

Comité International
des Sciences Historiques

1926–2026
100 ans



International Committee
of Historical Sciences

1926–2026
100 years

New Constitution of the International Committee of Historical Sciences (CISH)

Explanatory Note following the Preliminary General Assembly

The Preliminary General Assembly of 24 April 2026 marked an important milestone in the constitutional revision of CISH. The Assembly unanimously endorsed the proposed constitutional reform and demonstrated broad consensus on a new constitutional framework that is clearer, more transparent and better adapted to the evolving needs of the international historical community. It also confirmed the strong commitment of the member organisations to the future development of CISH.

The debate was conducted in a very constructive and collegial spirit. Several editorial suggestions improved the clarity and consistency of the draft. Only two issues required substantive revision before the Constitution could be submitted to the General Assembly in Leipzig on 27 August 2026:

The first concerned Article 2 (Mission and Purpose). Following an intensive and highly constructive discussion during the Preliminary General Assembly, a revised wording emerged that expressed more precisely the mission and values of CISH. The amended text reflects the broad consensus reached during the discussion and has therefore been incorporated into the revised draft.

The second concerned the provisions governing terms of office. Although these provisions were generally supported during the Preliminary General Assembly, one aspect of the proposed rules on Board renewal was considered to merit further examination. This prompted a systematic historical examination of the composition of the CISH Board and its elections since 1990, providing an empirical basis for assessing the practical implications of the proposed provisions.

1. Article 2 (Mission and Purpose)

Article 2 gave rise to the principal substantive discussion during the Preliminary General Assembly. Participants welcomed the proposed mission statement as a sound basis, while suggesting several refinements intended to express more clearly the identity, purpose and values of CISH. The discussion was characterised by broad convergence of views and by a shared commitment to formulating a mission statement that reflects both the historical role of CISH and the contemporary responsibilities of an international organisation of historians.

Several amendments proposed during the discussion were adopted by consensus and have all been incorporated into the revised draft. These amendments strengthen the articulation of CISH's mission by more clearly expressing its commitment to the promotion of historical scholarship, academic freedom, professional and academic standards, universal human rights and the responsible public use of history.

The revised Article 2 therefore represents the most significant substantive modification introduced after the Preliminary General Assembly. It provides a more precise and comprehensive formulation of the principles and objectives that unite CISH's member organisations. The revised wording reflects the broad consensus achieved during the discussion and is therefore submitted for adoption by the General Assembly.

2. Article 11.3 (Terms of office)

The proposed provisions governing terms of office received broad support during the Preliminary General Assembly. One aspect of the proposed rules on Board renewal nevertheless prompted further discussion concerning the balance between continuity and renewal within the Board. Although this issue was raised by only a limited number of members, it touched upon an important constitutional principle. It therefore prompted a comprehensive review of the proposed provisions in the light of the Committee's historical experience before the revised draft was finalised.

The purpose of these provisions extends beyond ensuring the periodic renewal of the Board. Equally important, however, is to maintain a Board that reflects, as far as possible, the diversity of the international historical community and the worldwide scope of historical scholarship. This includes an appropriate balance of geographical regions, gender, linguistic traditions, chronological fields and historical disciplines. As the international historical community continues to evolve, the constitutional framework should ensure that new generations of historians have regular opportunities to participate in the leadership of the Committee, while preserving the institutional continuity necessary for its effective functioning.

In order to evaluate whether the proposed provisions achieve this balance, the Board undertook a systematic historical examination of the composition of the CISH Board and its elections since 1990. The historical analysis demonstrates that Board renewals have consistently been substantially higher than the constitutional minimum proposed in the revised Statutes.

Renewal of ordinary Board members at Congress General Assemblies, 1995–2021¹

General Assembly	Renewal
1995	70%
2000	70%
2005	50%
2010	80%
2015	60%
2021	60%
Average	65%

The analysis also provides important insights into the mechanisms that have historically produced this high level of Board renewal. Under the current Statutes, renewal has been governed by only two provisions: the requirement that at least three Board members be newly elected at each general election and the mandatory retirement of Board members upon reaching the age of 70. Unlike the proposed revised Statutes, the current Statutes impose no limit on the number of consecutive terms that a Board member may serve.

The empirical evidence indicates that the statutory age limit has historically been the principal mechanism governing Board renewal. Board members first entered office at an average age of approximately 59.5 years, reflecting the fact that historians have generally joined the Board only after acquiring an internationally recognised academic reputation. Consequently, the statutory age limit frequently determined the duration of Board service before a fourth consecutive term would have become possible, so that Board turnover depended far more on mandatory retirement than on the statutory minimum number of newly elected members.

¹ This analysis is based on a systematic examination of published CISH Board lists, General Assembly records and publicly available biographical sources for all individuals who first entered the CISH Board between 1990 and 2026. The resulting dataset comprises 53 Board members. The year of birth could be established for all members, and the exact date of birth for almost all. First entry into the Board was identified on the basis of the earliest documented election. For the purposes of both the age analysis and the calculation of renewal rates, mid-term elections are attributed to the subsequent Congress General Assembly, thereby providing a uniform chronological framework for comparison. The analysis indicates that Board members first entered the Board at an average age of approximately 59.5 years. Although the documentation of some mid-term elections is not entirely uniform, these minor uncertainties do not affect the overall finding that Board members have typically joined the Board only at a comparatively advanced stage of their academic careers.

Against this background, the revised constitutional framework is formally more restrictive than the existing Statutes. For the first time, it introduces a limit of three consecutive terms for Board members, while reducing the minimum compulsory renewal at each general election from three to two newly elected members. The historical analysis indicates that these formal changes largely codify a long-standing pattern of Board renewal within CISH and are therefore unlikely to produce significantly different practical outcomes. Given the historically high average age at first entry to the Board, the statutory age limit of 70 years will in many cases continue to determine the maximum duration of Board service before the new term limit becomes applicable. The principal effect of the revised provisions is therefore not to alter the historical pattern of Board renewal but to establish a clearer and more coherent constitutional framework governing the duration of Board membership.

The requirement that at least two members of the Board be newly elected at each general election should therefore be understood as a constitutional safeguard rather than as the principal mechanism of renewal. It guarantees that every electoral cycle provides an opportunity for the election of new Board members, while leaving the General Assembly full discretion to elect a substantially larger number whenever this is considered appropriate. The historical record demonstrates that the General Assembly has consistently exercised this discretion in favour of significantly higher levels of renewal than the constitutional minimum.

Taken together, the three mechanisms of the revised Statutes – the maximum of three consecutive terms, the statutory age limit of 70 years and the requirement that at least two Board members be newly elected at each general election – provide a balanced constitutional framework. They reconcile institutional continuity with regular renewal and help ensure that the Board remains representative of the international historical community in all its geographical, linguistic, chronological, disciplinary and gender diversity.

3. Conclusion

With these two substantive revisions, the final draft of the Constitution further strengthens the revised constitutional framework. It provides CISH with a clearer, more coherent and more effective constitutional framework, combining institutional continuity with modern governance, enabling the organisation to pursue its mission more effectively in an evolving international academic environment, while preserving the traditions and values that have guided CISH since its foundation in 1926.

The General Assembly is invited to adopt the final draft of the Constitution at the Centennial Conference in Leipzig as the constitutional framework for the future development of CISH.

Submitted to the General Assembly by the Board

Bern, 19 July 2026

On behalf of the Board

Sacha Zala