation that supports the development of its members' personal talents in a special way, offers its members and society help in life and promotes the common good in the Christian sense through the activities of its members and groups. Kolping's work is focussed on the whole person. They should be able to receive help and encouragement in all areas of life, but also can contribute all their worries and problems as well as their knowledge and skills.

Kolping's work is focussed on the areas of work and profession, marriage and family, society and state, culture and leisure. As a democratically structured organisation, Kolping sees itself as jointly responsible for the promotion of democracy and stands up for the special dignity of people in every phase of life and for inalienable and inviolable human rights.

Kolping Europe is a continental organisation of KOLPING INTERNATIONAL **Kolping is present in Europe in the following countries:** Albania, Austria, Croatia, the Czech Republic, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Kosovo, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Republic of Moldova, the Netherlands, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Switzerland and Ukraine. As part of a democratic and cross-generational member organisation, it takes on the challenges of the present and the future.

Based on its historical development and its programme, Kolping Europe feels particularly committed to the idea of Europe and works intensively with the Council of Europe and the European Union and the European Parliament, whereby it has had "**participatory status with the Council of Europe**" (Council of Europe / Conseil de l'Europe) <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal>) in Strasbourg since 11 March 1974 as an INGO (non-governmental organisation). The Kolping Society has contributed to the European discourse in over 50 European declarations.

A particular expression of these intensive European endeavours were the one-week **European seminars** held every year from 1979 to 2011 **at the headquarters of the Council of Europe** and the **European Parliament** in Strasbourg, which conveyed the idea of Europe to over 2,500 managers on site.

Further information:

Kolping Europe <https://kolping-europa.eu/>

European Secretariat of Kolping Europe:

c/o European Secretary Erich Reischmann, SLO - 9223 Dobrovnik Dobronak, Strehovci 80
E-mail: erich.reischmann@kolping-ibk.eu Phone: 0041 / 79 669 72 41 (Switzerland)

European Representative of Kolping Europe:

Reg. Rat. Anton Salesny, A - 2000 Stockerau near Vienna, Schaumannngasse 70/4/8
E-Mail: Anton.Salesny@gmx.net Phone: 0043 / 2266 / 65916 (Austria)