

Volume 9, Issue 2, December 2025

Italy's Recent Criticism to the Council of Europe: An Isolated Case or a Broader Trend?

Stefano Valenti

Policy Papers*

DOI:

10.25430/pupj-PHRG-2025-2-6

How to cite:

Valenti, S. (2025) 'Italy's Recent Criticism to the Council of Europe: An Isolated Case or a Broader Trend?', *Peace Human Rights Governance*, 9(2), 279-294. DOI: 10.25430/pupj-PHRG-2025-2-6

Article first published online

December 2025

*All research articles published in PHRG undergo a rigorous double-blind review process by independent, anonymous expert reviewers

Italy's Recent Criticism to the Council of Europe: An Isolated Case or a Broader Trend?

*Stefano Valenti**

Abstract

The article aims to review Italy's recent criticism towards the Council of Europe. It starts by providing background information on the Council of Europe and its various monitoring bodies that assess member states' compliance with human rights conventions. The article then highlights important contributions by Italy to the Council of Europe since its inception in 1949, before analysing reasons behind Italy's stance, including the government's political orientation prioritizing national sovereignty and security concerns over human rights. It suggests that the Government's criticism may have domestic political motivations to appeal to certain constituencies. The paper situates Italy's criticism within a broader trend of some Council of Europe member states asserting national interests over the human rights agenda. The author argues that the Council's monitoring role is misunderstood, as its aim is not to publicly condemn states but to provide recommendations through constructive dialogue. In the end, the paper highlights the need for the Council and other international organisations to communicate their added value more effectively to the general public, using simpler language and positive framing. For this reason, the author recommends to explore ways to communicate human rights more effectively.

Keywords: Italy, Council of Europe, ECRI, United Nations, Human Rights, International Organisations

* University of Padua, Department of Philosophy, Sociology, Education and Applied Psychology. e-mail: stefano.valenti@unipd.it.

** The author, a former staff member of the Council of Europe Secretariat, in observance with the relevant behavioural and ethical standards, has paid particular attention not to use or disclose confidential or sensitive information known by reason of his service with the Organisation.

*** The author wishes to thank for their valuable inputs and feedback a number of former colleagues of the Council of Europe, including Jan Malinowski, Stefano Montanari and Jaime Rodriguez, as well as Petra Roter, Professor of International Relations at the University of Ljubljana, Faculty of Social Sciences and Pietro de Perini, PhD in International Politics, researcher at the University of Padua Department of Political Science, Law and International Studies.

**** Unless otherwise indicated, any developments occurring after December 2025 are not covered in the analysis contained in this article.

Introduction

During 2024 and 2025, media reported a series of sharp criticism levelled by senior Italian government officials towards the Council of Europe. These critiques stem from the findings of the Organisation's monitoring bodies on Italy's human rights record, migration policies, independence of the judiciary, behaviour of the police, etc. The aim of the article is to analyse Italy's criticism of the Council of Europe from different perspectives, including the government's political orientation, concerns about national sovereignty, and challenges in managing migration flows. It also examines whether Italy's stance is an isolated case or part of a broader trend among member states challenging international organisations' authority on human rights matters. The article is based on the available documentation, as well as on the working experience of the author as international civil servant and serves to contextualise Italy's specific criticisms and the government's reactions to the Council's latest monitoring reports. In this context, the author aims to pass on the message that the Council's monitoring bodies do not aim to publicly shame or condemn member states, but rather to engage in constructive dialogue and provide recommendations to uphold human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The article starts with an overview of the Council of Europe, its human rights monitoring mechanisms, and a recollection of Italy's contribution to the Organisation since its inception. The paper then put the 'Italian case' in the broader context of states asserting national interests over human rights agendas, citing examples from other countries like the United Kingdom and the United States. The article concludes underlining the urgent need for a more effective communication by international organisations to the general public. For this reason, at the end, the author proposes, as an additional research topic, to explore more effective ways to communicate to the general public the importance of human rights.

1. Brief Overview of the Council of Europe and its Human Rights Monitoring Mechanisms

The Council of Europe (the Council) is an international organisation founded in 1949 with the primary aim of promoting human rights, democracy, and the rule of law across its current 46 member States¹. It has developed various monitoring mechanisms to assess and report on the human rights situation

¹ For any additional information related to the Council of Europe please consult its web site www.coe.int.

in its member States. These include the European Court of Human Rights (the European Court), which is responsible for interpreting and ensuring states' compliance with the European Convention on Human Rights (the European Convention) signed in Rome in 1950. However, limiting to the European Court the description of the human rights monitoring 'machine' of the Organisation would be an over-simplification. Despite the role and reputation acquired by the European Court over its many years of existence in interpreting the European Convention, other Council of Europe conventions provide for their own monitoring 'watch dogs' that are mandated with reporting on the respect or the violation of that particular convention. These monitoring bodies conduct country visits and issue reports containing findings and recommendations on specific human rights issues. A few other monitoring bodies are not linked to a specific convention, such as the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) or institutions that may observe and report on country specific situations such as the Commissioner for Human Rights.

Contrary to the European Court, these other 'watch dogs' just 'bark' at member States but do not 'bite' them: their role is in fact not to 'name and shame' countries. Instead, their mandate is to provide suggestions and recommendations through a process of country visits and confidential dialogue with national authorities and civil society representatives, rather than publicly condemning member States. We will analyse how and why this 'modus operandi' of the Council of Europe's monitoring bodies, characterised by a constant dialogue with the member states, has been misunderstood or purposely distorted in the recent criticism addressed by the Italian Government to the organisation for allegedly overstepping its mandate and interfering in domestic affairs.

2. Italy and the Council of Europe

Italy has been a member of the Council of Europe since its inception, as one of the nine signatory States of its so called 'London Statute' in May 1949. Italy has remained until now an active and influential member, contributing significantly to the Council's budget and participating in its various bodies and activities. Here are some details which show the importance of Italy's contribution to the Council².

Italy is one of the major contributors to the Council of Europe's budget, which is funded by member states according to their population and

² Giacomelli Michele, 'Italy and the Council of Europe' Permanent Representation of Italy to the Council of Europe, 2021

economic strength. Italy's contribution to the Council of Europe's ordinary budget is equivalent to almost a 10% of the overall 2025 Organisation's budget of €655.7 million. Italy has also provided voluntary contributions to various Council of Europe programmes and activities, such as the Human Rights Trust Fund, the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), and the European Youth Foundation. Italy has a permanent representation to the Council of Europe, headed by an Ambassador, which serves as a liaison between the Italian government and the Council's various bodies and institutions. Italian representatives have held important positions within the Council's structures, including: The Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers (the Council's decision-making body) on nine occasions since 1950, most recently from November 2021 until May 2022, a total of six Italian judges have served on the European Court of Human Rights and two of them have served also as Presidents of the European Court. In addition, the Italian Membership of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE), includes a total of 36 parliamentarians as representatives and substitutes who actively participate in the Assembly's work. Italy is also represented in the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities by a delegation of 18 representatives and 18 substitutes.

The Italian Authorities hosted several Council of Europe meetings and events, including ministerial conferences and summits, further contributing to the organisation's activities and visibility, such as the Committee of Ministers meeting in Turin in May 2022 at the end of the six-month Italian Chairmanship of that Committee. Italian independent experts and professionals have been and are involved in various Council of Europe monitoring mechanisms, such as the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance and the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT). Last but not least, we should mention two important organs of the Strasbourg Organisation to which Italy has significantly contributed: The European Committee of Social Rights (ECSR), a quasi-judicial mechanism of the European Social Charter, which was itself signed in Turin on 18 October 1961 during the celebrations to mark the hundredth anniversary of Italian unity. The Chair of the ECSR was for an entire decade, till 2020, an Italian, Professor Giuseppe Palmisano. Moreover, the European Commission for Democracy through Law, better known as the 'Venice Commission', was originated by an idea of the famous Italian constitutionalist Antonio La Pergola, it is chaired by another famous Italian Constitutionalist, Marta Cartabia. It has held since 1990 its plenary sessions in the city of the Doges thanks to the generous hospitality of the Veneto Region.

3. Italy Stance and Criticism

Despite Italy's outstanding contribution to the work of the Council, tensions have arisen recently between the Italian Government and the Council regarding its monitoring reports and findings. The Italian government has reacted strongly to the Council of Europe monitoring reports, accusing the Organisation of overstepping its mandate and interfering in domestic affairs. Italy has particularly taken issue with the Council's findings on its migration policies, which have been criticised for their harsh treatment of migrants and asylum seekers. The government has also rejected the Council's concerns about the behaviour of law enforcement agencies.

For example, the Italian government, rejected with particular emphasis the findings contained in the ECRI report on Italy of 2024³ (ECRI, 2024, p.29-30) related to the police forces, as well as the invitation to study the phenomenon of discriminatory practices of the police in order to remedy them. The Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni, in a message on social media defined such criticisms as 'simply shameful', based on 'unfounded judgements, the result of an ideological approach and evident prejudices'⁴. The criticism from the Italian government regarding the Council of Europe's monitoring reports and their findings can be analysed from several perspectives.

The current right-wing coalition government in Italy has taken a more assertive stance on issues related to migration, security, and national sovereignty. This political orientation, which resonates well with a growing part of the Italian voters that prioritise national sovereignty and security concerns, may have contributed to the government's sensitivity towards external criticism, particularly from international organisations like the Council of Europe. Concerning sovereignty and domestic affairs, one of the main criticisms levelled by the Italian government is that the Council of Europe is overstepping its mandate and interfering in domestic affairs. Despite what is mentioned above about the role and aims of the monitoring bodies of the Organisation, the government views the monitoring bodies' findings and recommendations as an encroachment on Italy's sovereignty and decision-making power.

In addition, Italy has faced significant challenges in managing migration flows, particularly from the Mediterranean region. The Council of Europe's reports have criticised Italy's harsh treatment of migrants and asylum

³ ECRI Sixth report on Italy adopted on 2 July 2024 / published on 22 October 2024.

⁴ Precise references to the Italian Government reactions towards the Council of Europe monitoring findings on Italy can be found in the 'Italian Yearbook of Human Rights' years 2024-2025, edited by the Human Rights Centre of the University of Padua, <https://unipd-centrodirittumani.it/en/keywords/council-of-europe>.

seekers, which the government views as necessary measures to address security concerns and control irregular migration, which is strictly related to its power as a sovereign State.

Other sensitive issues concern the judicial Independence and law enforcement. The Council's findings on the undue criticism from the Government affecting the independence of the Italian judiciary and other findings related to the bias behaviour of some members of the law enforcement towards migrants have been met by the government with scepticism, to say the least. The government has perceived these criticisms as an attempt to undermine its efforts to address issues such as irregular migration and organised crime.

4. Italy's Questioning of the Council's Functioning and Relevance

Also in the past, the Council of Europe has raised concern at Italy's human rights records such as prisons' overcrowding, forced evictions of Roma people, lack of specific anti-torture legislation, etc. Italy's initial reaction was to defend its policies, but over time, the country has often made efforts to address the issues raised by the Council of Europe, even if progress has sometimes been slow or partial.

The novelty is that beyond challenging specific monitoring reports, members of the Italian government, such as the Minister of the Interior Matteo Piantedosi in a post contained in its official Facebook account⁵, have also questioned the overall functioning and relevance of the Council of Europe, arguing that it needs to reform and adapt to the evolving geopolitical landscape and security challenges faced by member states. In particular, Italian officials have argued that the Council's focus on human rights has become too narrow and that it should also take into consideration issues such as national security and the fight against terrorism.

The Italian government's criticism of the Council of Europe may also be influenced by domestic political considerations, such as appealing to certain constituencies or deflecting attention from other issues. Portraying the Council as an external interference (the 'us and them' confrontational approach) could resonate well with segments of the Italian population that prioritise national sovereignty and security concerns. The Italian government (over)reactions characterised by surprise and indignation towards the findings of monitoring reports by Council's bodies, such as ECRI, sound

⁵ <https://www.facebook.com/matteopiatendosi.official/posts/trovo-sorprendente-e-inaccettabile-che-il-consiglio-deuropa-che-dovrebbe-tutelar/568102229692365/>.

quite preposterous. The fact is that most of these reports, and certainly all of ECRI's country reports, are sent confidentially to the national authorities for comments, as per standard procedure, well ahead their publication⁶. These reports were therefore known to and already commented by the Italian authorities and were in fact published together with detailed and punctual comments from the Italian government. These comments in substance and form were in no way similar to the ones of surprise, harshly critical and accusatory of bias and uselessness directed at the Council just a few hours after publication of the Council's reports. In short, a 'game played' by senior representatives of the Italian government through messages on their social media for internal political purposes.

A few other member states, such as Turkey and the Russian Federation, the latter no longer a member State of the Organisation since March 2022, once faced with criticism from the Council of Europe for their human rights records have responded by challenging the organisation's authority and legitimacy, and reducing or suspending their funding contribution. In 2018, the Council of Europe found itself in financial crisis after the Russian Federation made the decision not to pay its first €11 million payment of its €33 million overall funding contribution and declined to pay the €22 million that it owed in June 2017 to the Organisation. The sudden stop of the funding erupted after Russian representatives in the Council's parliamentary session were denied the right to vote in the body because of Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea (Muižnieks N., 2025). Turkey, too, refused to pay its Council dues that year as a big payer as initially pledged, and returned to pay a lesser contribution as in previous years. The dispute with Turkey had originated by the Council awarding of its Vaclav Havel Human Rights Prize to Murat Arslan, an imprisoned Turkish constitutional judge.

Contrary to those countries, it is important to note that Italian authorities have not taken, at least so far, any steps to withdraw from any convention or significantly reduce their financial engagement with the Council of Europe. However, Italy withdrew from the Pompidou Group on 1st January 2026. This group is not a monitoring body of the Council, but just a cooperation platform on drug policy and addictive behaviours, it develops very general commonly-agreed non country-specific guidance and offers cooperation platforms including in drug-related law enforcement. This decision by the Italian Government is somewhat surprising given the support Italy has provided to the Group, including financial voluntary contributions over years, and it was announced during the Italian presidency of the

⁶ Article 11, paragraph 3 of the statute of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance.

Group. No official explanation was provided by the Italian Authorities for the withdrawal, however some media speculate that it is due to a lack of confidence in the concreteness of the body and disagreement of the current Government with the Pompidou Group guidelines for care, prevention, and rehabilitation, including decriminalisation and drug liberalisation⁷.

5. Broader Trend or Isolated Incident?

Italy's stance towards the Council of Europe's monitoring mechanisms is also part of a broader trend among member states to assert their national interests and priorities over the human rights agenda. These tensions mirror the ongoing debates and challenges faced by international organisations in balancing the promotion of human rights and democratic principles with the member states' concerns about sovereignty. The governments of several other countries, including Poland and the United Kingdom, have expressed similar concerns to Italy about the Council's perceived overreach and prioritisation of human rights over security considerations.

For instance, in an open letter dated 22 May 2025⁸, which was not addressed directly to the Council of Europe Secretariat, but was widely covered by the media, Italy and Denmark together with other seven member states have been critical of the European Court of Human Rights' rulings on migration, arguing that they undermine national sovereignty and fail to adequately consider security risks. They advocated for a stronger emphasis on national security and therefore 'want ...to launch a new and open minded conversation about the interpretation of the European Convention on Human Rights'. The United Kingdom has also engaged in debates about the role of the European Convention on Human Rights in its domestic legal system, with some political factions advocating for limiting the Convention's influence or even withdrawing from it altogether, citing concerns over its impact on matters such as deporting foreign criminals and counterterrorism measures. For example, in May 2025 the UK Secretary of State for Justice announced that she is reviewing how the Convention is 'used by foreign criminals and asylum seekers to argue for a right to stay in the country'.

This shows that in recent years, issues related to migration – including the relationship between the Convention and national measures to control migration – have become the subject of intense political debate not only in

⁷ See for more <https://en.ilsole24ore.com/art/drugs-italy-leaves-council-of-europe-group-AHKYFoOB>.

⁸ <https://unipd-centrodirittiumani.it/en/news/council-of-europe-the-secretary-general-replies-to-italy-and-other-eight-countries-criticizing-the-european-court-of-human-rights-rulings-on-migration>.

Italy, but also in many other Council of Europe member states. In response to the above-mentioned open letter dated 22 May, the Council of Europe convened in Strasbourg on 10 December 2025 an informal Ministerial Conference. The outcome of this meeting was the decision to prepare a draft political declaration reaffirming the obligation to ensure the effective enjoyment of the rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Convention to everyone within the jurisdiction of member states, in the context of migration. Moreover, the Ministers of Justice of the 46 member states of the Council supported the elaboration of a new recommendation on deterring and combating the smuggling of migrants, with full respect for their human rights⁹. In my opinion, this move from the Council of Europe brings the matter regarding international conventions and their ability to respond to the challenges of irregular migration within the political dialogue among member states, thus preserving the independence of the European Court from undue pressure, which will continue to remain the sole guardian of the Convention. Of course, this will not mean that the interpretation of this human rights instrument by the Court is done in a vacuum, but instead that the Court's interpretation will continue to make the Convention a living instrument.

If we broaden our horizons beyond the Council of Europe and its members, the picture remains one of strong criticism by a growing number of states to the international law of human rights and the multilateral system which supervises their respect. The target is in particular the United Nations system (Sachs J. D. and Lafortune G. 2024), which the Italian Prime Minister described in her 2025 speech to the 80th UN General Assembly as 'not... up to the challenges that our era imposes on us today'¹⁰. Such criticism of the UN then becomes almost derisive in the US President Donald Trump's remarks to the 80th General Assembly when he claimed, much to the surprise of the other State representatives, that '...in a period of just seven months' he alone ended 'seven unendable wars'. He then complained saying 'It's too bad that I had to do these things instead of the United Nations doing them. And sadly, in all cases, the United Nations did not even try to help in any of them. I ended seven wars, dealt with the leaders of each and every one of these

⁹ See the press release 'Migration challenges: Council of Europe ministers call for political declaration on rights' <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/-/migration-challenges-council-of-europe-ministers-call-for-political-declaration-on-rights>.

¹⁰ See 'President Meloni's speech at the 80th United Nations General Assembly Wednesday' 24 September 2025 retrieved from the web site of the Italian Government Presidency of the Council of Ministers, <https://www.governo.it/en/articolo/president-meloni-s-address-80th-united-nations-general-assembly/29851>.

countries and never even received a phone call from the United Nations offering to help in finalising the deal'¹¹.

Returning to Italy, the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Antonio Tajani, in February 2025 expressed doubts about the work of an international court such as the International Criminal Court (ICC), whereas Italy itself was at the forefront of its establishment with the Rome Statute in 1990. The Minister said in an interview that 'perhaps an investigation should be opened into the Criminal Court, we need clarification on how it has behaved'¹². Even more recently, during a television broadcast on 1st October 2025, when asked about the legitimacy of the Israeli blockade in international waters, the same Italian Minister stated, 'International law is important... but international law applies up to a point'¹³.

However, the list of blows to the foundations of international law is not limited to the above-mentioned statements. It comprises concrete measures such as the sanctions the US Government has imposed on International Criminal Court (ICC) officials, making difficult if not impossible to carry their work, or the non-compliance of countries, like Italy and Hungary, which refuse to enforce ICC arrest warrants, blatantly failing to observe their key obligations as ICC member States¹⁴.

One can say that even in the past obedience by previous world leaders and powers to international law has been only theoretical and just a facade (Goldsmith J., 2016, p. 416). However, we are certainly thousand miles away from the words expressed by the former US President Barack Obama in his address to the General Assembly back in 2015, which I quote: 'Over seven decades, terrible conflicts have claimed untold victims. But we have pressed forward, slowly, steadily, to make a system of international rules and norms that are better and stronger and more consistent. It is this international order that has underwritten unparalleled advances in human liberty and prosperity'¹⁵.

Perhaps we need today a different attitude on the part of our governments, which consider the international system and the organisations that head it to be foreign to their States. Instead, these organisations are, for better or

¹¹ The full transcript of the speech can be withdraw from <https://foreignpolicy.com/2025/09/23/trump-united-nations-speech-immigration-energy/>.

¹² As reported in an article of the Italian Newspaper 'Il Fatto Quotidiano' on 6 February 2025.

¹³ Interview aired on 1st of October 2025 during the State TV 'Rai 1' programme 'Porta a Porta'.

¹⁴ See ICC-01/18 of 13 June 2025 pre-trial chamber 1.

¹⁵ All quotations of the former US President Barack Obama address to the 2015 General Assembly can be retrieved from <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/09/28/remarks-president-obama-united-nations-general-assembly>.

worse, the sum total of their member states. Despite this grim scenario, the President of the Italian Republic, Sergio Mattarella, in a recent interview made explicit reference to the centrality of the United Nations, which ‘remains more valid today than ever, precisely in the face of the disasters that its non-compliance causes, and it must be defended, precisely because it is under attack’: ‘the alternative would be a return to a world in constant turmoil, governed by temporary power relations and, ultimately, by the reality that led to the devastation following the outbreak of the Second World War’¹⁶.

6. The role of the Council of Europe is Misunderstood

To return to the Council of Europe, as we pointed out above, while the monitoring reports and recommendations may highlight issues related to human rights in the Council of Europe States, they are not intended to publicly condemn or shame those countries. Moreover, the pace of monitoring is not uniform across all areas for all member States, as evidenced by the varying rates of ratification for different Council of Europe treaties. While some agreements are widely adopted, being ratified by all or nearly all Council members and even some non-members, other treaties have seen a poor reception. This is another indicator of divergent speeds of the willingness of countries to submit to international oversight mechanisms. For example, the European Social Charter’s collective complaints procedure, with only 16 participating states, - out of the 42 parties to the Charter - including Italy, remains an underutilised instrument within the Council of Europe’s framework.

It is important to point out once again that the Council of Europe is an intergovernmental organisation composed by 46 member states and not an alien entity. In a way of speaking, the organisation is the member states and belongs to them. One reason more for the Council of Europe not to be viewed with mistrust or scepticism simply because it may offer critiques, observations, or recommendations in relation to conventions willingly and freely ratified by the member states. Rather, the Council of Europe should be viewed as an integral part of the processes that inspire, inform, shape and regulate the quality of decisions made within institutions and from external sources, serving as an ally to governments in promoting good democratic governance and a source of legitimacy for those in positions of authority in a democratic state governed by the rule of law (Malinowski J., 2020 229-323).

¹⁶ Interview of the President of the Republic of Italy by ‘La Voce di New York’ on the 80th anniversary of the UN Charter, 22 October 2025.

Similar to how human rights initially emerged as a means to limit the abusive power of rulers, the principles of good democratic governance put forth by the Council of Europe act as antidotes and safeguards for states that accept them, protecting against the potential threats of new despots. Global threats and challenges that cross national borders cannot be adequately addressed today by any single country acting alone, no matter how wealthy or powerful that country may be. Multilateral approaches enhance rather than diminish a nation's sovereignty by enabling coordinated solutions to shared global problems. In this context, the Council of Europe plays a constructive role in upholding democratic values and checks on power through its recommendations. Rather than being seen as a source of suspicion, its guidance can help strengthen legitimate democratic authority and acts as a bulwark against the erosion of democratic norms¹⁷.

I would like to conclude this part with a positive note by quoting again the words of the President of the Republic of Italy, Sergio Mattarella, who sees the Council of Europe as 'an expression and a living example of a tangible and effective form of multilateralism to which Italy is steadfastly committed, and we shall continue to make our contribution, as a founder, in a consistent and determined manner' (Giacomelli M., 2021, p. 9).

7. How can the Council of Europe and other Human Rights International Organisations Communicate More Effectively about their Added Value?

As we have noted above, the criticism levelled by representatives of the Italian Government at the findings of the Council of Europe's monitoring bodies on Italy's human rights record does not seem to be directed primarily at the Organisation itself. Rather, it seems that the real audience is the Italian electorate, to whom the social media of politicians communicate with great effect and efficiency their 'slogans' about the uselessness of an international organisation that is in part funded by Italian taxpayers. Since the 'daily bread' of the Council of Europe is the protection of human rights, those critiques are also towards human rights themselves. However, to point the finger only at the representatives of the Italian executive for misleading the general public, risks to be short sighted. Instead, we should ask ourselves 'why multilateral institutions are failing to convince the general public that human rights are important', to use the words of a study commissioned by

¹⁷ For more on this see Jan Malinowski (2020), 'Consejo de Europa: un instrumento para el buen gobierno' in 'Construyendo los Derechos Humanos en Estrasburgo' pp. 229-323, editore Tirant lo Blanch, Valencia 2020.

another human rights organisation, the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) of the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE)¹⁸.

The main criticism of how international organisations communicate about human rights, according to this seven-year-old study, is that they use highly specialised, hermetic and inward-looking language that fails to engage the general public and those most in need of human rights protection. Unfortunately, international organisations' communication remains too insular, negative, abstract, and disconnected from effectively engaging and persuading the general public. Moreover, resources to improve communication are limited in terms of staff and funds at the disposal of international organisations, therefore the involvement of other actors, both governmental and non-governmental, as multipliers is fundamental. A number of public discussions, experts' think tanks involving journalists, and practical tools¹⁹ have aimed at finding better ways to communicate by using simpler language, positive framing, new technologies, broader outreach and partnerships to make human rights messaging more resonant and impactful. In sum, there is an urgent need for international organisations to get out from their 'comfort zone' of preaching to the converted, instead of 'engaging the disengaged'. The point of departure of the 2018 ODIHR study mentioned above was that 'international organisations and institutions need to regain, strengthen and sustain popular trust and support to be effective in promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms' (Gardapkhadze K. and Davies G., 2018). Probably showing the positive impact that the enjoyment of human rights has on individuals is the best way of communicating²⁰ and remains of upmost importance when such trust and support, for both international institutions and their human rights causes are in decline and when some governments and public figures are turning away from human rights.

Conclusions

The paper has put the Italian Government's concern about the Council of Europe for allegedly overstepping its mandate and interfering in domestic

¹⁸ 'On communication, or why multilateral institutions are failing to convince the general public that human rights and fundamental freedoms are important', ODIHR Submissions to the 2018 European Yearbook of Human Rights, by Katarzyna Gardapkhadze and Gareth Davies.

¹⁹ See for example '10 Keys to effectively communicating Human Rights' by the European Agency for Fundamental Rights.

²⁰ See examples of the impact of the European Convention on Human Rights by theme at <https://www.coe.int/en/web/impact-convention-human-rights#/>.

affairs in the wider context of criticism and scepticism towards human rights international organisations. In the case of Italy, these criticisms may stem from a misunderstanding of the Council's role and monitoring mechanisms, rather than a calculated attack to the Organisation simply for domestic electoral gain. In both cases, it is necessary to reiterate and convincingly pass on the message that the Council's monitoring bodies do not aim to publicly shame or condemn member states, but rather to engage in constructive dialogue and provide recommendations to uphold human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Italy's outstanding contributions and historical ties to the Council of Europe should be a reminder for the current Italian Government of the importance that the country has always attached to this intergovernmental organisation. Therefore, rather than viewing it with scepticism, the Government of Italy and of other member states should embrace the Council as a legitimate source of democratic governance principles and an ally in promoting the shared values that the organisation was founded upon over 75 years ago.

By working cooperatively with the Council's monitoring bodies and cooperating with its processes, Italy can testimony its commitment to democratic norms and human rights while addressing legitimate security concerns through established international frameworks: working together in international and transnational frameworks strengthens rather than weakens sovereignty. To say it with the words of Josep Borrell, the former High Representative of the EU for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, 'It's high time to make multilateralism great again' (Borell J., 2020) as 'Multilateralism is not about giving up sovereignty. It is about sharing it to be stronger together'²¹.

At the same time, there is an urgent need for the Council of Europe, as well as for other international organisations, to explore more effective ways to communicate the Organisation's added value. While the specific issue of an improved communication is beyond the scope of this article, it remains pivotal to the solution of the problems affecting the member states' support for the Council of Europe, as well as for other international organisations. I hope that this final remark will be taken as an invitation by academia, international experts and international civil servants, as I have been for 35 years, to further explore this aspect in detail to help ease tensions and misunderstandings between member states and international organisations entrusted with human rights monitoring.

²¹ As reported in the 2023 Raisina conferences found at <https://share.google/KewbK7z1DXjcnMr6p>.

References

- Borrell J. (14 December 2020) 'Quelle politique étrangère européenne à l'heure du Covid-19 ?' *Le Grand Continent*, retrieved from: <https://legrandcontinent.eu/fr/2020/12/14/la-doctrine-borrell/>. (accessed: 10/12/2025)
- European Agency for Fundamental Rights (2022), '10 Keys to effectively communicating Human Rights', retrieved from: <https://fra.europa.eu/en/publication/2022/10-keys-effectively-communicating-human-rights-2022-edition>. (accessed: 10/12/2025)
- European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (2024), ECRI Sixth report on Italy, retrieved from: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/european-commission-against-racism-and-intolerance/italy> (accessed: 10/12/2025)
- Gardapkhadze K. and Davies G. (2018) 'On communication, or why multilateral institutions are failing to convince the general public that human rights and fundamental freedoms are important', ODIHR Submissions to the 2018 European Yearbook of Human Rights, pp. 495–520, retrieved from: <https://www.cambridge.org/core/books/abs/european-yearbook-on-human-rights-2018/how-multilateral-organisations-can-communicate-better-about-human-rights/8190B8D2DE5EB158A3253AF921236F1B> (accessed: 10/12/2025)
- Giacomelli M. (2021) 'Italy and the Council of Europe' Permanent Representation of Italy to the Council of Europe, retrieved from: 'Italy and the Council of Europe' by Ambassador Michele Giacomelli (accessed: 10/12/2025)
- Goldsmith J. (2016) 'The Contributions of the Obama Administration to the Practice and Theory of International Law' *Harvard International Law Journal* / Vol. 57, retrieved from: <https://hls.harvard.edu/bibliography/the-contributions-of-the-obama-administration-to-the-practice-and-theory-of-international-law/> (accessed: 10/12/2025)
- Malinowski J. (2020), 'Consejo de Europa: un instrumento para el buen gobierno' in 'Construyendo los Derechos Humanos en Estrasburgo' pp. 229 – 323, Tirant lo Blanch, Valencia, retrieved from: <https://dialnet.unirioja.es/servlet/articulo?codigo=8079197> (accessed: 10/12/2025)
- Muižnieks N. (3 September 2025) 'Russia and the Council of Europe: The troubled membership from the perspective of a Commissioner for Human Rights' *EJIL Talk*, Blog of the *European Journal of International Law*, retrieved from: <https://www.ejiltalk.org/russia-and-the-council->

of-europe-the-troubled-membership-from-the-perspective-of-a-commissioner-for-human-rights/ (accessed: 10/12/2025)

Sachs J. D. and Lafortune G. (2024) 'The Index of Countries' Support for UN-based Multilateralism: Construction, Verification, and Correlates' Asian Economic Papers retrieved from <https://direct.mit.edu/asep/article/23/3/1/124683/The-Index-of-Countries-Support-for-UN-based> (accessed: 10/12/2025)