



Resolution 2486 (2023)¹

Building the Open Council of Europe Academic Networks (OCEAN)

Parliamentary Assembly

1. The globalisation of research and innovation has intensified over the last decade, particularly in terms of collaborative research, technology development and the mobility of researchers.
2. The Parliamentary Assembly firmly believes that universities and research institutes have a key role to play in addressing Europe's challenges, such as upholding the primacy of the rule of law, the fight against corruption, defending the promotion of social rights, the fight against gender-based violence, the need to address climate change, issues related to biomedicine and the integration of migrants.
3. Full respect for the values and standards enshrined in the Council of Europe convention system requires the resources, strengths and talents of all sectors of civil society, including academics, scientists, schools, students, regional and local authorities, social workers and non-governmental organisations.
4. Apathy and disenchantment with regard to the above-mentioned values and the rise of populism, nationalism and new ideas of what constitutes "the people" and "the elites" create social conflicts and continue to impede the realisation of human rights in all European societies.
5. The Assembly is convinced that the impact and visibility of the Council of Europe's activities must first and foremost be measured on the ground. Only the widespread sharing of common values in a society can guarantee the effective implementation of Council of Europe standards. Researchers, students, social workers and local authorities in various sectors can embrace shared values, which in turn have an impact on their work and daily lives. Everyone contributes to the standards developed by the Council of Europe because everyone benefits from them.
6. The Assembly notes that European universities and research institutes are still a largely untapped resource for the promotion of the Council of Europe convention system. They remain the drivers of innovation and creative thinking and can be considered a universal heritage; they produce skilled human capital, including the next generation of European policy makers, facilitate policy discussions and drive change.
7. Universities have the potential to strengthen their role as incubators of human rights, democracy and the rule of law and create a fertile environment for the implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) and all other Council of Europe conventions. Their ability to mobilise the collective intelligence of civil society at all levels should be reinforced.
8. The Assembly therefore welcomes the Open Council of Europe Academic Networks (OCEAN) initiative which aims at strengthening co-operation between the Council of Europe and universities and research institutions through mutually enriching interaction.
9. It wishes to praise two existing networks which are already working on key priorities, namely the Academic Network on the European Social Charter and Social Rights (ANESC), set up in 2006 at the Council of Europe level, and the Italian network Universities in Network against Gender Violence (UN.I.RE), set up in 2019 and entirely funded by the Italian Government. They can serve as models for future thematic networks

1. *Assembly debate* on 27 January 2023 (9th sitting) (see [Doc. 15675](#), report of the Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media, rapporteur: Ms Marta Grande). *Text adopted by the Assembly* on 27 January 2023 (9th sitting).



working on other Council of Europe conventions, such as the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Dignity of the Human Being with regard to the Application of Biology and Medicine (ETS No. 164, Oviedo Convention) and the conventions under the enlarged agreement on the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO).

10. In the light of the above, the Assembly calls on all Council of Europe member States to:

10.1. recognise the role universities and research institutes play, and should be able to play, in upholding Council of Europe values and entrenching them in the social fabric, and in facilitating the implementation of Council of Europe conventions and building greater unity between all member States;

10.2. raise awareness among universities and research institutes about the OCEAN initiative, via ministries for higher education and research, with a view to setting up national thematic networks, supported by an appropriate legal structure, or joining existing ones;

10.3. provide adequate financial support to such networks and encourage universities and research institutes to make available funds that are earmarked for the professional travel of academic staff as well as their expertise and work time;

10.4. consider making voluntary contributions to support the OCEAN initiative at European level, following the example of the Italian Government, with a view to strengthening expertise and capacity building, and contributing to the exchange of information, data, researchers, curriculums and experiences at European and international levels, including through international conferences, joint degrees, doctoral degrees or other research programmes;

10.5. in line with [Resolution 2352](#) and [Recommendation 2189 \(2020\)](#) “Threats to academic freedom and autonomy of higher education institutions in Europe”, pay special attention to the integration of the assessment of academic freedom into the OCEAN initiative, providing a framework for regular evaluation and dialogue;

10.6. closely co-ordinate with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) members, also in the framework of its Task Force on Enhancing Knowledge Sharing in the EHEA community.

11. The Assembly also calls on the European Union to consider supporting financially the OCEAN initiative, thereby sending a strong political signal, in particular with regard to the conventions which it has signed.

12. The Assembly stresses that parliamentarians may benefit from the expertise of academics when it comes to scrutinising draft legislation in regard to Council of Europe convention standards and overseeing their governments’ action in the execution of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights. Therefore, the Assembly also encourages national parliaments of all Council of Europe member States to:

12.1. contribute to the efforts to recruit universities and research institutes, as well as individual academics who are already providing expertise to relevant parliamentary committees;

12.2. organise parliamentary hearings with the participation of representatives of the academic world and relevant Council of Europe experts to encourage the creation of national thematic academic networks, under the OCEAN umbrella.