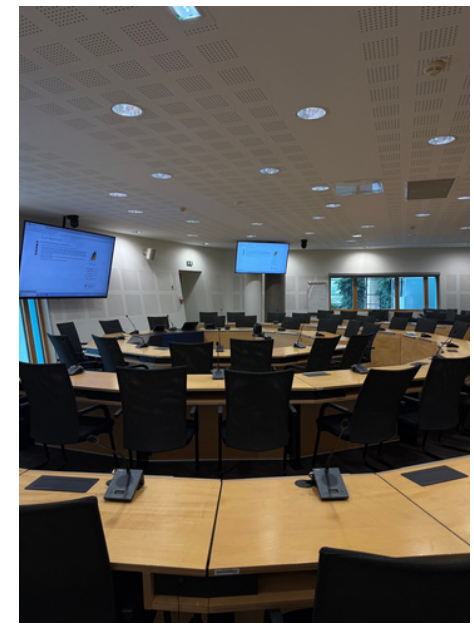
Experiencing democracy in Strasbourg

When we think about Europe, we often think about the European Union, the euro, open borders, political cooperation and many other things.
However, there is another European institution that plays an important role in protecting our rights, the Council of Europe.
The Council of Europe was founded in 1949, only a few years after the end of the Second World War.
Back then, ten European countries came together with a shared goal, to build a Europe based on human rights, democracy and the rule of law with the message, “Never again.”
Today, the Council of Europe has 46 member states and represents around 700 million people.
Its work is based on the idea that human rights should be protected in everyday life.
One of its most crucial achievements is the European Convention on Human Rights, which protects fundamental rights such as freedom of expression and the right to a fair trial.
Likewise, the European Court of Human Rights gives individuals the opportunity to take action when they believe their rights have been violated.
What I find particularly interesting is the connection between human rights, democracy and the rule of law.



Council of Europe from the inside

These three principles create a stable foundation for the involved democratic societies and indicate that democracy goes beyond elections.
Another thing that stood out to me during the visit was the focus on young people. The Council of Europe actively tries to involve young people in democratic life and gives them opportunities to share their ideas and take part in decision-making.
Seeing this made the idea of democracy feel more relevant to me because young people are also part of the society they want to shape.
Moreover, the visit also made me realise how relevant the Council of Europe remains today.
Europe faces new challenges, from war and discrimination to threats to freedom of expression and the impact of artificial intelligence. The organisation continues to address these issues while protecting its core values.
For instance, the situation in Ukraine shows the importance of the Council of Europe today. After Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Russia was excluded from the organisation in 2022. Since then, supporting Ukraine has become a vital part of the Council of Europe's work, especially in areas such as justice and accountability.
Looking at the Council of Europe today, I think its original idea remains just as relevant as it was in 1949. Human rights and democracy require continuous protection and active participation.

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