10th anniversary of the Charter of Fundamental Rights: Council reaffirms the importance of EU common values

Today the Council adopted conclusions on the occasion of the 10th anniversary of the Charter of Fundamental Rights. The conclusions reaffirm that the Union is based on common values such as respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities. These rights are a cornerstone of the European Union and must be fully respected by all member states and the EU institutions.

The Council also reaffirms its commitment to the EU’s accession to the European Convention on Human Rights, which would further enhance the protection of fundamentals rights in Europe. The Council, taking note of the reports produced by the Commission and the EU Agency for Fundamental rights, acknowledges that challenges in the area of non-discrimination persist and reiterates its commitment to continue its work to fight against all forms of discrimination.

Noting that public awareness of the Charter remains low, the Council calls on member states to strengthen their awareness-raising and training activities towards all key stakeholders, including policymakers, civil servants, legal practitioners as well as national human rights institutions, civil society organisations, etc. The Council also recalls that the e-justice portal is an important tool to support this and commits itself to having thematic discussions and annual exchange of views on the application of the Charter at the national level.

While welcoming the essential role of the Fundamental Rights Agency in providing expertise on fundamental rights and inviting the EU institutions and Member States to make better use of the agency’s services, the Council underlines it would consider carefully any proposal from the Commission to enable the agency to carry out its work even more efficiently.

Finally, as civil society organisations play a vital role in raising awareness and supporting efforts by individuals to exercise and defend their rights, the Council recalls the importance of removing and refraining from any unnecessary, unlawful or arbitrary restrictions on civil society.

Background

The Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union was solemnly proclaimed on 7 December 2000. However, it became fully legally binding once it was integrated within the Treaty of Lisbon in December 2009. This year therefore marks the 10th anniversary of the EU Charter of Fundamental Rights becoming legally binding.

The Charter contains 50 articles related to political, social, and economic rights. Member States have a duty to respect the rights and observe the principles of the Charter whenever they are acting within the scope of EU law. The Charter applies to the institutions, bodies, offices and agencies of the Union and to its member states when implementing European Union law.

Results of a recent Eurobarometer survey on Charter awareness show that only 42% of respondents have heard of the Charter and 12% know what it is.