**The Council of Europe**

Not long ago Russia became a member of the Council of Europe. And what does the term "The Council of Europe" mean?

For over 50 years the Council of Europe has been working to build a Europe United on the basis of freedom and democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The Council was set up by ten west European states. Since then the European landscape has changed, and today the great majority of European countries belong to go to the Organization.

How the Council of Europe works. The Committee of Ministers comprises the foreign ministers of the 34 members states, it meets twice a year in ordinary session and may also held special or informal meetings. The Minister's Deputies meet every month. The Committee of Ministers also serves as a permanent forum of discuss European co-operation and common political problems.

The Parliamentary Assembly comprises 239 representatives. The Parliamentary Assembly meets in full session four times a year. By debating problems of modern society and making recommendations to the Committee of Ministers, it is the starting point for many of the Council of Europe's activities. The Parliamentary Assembly has created a "special guest" scheme to welcome representatives of non-member states from central and eastern Europe and designed to prepare them for full membership of the Organization.

The Council works to harmonize policies and adopt common standards practices in member states. It operates by bringing, at different levels, parliamentarias, ministers, government experts, local and regional representatives, youth associations and INGOs (international non-governmental organizations) to pool their knowledge and experience.

There have been adopted over 155 European conventions. Subjects range from the protection of computerized data, violence at sporting events and nature conservation, to mass media, cultural co-operation and the prevention of torture. The activities carried out in the Council of Europe affect all our lives. What are European symbols. The European Flag was chosen by the Council of Europe in 1955. It is composed of a circle of 12 gold stars on a blue black ground. The number of stars is invariable, 12 begin the symbol of perfection.

The European Anthem, adopted by the Council of Europe in 1972, is a musical arrangement by Herbert von Karajam of the Prelude to the Ode to Joy from Beethoven 9th Symphony.

Europe Day, which has been celebrated since 1964 on 5 May, aims to involve Europe's citizens more fully in the process of European unification.