

The Members of the Council of Europe

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The Members of the Council of Europe

In 1949, the Cold War was at its peak. Two of its most tangible manifestations were the imposition of the Berlin Blockade, in June 1948, and the creation of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) on 4 April 1949.

Scandinavia, geographically close to the USSR, was torn between the two camps. While Norway, Denmark and Sweden tried to pool their efforts and create a Nordic defence union and accede to both the Council of Europe and the Organisation for European Economic Cooperation (OEEC), Finland refused because it was bound by a friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance treaty to its closest neighbour, the USSR. Finland was fearful of displeasing the USSR and could not, therefore, join the Council of Europe, despite the democratic character of its institutions.

In 1952, Denmark, Iceland, Norway and Sweden continued their push for regional integration by creating the Nordic Council, an advisory body to the national governments and parliaments in Scandinavia in the area of cultural, legal and economic cooperation. The Nordic Council also supervised negotiations for the creation of a Scandinavian customs union and common market. Finland joined the Council in 1955. Since 1953, these countries have had a common market for their labour force and, as from 1955, common social security legislation.

The 10 founding countries of the Council of Europe, whose Statute was signed in London on 5 May 1949, were the United Kingdom, France, the three Benelux countries, Ireland, Italy, Norway, Sweden and Denmark. Greece, Turkey and Iceland have taken part in the Assembly's proceedings since 8 August 1949, when the first session of the Council of Ministers was convened. The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) and the Saar acceded as Associate Members on 8 August 1950. Once its government was constituted, West Germany became a full member of the Council of Europe on 2 May 1951. Other countries followed later: Austria in 1956, Cyprus in 1961, Switzerland in 1963, Malta in 1965, Portugal in 1976 and Spain in 1977. Most of the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (CEECs) acceded in the 1990s. In principle, all European countries, provided they undertake to respect human rights and the rule of law, are welcome to join, thus raising the question of exactly where the borders of Europe lie.