

Comité International
des Sciences Historiques

1926–2026
100 ans



International Committee
of Historical Sciences

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Commentary on the Draft Constitution of the International Committee of Historical Sciences (CISH)

This document accompanies the convening of the 2026 General Assembly (GA) and explains both the process through which the proposed new Constitution of the International Committee of Historical Sciences (CISH) has been prepared and the main ideas guiding the revision.

1. The Process of Drafting the New Constitution

Following the technical revisions adopted at the General Assembly in Tokyo on 25 October 2024, the draft Constitution was developed over the course of 2025–2026 through an extensive consultative process within the Board and in dialogue with the member organisations of CISH.

The current Constitution of CISH dates essentially from 1992 (GA Prague) and was subsequently amended in 2005 (GA Sydney) and most recently in 2024 (GA Tokyo). While it has provided a stable legal framework for the organisation, experience over the past decade has revealed several structural limitations. In particular, the existing text contains very detailed and complex procedural provisions—especially regarding elections and internal procedures—while the responsibilities and competences of the various organs of CISH are only partially defined. As a result, the organisation has at times been preoccupied with its internal procedures rather than focusing on its strategic role.

In March 2025, the Board therefore decided to prepare a new and streamlined Constitution. The objective was to create a clearer and more concise constitutional framework that would better reflect the current requirements of the organisation and support its further professionalisation. In particular, the establishment of a permanent CISH Office in Bern in 2025 created new opportunities to strengthen the organisation's operational capacity and required a constitutional framework that responds to these developments.

Following the Board discussion of 8 March 2025, a drafting process was initiated. A first draft was prepared and subsequently revised several times based on discussions within the Board and feedback from CISH members. The process included several stages of revision and consultation, including Board discussions in May and September 2025, a phase of broader consultation with CISH members in October 2025, and further revisions at the end of 2025 and beginning of 2026. The present text of the draft Constitution reflects the outcome of this iterative process and the revisions adopted during the Board meeting of March 2026.

Throughout the drafting process, particular attention was paid to ensuring that the new Constitution responds to the current requirements of the organisation and enhances its professional capacity. A comparative approach, drawing on international scholarly organisations, included a systematic analysis of the statutes and mission statements of several international scientific bodies and academic charters. This process helped to clarify the formulation of CISH's mission and to structure the constitutional provisions in a manner that reflects good practices in international academic governance and demonstrates that the draft follows widely accepted standards of governance.

2. Main Ideas and Innovations of the Draft Constitution

The new Constitution preserves the historical identity and mission of CISH while introducing several structural improvements designed to make the organisation more coherent and adaptable. At the same time, it is designed to create a clearer and more streamlined institutional framework that both responds to current requirements and strengthens the organisation's professional development. A central aim of the reform is to enhance the agility of the organisation by aligning decision-making authority more closely with the level at which action is required, while preserving appropriate forms of collective oversight.

A first guiding principle of the revision, directly linked to this objective, has been to make the Constitution shorter, clearer, and more focused. The new text focuses on defining the essential institutional framework and the main responsibilities of the organs of CISH, while detailed procedural matters are intended to be regulated in separate by-laws or organisational regulations. This approach allows the Constitution to concentrate on fundamental principles rather than operational details.

A second important innovation concerns the clearer definition of the mission and objectives of the organisation. The new article on "Mission and Purpose" (art. 2) explicitly presents CISH as the world organisation of historians and defines its role in promoting the advancement of the historical sciences through international cooperation, research, education, and the dissemination of knowledge. It also emphasises the importance of defending academic freedom, supporting professional standards in historical scholarship, and engaging critically with the public uses of history. This formulation aligns the mission of CISH with the values and responsibilities widely shared by international scientific organisations.

A third major element of the reform is the reorganisation and clarification of the institutional structure of CISH. The new Constitution clearly distinguishes between several organs with different functions: the General Assembly as the highest body of the organisation; the Board as the strategic and political body; the Presidium as the executive decision-making body for urgent matters; and the Office as the operational structure responsible for the daily administration of the organisation. This clearer division of responsibilities is intended to ensure both clarity of authority and greater responsiveness in decision-making.

Closely linked to this institutional reform is the introduction of a professional administrative structure centred on the CISH Office and the Executive Director. The Executive Director is entrusted

with administrative and financial management, membership administration, and communication, thereby relieving the elected bodies of routine operational tasks and enabling them to concentrate on strategic and scholarly priorities. This development also establishes a clear distinction between elected leadership and professional administration.

The draft Constitution further introduces a series of adjustments designed to enhance the effectiveness and coherence of the organisation in the twenty-first century. These include the establishment of a more structured Board, a clearer delineation of the role of the Nominating Committee in the preparation of elections, and a more flexible framework for the organisation of the General Assembly, which may convene both in person and online. At the same time, the Constitution preserves continuity with the historical traditions of CISH, in particular by reaffirming the central role of the International Congress of Historical Sciences (hereafter “World Congress”) as the principal forum of the global community of historians—or, in the felicitous formulation of the “oecumene of historians”.

In addition to these structural and conceptual innovations, the draft Constitution introduces several concrete provisions aimed at improving the practical functioning and inclusiveness of the organisation.

First, the possibility of individual membership is introduced. This measure is intended to allow scholars—particularly those who are not represented through national committees or equivalent institutional structures—to participate more directly in the activities of CISH, thereby strengthening the global inclusiveness of the organisation.

Second, the procedure for selecting the venue of the World Congress has been revised. While the General Assembly retains a central role in identifying a shortlist of suitable bids, the final decision rests with the Board. This allocation of responsibilities preserves the strategic and normative oversight of the General Assembly, while entrusting the Board with delegated decision-making authority within a clearly defined framework. This adjustment increases flexibility in the evaluation process, allows more time for the preparation of bids, and—most importantly—strengthens CISH’s strategic position in negotiations with prospective host institutions. It is expected to intensify competition among candidates, secure more favourable conditions for CISH—particularly regarding the Solidarity Fund—and foster a more inclusive global presence.

Third, the draft Constitution introduces a more flexible framework for the organisation of the World Congress, moving away from the rigid five-year cycle. Where sufficient human and financial resources are available, the World Congress may in future be held at shorter intervals, ideally every three years. As the timing of the World Congress determines the organisation’s electoral cycle, this flexibility directly affects the duration of terms of office. The draft therefore provides explicitly that terms are no longer fixed but may vary, depending on the interval between World Congresses, ranging from three to five years. This adjustment ensures a closer alignment between the electoral cycle and the organisation of the World Congress. At the same time, it preserves institutional continuity by ensuring that part of the Board retains experience from one World Congress cycle to the next, while limiting the overall duration of service and thereby facilitating regular renewal. The need for such flexibility became particularly evident during the preparation of the XXIII International Congress of Historical Sciences in Poznań in the aftermath of the pandemic. Taken together, these

provisions establish a framework that balances continuity and renewal by combining institutional memory with regular turnover in the composition of the Board.

Finally, the new institutional architecture is complemented by a clearer allocation of decision-making competences. In line with the principle of subsidiarity, responsibilities are distributed across the organs of CISH according to the nature and significance of the issues concerned. Routine operational matters are handled by the Office; matters requiring coordination or limited political guidance are addressed by the Presidium; issues of broader strategic or institutional importance fall within the remit of the Board; and questions of major political significance or affecting the fundamental orientation of the organisation are reserved for the General Assembly. This structured cascade ensures both operational efficiency and appropriate levels of institutional legitimacy.

Taken together, these elements define the core operational logic of the new Constitution. For ease of reference, the principal innovations introduced by the draft may be summarized as follows:

- the introduction of individual membership, broadening participation beyond existing national structures and affiliated specialized organisations;
- a revised procedure for selecting the venue of the World Congress, combining the role of the General Assembly in identifying candidates with a final decision by the Board, thereby strengthening CISH's negotiating position and enabling more favourable terms;
- more flexible terms of office, ranging from three to five years depending on the cycle of the World Congresses;
- a structured allocation of decision-making competences across the organs of CISH, ensuring both effectiveness and appropriate institutional legitimacy;
- the establishment of a professional administrative structure centred on the Executive Director.

3. Conclusion

The proposed Constitution represents a modernisation and consolidation of CISH's institutional framework, building on its long-standing history. It establishes a clearer and more concise constitutional framework that meets the organisation's current requirements and supports its ongoing professionalisation. This enables CISH to fulfil its mission more effectively in an ever-changing international academic landscape while preserving the traditions and values that have guided it since its foundation in 1926.

In this spirit, the General Assembly is invited to consider the draft Constitution and deliberate on its adoption at the Centennial Conference in Leipzig, with a view to providing a framework for the future development of the International Committee of Historical Sciences.

Bern, 18 March 2026

On behalf of the Board
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