

Information Centre on the Council of Europe in Sofia

The Center for the Study of Democracy has been hosting the Information Centre on the Council of Europe in Sofia since 1993. The Information Centre provides the Bulgarian public and institutions with information on the activities and supports Council activities in priority areas. Below are some of the highlights for the 2003. Additional information is available at www.cid.bg

Releases in 2003

Translations

- Fundamental Principles on the Status of Non-governmental Organisations in Europe and explanatory memorandum

Publications

- Reprint of The European Convention on Human Rights: Starting points for Teachers.

Events

- 21-22 February - European Parents' Association East-West Dialogue Conference
- 7-10 May - European Commission against Racism and Intolerance visit
- 9 May – Europe's Day celebration
- 10 July - Public presentation of a new Ministry of Interior Manual on the rules and procedures of taking into custody and the conditions in the places of custody
- 15-16 September - Seminar on Subsidiary and Temporary Protection of Refugees in Europe and in Bulgaria
- 26 September - Fourth Coordination Meeting of Academic Refugee Study Initiative in Bulgaria
- 8 October - Public discussion on the forthcoming introduction of the Ombudsman institution in Bulgaria
- 11-13 November – Delegation of the Advisory Committee on the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities visited Bulgaria
- 15 December – Information Centre on the Council of Europe in Sofia celebrated its 10th anniversary with a ceremony held in its host organisation – Center for the Study of Democracy

During 2003 ICCE answered approx. 1,000 requests by letters, telephone calls, e-mails, and to the visitors of the library. Seventy percent of all requests were about information on the European Court of Human Rights.

Celebrating the 10th Anniversary of the Information Centre

On December 13, 1993 the Information Centre on the Council of Europe opened in Sofia. To mark this occasion a ceremony was organized at the Centre premises, which was attended by representatives from the Presidency of the Republic of Bulgaria, the Ministry of foreign affairs, other public institutions, diplomats, journalists and NGO leaders and experts.

“Bulgaria’s membership in the Council of Europe became the basis for its development as an integral part of the European democratic community, in the process of asserting the human rights and essential freedoms into the starting point in the development of the European system of values and in fostering the principles of democratic security. The Information Centre on the Council of Europe in Sofia still has an important role in the transmission of a more comprehensive information to the Bulgarian public about the activities of the Council of Europe and Bulgaria’s specific role for the success of this organisation.”

President Georgi Purvanov
greeting to the Information Centre

Walter Schwimmer Stresses the Importance of the Introduction of the Ombudsman Institution in Bulgaria

The Information Centre jointly with the Center for the Study of Democracy hosted a public discussion on the forthcoming introduction of the Ombudsman Institution in Bulgaria. The Council of Europe Secretary General Walter Schwimmer was the guest of honor at this occasion attended by Dr. Plamen Panayotov, Deputy Prime Minister,

members of parliament, ambassadors, journalists, and NGO representatives. In his speech Mr. Schwimmer outlined that Ombudsmen are today an integral part of the institutional architecture of a modern democracy and welcomed the introduction of this institution in Bulgaria. Furthermore, the Secretary General focused on the very recent Recommendation 1615 (2003) of the Parliamentary Assembly on the Ombudsman Institution and the essential characteristics of the Ombudsman to be ensured at national level in order to provide this institution with operational effect – the first pre-requisite being that all these essential characteristics of the Ombudsmen should be established at constitutional level. Mr. Schwimmer welcomed the work done by the Center for the Study of Democracy in drafting Ombudsman legislation and for promoting and establishing the Ombudsman institution in Bulgaria. He also confirmed the commitment of Council of Europe to further support of the establishment of the ombudsman institution in Bulgaria.

The participation of the Secretary General in this event, which took place in the framework of the 25th Council of Europe Justice Ministers’ Conference in Sofia (October, 9-10, 2003), had a significant impact at a particularly crucial juncture in the efforts for the introduction of this independent institution fostering human rights in this country.

The Human Dimension of Security

Another priority of the Information Centre in 2003 was the linkage between the new security agenda in the post-communist period and the principles and values of human security, defended as a cornerstone of European society and as a priority area in the activities of the Council of Europe. Such a linkage



Public discussion of the Ombudsman Institution (October 8, 2003, CSD); from left to right: Mr. Walter Schwimmer, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Mr. Plamen Panayotov, Deputy Prime Minister, and Dr. Maria Yordanova, Director of Law Program, CSD

was outlined by Dr. Klaus Schumann, Director General of Political Affairs, who participated in the international conference *Shaping a Common Security Agenda for Southeast Europe*, which took place in Sofia on 5 and 6 September. In the presence of NATO Secretary General Lord Robertson, high level EU officials and ministers from SEE countries, Mr. Schumann noted that the One Europe approach is based on the commitment to common agreed norms and standards which are the milestones on the way towards stability and security.



Mr. Klaus Schumann, Director General of Political Affairs, Council of Europe

The Information Centre focus on the human dimension of security was reaffirmed by hosting and taking part in two events, related to the necessity to guarantee protection and the essential rights of refugees. The first was a 2-day seminar titled *Subsidiary and Temporary Protection of Refugees in Europe and in Bulgaria – theory and practice* (15-16 September). The seminar was organized by the Council of Europe, the State Agency for Refugees-Twinning Project and the UNHCR- Branch office in Sofia. A week later, the Information Centre hosted the Fourth Coordination Meeting of Academic Refugee Study Initiative in Bulgaria, initiated and supported by the UNHCR-Branch office in Sofia. The main goal of this initiative is to stimulate Bulgarian lectures, students and researchers for more methodical approach in their work in the field of refugee rights.



From left to right: Mr. Rumen Galev, Secretary General, State Agency for Refugees, Dr. Luise Druke, UNHCR Representative, Mr. Denis Bribosia, Asylum and Refugees Unit of the Council of Europe

The interface between security concerns and the European standards in defending human rights was the public presentation of a new instruction of Ministry of Interior on the rules and procedures of taking into custody and the conditions in the places of custody,