



CONFERENCE OF INGOs
OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

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CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

2015

Activity Report



Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe

Introduction

The Council of Europe is the only intergovernmental institution to have granted INGOs a special, participatory status. Through this status, which was established by means of Committee of Ministers Resolution 2003(8), the role of INGOs at the Council of Europe was enhanced. As a result the Conference of INGOs no longer just attempts to take an active part in the preparation of the Council of Europe's legal instruments, it also tries to act as a driving force for proposals and strengthen its role as a key partner in areas relating to organised civil society in the Council of Europe member states.

The Conference of INGOs determines the general measures to be taken to organise its participation in the Council's activities and the "quadrilogue", to ensure that the participatory arrangements function smoothly and hence to help to assert the political role of civil society at the Council of Europe, represented by the 325 INGOs with participatory status.

This activity report gives an overview of the activities of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe. It concerns the period from January to December 2015 and covers the political, thematic and co-operation activities carried out on the territory of the Council of Europe member states.

The Conference of INGOs is a political body but also a structured institutional aid, which organises the work of INGOs at the Council of Europe. The INGOs which take part in Conference sessions do their work within three thematic committees, focusing on human rights; democracy, social cohesion and global challenges; and education and culture. In April, each of these committees renewed their working groups. Currently, there are 19 working groups operating within the Conference of INGOs (eight within the Human Rights Committee, seven within the Democracy, Social Cohesion and Global Challenges Committee and four within the Education and Culture Committee).

Since January 2015, the Conference and its thematic committees have met twice (in January and in June). These sessions are an opportunity for the INGOs to discuss political subjects, take joint positions and converse with representatives of other Council of Europe bodies and external partners.

The Standing Committee held four meetings this year (in January, April, June and September). In addition to its formal meeting, the Bureau held an internal working seminar in September in co-operation with the Secretariat. The Bureau also held an extra meeting in March 2015, one and a half months after its election. All the activities in this report took place with the participation and support of the Civil Society Division of DGII's Directorate of Democratic Governance.

For more details, we also invite the reader to consult the 2015 activity reports of the Conference of INGOs' thematic committees:

- Human Rights: [CONF/HR\(2015\)RAPACT](#)
- Education and Culture: [CONF/EDUC\(2015\)RAPACT](#)
- Democracy, Social Cohesion and Global Challenges

I. The Conference of INGOs in its environment

2015 began with the [election of the President](#) and [Bureau members](#). These elections gave a new impetus, which resulted in an immediate effort, enabling the Conference of INGOs to meet both the expectations of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and the challenges posed by the restriction of civic space and the erosion of fundamental freedoms within the member states.

NGOs are key forums for participatory democracy. Their role is vital and it can be exercised when the rights to freedom of association and freedom of expression are guaranteed and protected by the authorities. The Conference of INGOs therefore supports NGOs in the exercise of their fundamental rights and undertakes to extend the means of action through which it can foster respect for these rights.

1. The bottom-up work begun by the Conference

The first Bureau meeting was held in Paris in March 2015. It provided an opportunity to agree on the approach to consulting INGOs on their thematic priorities so as to reorganise the working groups within each of the Conference's thematic committees (1. Human Rights; 2. Education and Culture; 3. Democracy, Social Cohesion and Global Challenges).

Accordingly, working groups were renewed or set up in line with each committee's priorities. The "contracts" between working groups and the chairs of the committees were based on a document proposed by the Bureau, including details such as the groups' objectives, the duration of their activities and expected results. Following approval by the chairs of the thematic committees, each group's work plan was validated by the Standing Committee in April¹.



From April onwards, the thematic committees and the Gender Equality Expert were invited to draw up their respective action plans for 2015-2017. These documents served as the basis for the whole [Conference's Action Plan for 2015-2018](#). The Conference's Action Plan, which was adopted in June 2015, is centred on twelve thematic priorities, which form the basis for internal and external strategic objectives. The Action Plan also sets out the working methods through which these strategic objectives are to be achieved. The time gap between the committees' action plans and the Conference Action Plan is the result of the differing lengths of the terms of office of the committee chairs, the Gender Equality Expert and the Bureau. As a result the focus in 2017-2018 will mostly be on evaluating the effectiveness of our actions and their outcome.

Special attention was paid to youth issues in 2015. Among the strategic objectives of the Conference's Action Plan are "to lend an ear to young people's concerns and strengthen their participation in the work of the thematic committees" and "to foster the participation of young members of our INGOs in the Conference sessions". These two priorities were implemented with the help of an ad hoc group set up under the responsibility of Anne Kraus (the Conference's representative on the Advisory Council on Youth (CCJ) and Rapporteur to the Bureau). This group highlighted the need to alter the Conference's activities to make them more attractive to

¹ See the appended list of working groups.

young people and more open to their ideas and methods of communication². This will subsequently lead to increased links with the “Youth” INGOs and formal and informal exchanges and events (during sessions and at other times). This approach should make it possible for the Conference of INGOs to become an intergenerational body in which everyone can find a place and express his or her creativity.

The aim of this bottom-up work process, which is still under way, is to foster interaction between the Conference’s member INGOs and to base strategic priorities on the ideas of people working in the field. In 2015, the Conference also re-established the practice of holding a meeting in which its organisation and aims are presented to new member INGOs – this time during the June plenary session. These regular short meetings will be followed up in 2016 through activities during the informal times between working group meetings and plenary sessions so as to foster exchanges between INGOs and collective discussion.

The aim of the seminar held by the Bureau and the Secretariat for the members of the Standing Committee in September was to propose practical activities to help to carry out the action plan. The discussion between the chairs and vice-chairs of the committees made it possible to identify three cross-cutting themes, which will now be co-ordinated by the Bureau:

- migration
- poverty and social cohesion
- youth participation.

This seminar and the meeting of the Standing Committee which followed also saw the beginning of the work on certain amendments to the Conference’s regulations, which will be put to the vote in 2016. The seminar was led in large part by Jessica Chamba, Rapporteur to the Bureau, and reflected the desire to be involved in a truly beneficial and active exchange process. New more interactive and dynamic working methods were used to stimulate the work of the seminar and the aim is for these to be used also, when they are relevant, during working group meetings in 2016 with a view to fostering collective participation.

It was also decided that the internal and external communication between working groups, committees and the Standing Committee would be the subject of a charter and a communication strategy, both of which are still being drawn up. In this connection, it is worth emphasising the considerable efforts made to improve external communications about the Conference’s activities:

- the Conference website has been updated and is still run by the Secretariat;
- the Conference’s Facebook page was reactivated. By December 2015, it had attracted likes from 3 931 people, who follow the page regularly;
- the Conference Twitter account, which had been set up previously but practically never used, was revived in May 2015. By December 2015, it had 143 followers, meaning that there is much scope for progress in the communication strategy referred to in this report.

2. Expert Council on NGO Law

In April, the Standing Committee approved the new composition of the [Expert Council](#) following the appointment of the new members by the Bureau and the renewal of the others’ membership. In this connection, the Bureau decided to appoint [Intigam Aliyev](#) as a Council member. Intigam Aliyev is a human rights lawyer and the President of the NGO [Legal Education](#)

² See the road map for “youth participation” appended.

[Society](#) in Azerbaijan. He has lodged many applications with the European Court of Human Rights, some of which have ended with a finding in favour of the applicants he was defending. This appointment took place only a few days before the first trial of Intigam Aliyev, who is accused by his national authorities of tax evasion (Article 213.1 of the Criminal Code), illegal undertakings (Article 192.2.2) and abuse of office (Article 308.2).

The term of office of the members of the Expert Council began on 27 June. The President's term was renewed for the period from July 2015 to June 2018, which is also the duration of the members' term.

In July 2015 the President of the Conference sent a [letter to the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan](#), expressing her concern at the penalty imposed on Intigam Aliyev and upheld on appeal, and at the poor conditions of his imprisonment. No answer has been received. The President has continued to seek dialogue with the national authorities and to pool the resources of the international human rights NGOs and the national ones in Baku. The subject was also raised at a meeting with the Azerbaijani Ambassador.

The Expert Council therefore began its new round of work with a [campaign](#) for the release of one of its members. Some members of the Expert Council feel directly concerned as they know Intigam Aliyev personally.

The Expert Council's first meeting was held in Strasbourg on 28 and 29 September 2015. On this occasion, its members met representatives of the Council of Europe responsible for the institution's priorities. A joint meeting with the Standing Committee was also held, during which the focus was on an open discussion about the Conference's priorities. An [Expert Council work plan](#) was drawn up and the next meeting will be held at some point in 2016.

3. Interaction with Council of Europe bodies

After her election, the President met the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to discuss the role of organised civil society at the Council of Europe. Meetings with the heads of other bodies (the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities) and with the Commissioner for Human Rights and the senior officials of the Council in charge of programmes helped to establish the main lines of the Conference of INGOs' Action Plan.

3.1. Committee of Ministers

Following the thematic debate by the Ministers' Deputies on the role and functioning of NGOs at the Council of Europe, the Rapporteur Group on Democracy (GR-DEM) was asked to make proposals to improve interaction between the Committee of Ministers and INGOs. On 18 February, the President and representatives of three other INGOs chosen by the GR-DEM were heard by the latter. A number of proposals were already made by the speakers at this hearing, but to increase the number of specific proposals, the Chair of the GR-DEM asked the Civil Society Division to send a questionnaire to all the INGOs with participatory status. After over 120 answers came in, the internal discussion process continued within the Committee of Ministers. At its [plenary meeting in June 2015](#), the Conference of INGOs also held an exchange of views between the INGOs and the permanent representatives of the member states to the Council of Europe. The Norwegian Ambassador (who is the Chair of the GR-DEM) and the Chargé d'Affaires for Poland (which initiated the thematic debate in the Committee of Ministers in 2014) introduced the debate.

The findings that emerged from this exchange are disappointing and recurrent, yet plausible: the work of the Conference is not well known enough within the Council of Europe and, while the [annual hearing of the President of the Conference](#) is now an established institution, more emphasis should be placed on direct exchanges of views between INGOs and Ambassadors, who should be invited regularly to our plenary meetings to talk about subjects that interest us. Similarly, we should not expect a written response from the Council of Europe's decision-making bodies to the resolutions adopted by the Conference, which have proved a far less successful means of communication.

The Conference has a duty to consult its members and to relay their concerns to policy makers including the Committee of Ministers, as the President of the Conference did when she convened a meeting of the INGOs on the day before the [Committee of Ministers' session in Brussels on 18 May 2015](#).

The recent rescheduling of the Conference session timetable and the decision to move the plenary meeting in the Palais de l'Europe to Friday is a measure which should encourage diplomatic delegations to attend the INGO session.

3.2 Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE)

There is still a need to increase and structure direct interaction with the PACE in 2016. However, a meeting was organised between the President of the Conference and the President of the Parliamentary Assembly. Furthermore, in September 2015, the Conference's Democracy, Social Cohesion and Global Challenges Committee held a round table session in partnership with the Parliamentary Assembly entitled "Climate Change: Towards an ambitious agreement at the Paris Summit". The conclusions of this round table, which underlined on the one hand the effects of climate change on migratory flows, and on the other, the tools of the Council of Europe in the field of law and environment, contributed to the plea from civil society to include Human Rights in the COP21 negotiations. Among the guests who accepted the invitation from the Chair of the Committee were Lord Prescott, the Chair of the Parliamentary Assembly's Sub-Committee on Environment and Energy and former negotiator for Europe on the Kyoto Agreements, and Dina Ionesco, the Head of the Migration, Environment and Climate Change Division of the International Organisation for Migration. The event was awarded the official COP21 label. This side event and the others that followed at Le Bourget, received the COP21 official label.

The involvement of the Conference of INGOs in the work of the PACE Committee on Equality and Non-Discrimination through its Gender Equality Expert should also be noted.

At the beginning of 2016, work will begin to organise the joint agenda which we could establish with the Parliamentary Assembly.

3.3. Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

A discussion was held by the joint working group of representatives of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Conference of INGOs on improving the [Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process](#) to make it more accessible to the member states' local and regional authorities, and the [Svensson report](#) and a resolution on "Fostering active citizenship by building partnerships with civil society" (Resolution 385) was adopted at the 29th session of the Congress. At this session, the [President of the Conference spoke](#) before the Congress in support of [Resolution 385](#) before it was voted on by the members. The Svensson report provides practical pointers on how the Code could be improved. As stated in paragraph 11

of the Resolution, in 2016, we will “set up a follow-up committee with a mandate limited to the review of the Code, including members representing the Congress and the Conference of INGOs with two co-chairs; one representing civil society organisations and the other representing the Congress”.

The regular co-operation with the Congress established by the Chair of the Democracy, Social Cohesion and Global Challenges Committee is also worth noting. Congress representatives are invited regularly to speak at Committee meetings. By the same token, the Committee makes considerable efforts to promote European Local Democracy Week. The theme of this annual Congress event this year was “Living together in multicultural societies: respect, dialogue, interaction”.

3.4. Intergovernmental committees, committees of parties, governmental committees and committees linked to the Council of Europe’s Partial Agreements

The representatives of the Conference of INGOs who contribute to the work of the various Council of Europe bodies are expected to supply suitable input based on their expertise but above all on the positions adopted by the Conference of INGOs and, where this is the case, its members. These representatives are then invited to give impetus to the joint activities of the various sub-committees and working groups which will contribute to these committees’ activities.

Every year, the list of the representatives of the Conference of INGOs on these intergovernmental committees, steering committees or committees of parties³ is revised and this practice will continue. The principle that representatives should send a full report to the Standing Committee on the contribution made or to be made by the Conference of INGOs is only partly respected. However, this work is essential for the co-ordination of our activities and for providing the thrust of the work within the Conference of INGOs. The aim is not to increase the members’ workload but for more relevant information to be passed on from the representatives to the Standing Committee. The chairs of the thematic committees are strongly encouraged to provide for contributions during the session from representatives of the Conference of INGOs and other participants within these committees, which are closely linked to the thematic committees’ priorities.

Four committees have strong ties with the Conference’s key focal points, namely the Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH) (representative: Jean-Bernard Marie), the Steering Committee for Education Policy and Practice (CDPPE) (representative: Sabine Rohmann, member of the Bureau of this committee), the European Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG) (representative: Anne-Marie Chavanon) and the Committee of the Parties to the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (representative: Anne Nègre). However, it is essential for the representatives on other committees which deal with different sub-themes to be able to find a means of communicating with the Conference of INGOs so as to inform them and get them involved in the work being carried out.

4. Interaction with the European Union and the INGOs working with it

Even though the responses of the European Union and the Council of Europe diverge, particularly in their views of social rights and the role they afford them, the INGOs should

³ See the list of committees and Conference representatives on the Conference website.

attempt to adopt a complementary approach in their dealings with the two institutions. A strong signal has been given by the Secretary General through the [Turin Process for the European Social Charter](#). This process is not just being conducted at the level of intergovernmental organisations; it has also been taking shape at the level of NGOs. NGOs are the bodies which must encourage the EU member states to ratify the Charter and the Collective Complaints Protocol. The Conference therefore has a duty to devise tools and provide them to NGOs so that they can take effective action in this respect.

To galvanise this process and contribute to the Turin Process for the European Social Charter, the Conference and the Social Platform organised a training course in partnership with the European Economic and Social Committee and the Academic Network on the European Social Charter and Social Rights (ANESC) for INGOs wishing to enhance their ability to lodge collective complaints. The course was also attended by the Vice-President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Mr Nicoletti, a representative of the European Committee of Social Rights and a representative of the government of one of the states party.

When the indivisibility of human rights is not reflected in practice, this leads social rights to be undervalued and treated as second-rate rights. If the 325 INGOs with participatory status lodged collective complaints and if all the Council of Europe member states had the courage to ratify the Additional Protocol to the revised Charter, all the regions of greater Europe would become more democratic and more welfare-oriented. INGOs which seek dialogue with member states should make more use of the collective complaints procedure, whose impartiality is guaranteed by the European Committee of Social Rights.

A crucial complementary approach is also sought with regard to the mechanism of human rights defenders and the freedom of association and assembly. An example of this was the exchange of views between the President of the Conference of INGOs, supported by the Conference Secretariat, and the EU External Action Service in September 2015, as a result of which the Conference of INGOs was represented at the 17th EU-NGO Human Rights Forum on Protecting and Promoting Civil Society Space (Brussels, 3 and 4 December 2015).

5. Interaction with organised civil society in the Council of Europe member states

For many years the Conference of INGOs' approach in the various areas in which it is active has been to highlight the expertise of those who, despite the fact that they work in favour of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, have trouble in making their concerns heard within intergovernmental institutions.

The Conference's commitment to national NGOs should be stepped up, thus enhancing their role in the member states.

- In countries in democratic transition, organised civil society is a force which prompts political change or helps to preserve the status quo.
- In countries with a stable democracy, NGOs play a key role in consolidating democracy by



monitoring and detecting abuses of authority, preventing authoritarian governments from regaining power and encouraging citizens to participate more in democratic processes.

- In countries in democratic regression, NGOs which oppose the authorities are under threat and require protection from international institutions including the Council of Europe. As one of the pillars of the Council, the Conference of INOs has a major role to play in this respect.

5.1. Country visits by the Conference of INGOs

This new activity has been officialised by the Conference's new Action Plan. Visits to the member countries will enable the Conference to reach out to national NGOs and get involved in participatory processes run by national authorities. This activity is also prompted by one of the Conference's strategic priorities, which is "Democratic governance through increased participation by civil society in decision-making procedures at local, national and European levels". These visits are expected to show any gaps there are between the legislative and institutional measures introduced, the practices implemented and the extent to which civil society's expertise is taken into account in the political decision-making process. The two visits which took place in 2015 were to [Chisinau \(9-11 November 2015\)](#) and to [Sofia \(23-25 November 2015\)](#). They were organised by two schools belonging to the [Network of Schools of Political Studies of the Council of Europe](#) (the Dimitry Panitzza Bulgarian School of Politics and the Moldovan School of Political Studies).

INGOs with participatory status were consulted in advance and asked for the details and sectors of activity of their national members in the countries concerned. As a result the details of 17 NGOs were collected for Moldova and 20 for Bulgaria. Following this, public policy sectors were identified and we were able to organise exchanges with 14 NGOs or groupings in Chisinau and 19 in Sofia. The sectors concerned were as follows: in Moldova, citizen participation, social services and youth; in Bulgaria, citizen participation, social services and gender equality. The Conference delegations were appointed according to the fields of expertise of the potential candidates, involving partners with knowledge in the subject areas concerned:

— Moldova: Beatriz Collantes Sanchez, member of the Expert Council on NGO Law, Thierry Mathieu, Vice-Chair of the Democracy, Social Cohesion and Global Challenges Committee, Paddy Hennelly of the Advisory Council on Youth, Jane Crozier from the Secretariat and Anna Rurka;

– Bulgaria: Mihaela Preslavaska, member of the Expert Council on NGO Law, Anne Nègre, Gender Equality Expert, Annica Ryngbeck of the Social Platform, Ivan Nikoltchev from the Secretariat and Anna Rurka.

In both countries, meetings were held with Deputy Ministers or their representatives at the following ministries:

- in Moldova: the Ministry of Labour, Family and Social Protection, the Ministry of Youth and Sport and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and European Integration, together with the Vice-President of the Parliamentary Assembly;
- in Bulgaria: the Ministry of Labour and Social Policies and the Ministry of Justice.

Informal meetings with representatives of the EU delegation and parliamentarians were also held in the two countries.

Before the visit, an interview between the President of the Conference and each country's diplomatic delegation in Strasbourg was organised by the Secretariat. The reports on the Conference's visits were forwarded to these delegations for information and comments. These reports are accessible on the website of the Conference of INGOs.

5.2. The Conference of INGOs' commitment to supporting initiatives by national NGOs

The legitimacy of democratic institutions is built up through the responses they offer to citizens and the effective implementation of the values they champion. However, the most important thing is to inform as many citizens as possible about the role that these institutions play and to make the links between frequently quite complex working processes and the ordinary life of civil society.

Several times in 2015 the Conference of INGOs was asked to meet groups visiting the Council of Europe. The exchanges with the students, volunteers and professionals (from Romania, Belgium, France, Colombia and China) we met during these visits to the Council were highly rewarding and helped to raise the profile of the Conference of INGOs and the work it does at the Council of Europe.

Participation by the Conference in events held by national NGOs also helps to raise awareness of such activities. Examples in 2015 were:

- the World Day for people unable to go on holiday (August 2015) organised by the Secours populaire français, at which the Conference of INGOs was represented by Didier Schretter;
- the launch of the Interfaith Tour (by the Democracy, Social Cohesion and Global Challenges Committee). Five young people with different religious beliefs departed from the Council of Europe on a tour through some forty countries in search of outstanding intercultural and interfaith initiatives. A presentation of the remarkable experiences of these five young people will be made at the Conference of INGOs in June 2016.

II. The implementation of the Conference’s strategic priorities and their incorporation into the Council of Europe’s three core fields

The Council of Europe’s three main areas of expertise – human rights, the rule of law and democracy – are reflected in a series of legal instruments which the member states are supposed to implement on their territories. The Conference of INGOs attempts to transpose this vast range of legal standards into the ordinary lives of the member states’ citizens and NGOs but also to voice the concerns and sometimes the inconsistencies which this transposition process can engender at the legislative level.

1. Human rights

Drawing on their commitment, NGOs must identify and condemn human rights violations. They are also required to promote the rights enshrined in the European Convention on Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms as it is only in this way that “genuine democracy” (as the Council of Europe Statute refers to it) can be brought about. Human rights form a huge part of the work of NGOs. Professionals and volunteers from NGOs devote themselves to helping emancipate individuals, among other things by facilitating their access to rights.

1.1. Commitment to the indivisibility of human rights

The reform of the Court and the strengthening of its role are major issues for NGOs because professionals and volunteers who are committed to increasing the capacity of vulnerable groups and individuals to act and to liberate themselves must be familiar and help others familiarise themselves with all possible remedies as well as championing access to the impartial judicial mechanisms called for by the Convention for the Protection of Human Rights and Fundamental Freedoms.

Based on its members’ experience and its involvement in the work of the Steering Committee for Human Rights, the Conference was invited to contribute to the [High-level Conference on “Implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights: our shared responsibility”](#), held in Brussels on 26 and 27 March 2015.

As is the case every year, the Conference of INGOs’ “Poverty” Working Group marked the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, this year through a day of discussion on 16 October 2015, held in partnership with the European Social Charter Department and entitled “Civil society tackling child poverty in Europe”. This day, which was opened by the Deputy Secretary General and the President of the European Committee of Social Rights, brought together managers of Council of Europe programmes (including Agnes Von Maravic from the Children’s Rights Division), elected representatives, social workers, students and volunteers to discuss the rights of children living in poverty. The day also amounted to preparation for the event on 17 October 2016, which is scheduled to take place in Warsaw. Although this initiative is led by the Human Rights Committee’s “Poverty” Working Group, the annual event is a



Conference activity. Therefore, in keeping with the Standing Committee's wishes, we should be making this group more transversal and open to a larger number of INGOs.

At the same time as the event in Strasbourg, the Conference was represented by Michel Aguilar (the Chair of the Human Rights Committee) in Ulyanovsk (Russian Federation) on 16 and 17 October on the occasion of the general meeting of the federation of social workers of the Russian Federation, organised by Antonina Dashkina and the Russian Union of Social Workers and Social Pedagogues, of which she is the President.

1.2. Protection of human rights defenders

Our first and deepest concern is for individuals and NGOs who are threatened and endangered because of their work for the promotion and respect of human rights for ALL. For many of these people, respect for these fundamental rights has become a vital issue. In the recommendation adopted by the Standing Committee on 30 November 2015 on behalf of the Conference of INGOs [CONF/PLE(2015)REC4], it is stated that "as with individual citizens, NGOs and associations have the fundamental right to peacefully disagree with governmental policies, and to peacefully express their opinions, without being muzzled by the authorities - the very authorities who should be accountable to their citizens for protecting and promoting citizens' liberties". In this connection, [a position was adopted by the President of the Conference of INGOs](#) and dialogue was established with the diplomatic representation of the Russian Federation on the subject of the charges made by the Russian Ministry of Justice against the INGO, Memorial, which is a member of the Conference of INGOs. The President of the Conference undertakes, along with the members of the Standing Committee and the Expert Council on NGO Law, to protect the member INGOs and make all possible proposals to resolve any disputes between national authorities and NGOs so that the latter can fully enjoy their fundamental rights.

1.3. Combating discrimination and violence against vulnerable groups and persons

As well as being reiterated, the indivisibility of human rights must take full effect in the ordinary lives of vulnerable groups. The day-to-day difficulties they face are a means of gauging the gap between the rules and their application.

Through its working group on disability, the Conference of INGOs has been contributing to Council of Europe policy in this sector for many years. This year, a [new study](#) was published on the rights of persons with disabilities. It deals with Article 15 of the European Social Charter in the light of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. The President of the Conference and the group co-coordinator, Marie José Schmitt visited Dublin on 5 and 6 November to contribute to the Council of Europe [Conference on Promoting Human Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Ambitions, Impact and Challenges Ahead](#). The Council of Europe's new strategy on disability is currently being drawn up and the Conference of INGOs will keep track of this work through its working group on disability. Furthermore, bearing in mind the poor implementation by the member states of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, the Conference of INGOs will be doing work on the effectiveness of the civic rights and the legal capacity of persons with disabilities (Article 12 of the UN Convention). The Conference is still open to suggestions from the working group and the Human Rights Committee concerning activities to promote increased recognition of these rights and make them more effective.

The [Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence](#) is based on the idea that this is a form of gender-based violence. The various types of violence covered are carried out on women because they are women. There are many INGOs which defend the rights of victims and work to promote gender equality. The Istanbul Convention is a new Council of Europe convention and its appearance on the institutional stage still causes much debate and controversy in the member states. It is for this reason that the Conference and the INGOs wish both to take an active part in the monitoring process and to help promote this mechanism. With this goal in mind, a round table, entitled “[Civil society, driving force of the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention](#)” was held in June by the Conference’s Gender Equality Expert⁴ and included contributions by Matjaž Hanžek of the Committee on Equality and Non-discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly and Johan Friestedt of the Violence against Women Division of the Directorate of Human Dignity and Equality, under DG II.

1.4. Human rights and democratic governance under pressure from migratory movements

In the context of the humanitarian crisis caused by a multitude of wars and increased migration, irregular migrants are an extremely vulnerable group. In order to increase the influence of INGOs with participatory status working with migrants on member states’ migration policies, a meeting was held on 21 September at the Council of Europe’s Brussels Office. Following this, an [Open Letter](#), taking account of the INGOs’ contributions, was sent to the Committee of Ministers condemning practices that were incompatible with human rights principles and suggesting that a number of measures could be stepped up. Both the representatives in Brussels and those in Strasbourg (meeting in the context of the Migration Working Group run by the Democracy, Social Cohesion and Global Challenges Committee) expressed the need to remove the term “irregular migrant” from the terminology on this subject as it was the administrative situation of these people that had not been regularised, not the people themselves. The humanist principle that no person can be illegal should also apply to migrants. Furthermore, the term “refugee” should not be applied solely to persons recognised as such by governments but be extended to anyone whose application for refugee status is being processed.

Through this action and those mentioned below, the Conference of INGOs has taken a stance again on migration issues, which call for major attention from civil society:

1. Representatives of the Migration Working Group of the Democracy, Social Cohesion and Global Challenges Committee and other Conference INGOs took part in the meeting of the Working Group on migrants, asylum seekers and refugees in the context of major risk prevention and management, held in Brussels on 22 October 2015⁵.
2. The Conference was involved in the Mediterranean Symposium organised by MIAMSI, entitled “The Mediterranean: a road in the sea – Migration of peoples, cultures, religions” and sponsored by the Council of Europe Secretary General.
3. A representative of the Conference spoke at the event entitled “[Migration and Development: EYD2015- the Year for Local Action for Global Solutions](#)”, held from 11 to 13 November 2015 by ALDA and SOS Malta on the sidelines of the EU-Africa Malta Summit.

⁴ The Expert’s activity report is appended.

The process of migration involves both a democratic and a human rights dimension, along with education and culture. For this reason this theme will be dealt with by the Conference in a cross-sectoral way. The work done by the working group, the committees and the INGOs themselves will be co-ordinated and brought to people's attention by the Bureau (contact persons: Jean-Michel Caudron and Israël Mensah).

2. Democracy

Some predict a crisis of democracy or believe that it is already upon us. However, everything depends on the indicators applied. The faces of organised civil society are changing, there are increasing protest movements across the world and new parties are emerging in response to the traditional parties' failure to attract new talent and ideas.

Until now civil society has been defined through its relationship with the state but could it not be that this dichotomy reduces the role of NGOs to that of the dealings between a power and an opposing power? As long as fundamental rights and freedoms are under threat, NGOs' potential role as innovators will be confined to protesting alone. Democratic governance is based on the recognition of NGOs which have the ability to devise public policy goals, muster the resources necessary to pursue them, take the decisions needed to achieve them and take full responsibility for their consequences.

2.1. The fight against radicalisation and extremism leading to terrorism

The terrorist attacks in Paris, Copenhagen, Tunis, Beirut and other cities across the world give the national authorities and organised civil society a permanent feeling of insecurity. In this context, we are determined to make a major contribution to the Secretary General's Action Plan on the fight against violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism. However, we are still wary of and alert to the fact that emergency measures and coercive and security measures may result in a failure to respect human rights, the rule of law and democratic principles. This concern relates most particularly to the right to freedom of association, assembly and expression (Articles 10 and 11 of the ECHR) and the principles of non-discrimination which provide the foundations for a democratic civic space in which organised civil society can thrive. The guarantee of fundamental rights provided by intergovernmental institutions makes it possible to equip civil society with means of resisting manipulation and exploitation.

Several activities have contributed to the fight against radicalisation :

- The No Hate Web – No Hate Speech Symposium held in May by the LICRA and the Conference of INGOs, which focused on the fight against the spread of hate speech on line and off line. The meetings were attended by school-age children, students, professionals, Council of Europe representatives and national experts. The Human Rights Committee is still working on the follow-up to this symposium and providing a link between the Conference and the Council of Europe's No Hate Speech campaign.
- A contribution by Jean Michel Caudron (Rapporteur to the Bureau) entitled "Organised civil society's response: an alternative to coercive measures as a response to radicalisation and terrorism" at the Lisbon Forum on "How to combat radicalisation and terrorism: prevention tools and shared knowledge in the Mediterranean and European space", Lisbon, 3-4 December 2015

A contribution by Sabine Rohman (Chair of the Culture and Education Committee) to the Conference on Human Rights and Democracy in Action: Addressing Radicalisation and Extremism through Education, held in Strasbourg on 24 and 25 September 2015.

The Education and Culture Committee focuses its work on education for democratic citizenship as a key factor in the fight against radicalisation which leads to terrorism and as a key to social integration of all young people.

However, the fight against radicalisation should not just be fought through the state's negative obligations but also by exposing citizens, particularly young citizens, to other viewpoints. Consequently, the Conference proposes to identify "inspirational" activities run by NGOs and their partners focusing on effective integration policies and hence to facilitate the emergence of a feeling among people that they are all citizens acting within the same human environment.

2.2.Active citizenship In an inclusive society

Active citizenship can be practised when citizens are informed about a government's political programme and when the authorities understand the challenges citizens face. The dialectic between information transmitted, received and understood and democratic participation is based on dialogue. The Conference of INGOs must continue to initiate dialogue and provide forums in which it is practised so as to increase the influence of organised civil society in the political decision-making process.

One example of an activity which provided instruction in dialogue and put it into practice is the seminar "Towards an inclusive Europe: learning to live better together with our different convictions", held by the Education and Culture Committee and the Human Rights Committee in co-operation with the partner NGOs in Strasbourg from 8 to 11 October 2015. This event, which brought together professionals and volunteers of various nationalities, provided an opportunity to reflect on the co-existence of convictions, cultures, currents of thought and religious "truths" which sometimes conflicted with one another. It was regarded as a transversal Conference activity⁶.

In the cultural dialogue field, several INGOs on the Human Rights Committee were invited by the Committee of Ministers to the Council of Europe Exchanges on the religious dimension of intercultural dialogue, which were held in 2015 in Sarajevo. The topics discussed were "Building inclusive societies together", "The role and place of religion in public space" and "Teaching about religions and non-religious beliefs at school". The contribution on behalf of the Conference was made by the Chair of the Human Rights Committee, Michel Aguilar.

Governance and territorial aspects of democracy

The subject of governance recurs in many Conference activities. However, local and territorial aspects were highlighted through two major events held by the Democracy, Social Cohesion and Global Challenges Committee on the sidelines of COP 21. These events, which focused on improved climate governance and social cohesion, involved both NGOs and local elected representatives:

- 9 December: "Citizens and local authorities, a common agenda for climate";

⁶ Transversal activities are developed through themes that at least two committees adopt as a field of work and deal with through joint activities.

- 10 December : “Climate change and human rights: Urban life, human rights and climate change adaptation”.

In addition, two tools produced by the Conference are intended to enhance democratic governance at local level. The first is the [Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process](#) (see p.8) and the second, the [Dialogue Toolkit](#) (or Toolkit for Conducting Intercultural Dialogue), co-ordinated by Christoph Spreng (Dialogue Toolkit Team).



In 2016 the Code of Good Practice will be given a much anticipated overhaul. After the presentation of the Svensson report and the vote on the related resolution by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, a joint committee will be set up to make substantial amendments. The Code was distributed during the visits to Chisinau and Sofia. However, training for the Standing Committee members on the implementation of the Code will be required, both because it is a highly technical tool and because there is a need to convey a certain degree of awareness about its relevance and know-how.

As to the Dialogue Toolkit, during 2015, Christoph Spreng gave three training courses to local managers as part of a social cohesion project entitled “Hope in Järva” conducted in one of the neighbourhoods of Stockholm in Sweden. After these courses, two of the participants organised a discussion on world citizenship and social cohesion, bringing together inhabitants of Stockholm city centre and those who live in its suburban neighbourhoods (see the report by the co-ordinator, appended). There is a need for a strategy to promote this tool, which can only be devised through and with the Conference of INGOs.

The Education and Culture Committee has co-operated with DGII in the context of the “regional support of an inclusive education” project, with a contribution from the Committee Chair at the project’s final Conference in Sarajevo in November 2015.

The Education and Culture Committee continues to work for an education for social inclusion, which also includes the question of Roma.

3. Rule of law

In the context of the fight against terrorism, any possible abuse of security policies and government surveillance would threaten human rights, democracy and the rule of law, in which organised civil society is one of the main protagonists. The fact that freedom of association is being called into question now makes it necessary for the Conference to step up its protection of civic space, which is being put to the test by the excessive restrictions of authoritarian governments and protest movements brought about by the lack of dialogue between civil society and the authorities. The Conference has a key role to play through its monitoring role and its representations to governments to ask them to account for their actions where it comes to protecting civil society in a state governed by the rule of law.

3.1. Freedom of association and protecting civic space

Freedom of association is not confined to recognising the founding acts of NGOs in accordance with the legislation in force in the country concerned. This right must be reflected in practice and requires states to promote a favourable environment in which NGOs can carry out their activities. According to the Joint Guidelines of the Venice Commission and the OSCE/ODIHR, “this may include simplifying regulatory requirements, ensuring that those requirements are not unduly burdensome, facilitating access to resources and taking positive measures to overcome specific challenges confronting disadvantaged or vulnerable persons or groups” (p. 17).

The protection of civic space is a multidimensional task and requires several levels of activity to be taken into account including international standards, clear policies, national regulations and the practices deployed by NGOs to occupy civic space.

In its role as a political body of the Conference of INGOs, the Expert Council on NGO Law attempts to ensure that legislation is applied in the Council of Europe member states which is conducive to the functioning of NGOs. Since 2013, the Expert Council has been concerned about the legislation in this field in the Russian Federation and has issued two opinions on Russian law on NGOs (in 2013 and 2014). In September 2015, the Expert Council asked Jeremy McBride to prepare a third opinion relating to Federal Law #129-FZ of 23 May 2015 on “Introduction of amendments to certain legislative acts of the Russian Federation” (the law on “undesirable” organisations). As a result, a recommendation was adopted by the Standing Committee of the Conference, enabling the opinion to be forwarded to the diplomatic delegation of the Russian Federation in Strasbourg. This opinion will be translated into Russian so that it can be distributed more widely and rendered accessible to the national NGOs concerned.

To promote the creation of an environment that is conducive to the functioning of NGOs in the Council of Europe member states, the Expert Council wishes to co-ordinate its activities more with those of the Venice Commission. Our aim is to improve the legislation on NGOs and its application.

Similarly, the Conference has sent two requests to its member INGOs for them to find out about the impact on the day-to-day existence of Russian NGOs of the Russian Federation’s laws on “foreign agents” and “undesirable organisations”.

Protecting civic space and instigating dialogue between organised civil society and the authorities were also the subject of the two LABs sponsored by the Conference of INGOs at the 2015 World Forum for Democracy:

- LAB 4: Civil Society Responses (Uganda and Turkey). There were presentations on a project run in Uganda by the Civil Society Coalition on Oil and Gas and the Water Governance Institute, which was one of the finalists for the Democracy Innovation Award, and on the activities of Amnesty International in Turkey.
- LAB 14: Protecting Civic Space in Intergovernmental Settings. Presentations were given on activities whose goal is to protect civic space by the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders of the International Federation for Human Rights (FIDH) and the World Organization Against Torture (OMCT) and the Community of Democracies Working Group on Enabling and Protecting Civil Society. Discussions in the LAB focused on measures to protect human rights defenders and civil society leaders.

All of these activities made it possible to identify additional areas of work which the Conference of INGOs should be taking up. 2016 will be a year of challenges where it comes to pooling our resources and focusing our efforts to protect “a vibrant, critical and pluralistic civil society ... which not only enables the political majority to govern, but enables the minority to question the decisions of those in power and offer alternatives” (World Forum concept paper).

Conclusions and prospects

The work dynamic described in this report is just the beginning of the changes which the INGOs can expect to experience. All the INGOs, but above all those which represent the Conference of INGOs in the outside world or their representatives who contribute to the work of the various Council of Europe bodies have a major role to play in this change. It is their task to make appropriate contributions, based on their own expertise but also on the positions adopted by the Conference of INGOs and, in some cases, its members. These representatives are then invited to provide impetus for the joint activities of the various committees and the working groups which help the committees in their work.

The Conference of INGOs heeds the messages of national NGOs, which serve as crucibles for innovative ideas that can be sponsored by the Conference, providing inspiration for national and international policies. To find out about these practices and understand them, it is often necessary to reach out to NGOs and learn more about the environment in which they work. The Conference’s commitment to national NGOs, and hence their role in the member states, should be reinforced.

From the very beginning of 2016, work will be done to establish a joint agenda of what we can do with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe.

The fight against radicalisation will also require an effort on our part because it is not just the radicalisation of citizens we face but also that of governments. To counter the political fundamentalism of authoritarian governments, civil society must be strong and have the support of democratic forces. The Conference will also attempt to seek out “inspirational” practices by NGOs and their partners centring on effective policies and based on democratic governance.

In 2016, two major events are due to take place. The first is a conference on ONGs’ political activities and their funding, which will involve all the stakeholders, namely NGOs, financial backers (foundations, donors and companies), national authorities and international policy makers. The aim will not be to try to reach a consensus but to explain the current tensions. The number of states which require NGOs financed by foreign funds to declare themselves “foreign agents” or to put this information on the documents they produce is on the increase. On the one hand, geopolitical conflicts between governments are having direct repercussions for the functioning of NGOs and threatening democracy. On the other, the commercialisation of services provided by NGOs is changing the definition of the public interest and bringing it closer to corporate economic interests.

Another project that is currently being prepared will require all our efforts, namely the establishment of a DIALOGUE PLATFORM FOR PROTECTING CIVIC SPACE. Given its role in preventing violations of rights through multilateral dialogue with the parties concerned, the platform would be a means of transferring best practice and gathering factual information suggesting violations of Articles 10 and 11 of the European Convention on Human Rights which

undermined the operation of NGOs in member countries. Consultations are in progress and we will update you regularly on the development of this project and call for your contributions.

In conclusion, I and the members of the Standing Committee would like to thank you for this productive year of work. We are sure that you will remain committed and full of new ideas, helping the Conference of INGOs to grow and flourish and to live up to its members' ambitions and the challenges it faces.

Anna Rurka

President of the Conference of INGOs

DEMOCRATIE, SOCIAL COHESION AND GLOBAL CHALLENGES

In 2015 the Committee focused on three priority areas: **social cohesion, migration and the climate.**

The creation of cohesive societies was a key focus as from January – a month bloodied by the attacks in Paris – and throughout the months that followed, during which an increasing number of acts of terrorism were committed in Europe and around the world in the name of Islamic State, the influx of refugees swelled, and the danger of rifts opening up between and within the Member States of the Council of Europe increased.

Climate change was also on the global agenda for debate in 2015, with a high-level commitment at world level at stake. Having spent three years working in this area, the Committee continued to support efforts to incorporate respect for human rights into climate policy.

In relation to these three challenges, the Committee's stated aim was to promote the values and instruments of the Council of Europe, and to do so jointly with its "Quadrilogue" partners as far as possible.

I – Development of cohesive societies

This work involved:

1. **An urgent debate** at the end of January 2015 on the theme: *"Je suis Charlie, je suis..."*, *the march of 11 January 2015: tremendous hope and responsibility. How should we respond and act now?*

This debate was attended by press officers, the President of the *Club de la presse Strasbourg – Europe*, the editor-in-chief of the most widely read French regional daily newspaper, actors involved in some remarkable integration and dialogue efforts, the founders of [Nes & Cité](#) and [Coexister](#), the members of the Committee who founded and lead the interfaith group – [G3I](#), and the Director of Democratic Governance of the Council of Europe.

(Read the detailed synopsis at [CONF/DEM\(2015\)SYN1](#) and see the [Committee's website](#), January 2015)

2. **Cooperation for an inclusive society with the European Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDGG) of the Council of Europe**, bringing together representatives of the ministries responsible for local and regional government, in April 2015. It was agreed that each participant would take stock of their country's best practices and share them with the others. (See the [Committee's website](#))
3. **Support for the InterFaith Tour team** which attended a plenary session of the Committee on the occasion of its departure from the Council of Europe in June 2015. The initiative, which had been presented to the Committee in January by the President of Coexister and which brought together a Muslim man, a Christian woman, a Jewish

woman and a female atheist, received a very positive response from the Committee. The latter offered the assistance of its networks whenever necessary during the group's journey. It pledged to help to disseminate its findings. (See the June synopsis and the Committee's website: [Departure of the InterFaith Tour from the Council of Europe](#))

4. **The establishment of a working group** entitled **“Inclusive societies: from living together to doing things together”** whose role is to research and disseminate cohesive practices developed by our NGOs in Europe and on other continents and the **launch** on the social media of **dedicated pages** providing noteworthy examples of good practice for the creation of inclusive societies. ([Dedicated page](#))
5. **Participation in European Local Democracy Week** for which the theme was *“Living together in multicultural societies: respect, dialogue, interaction”*. The NGOs members of the Committee were called upon to mobilise their skills so as to promote social cohesion and dialogue in October. They did so by publicising the key themes and concepts of ELDW, which was coordinated by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. ([Committee website](#))

II – Migration

1. Transformation of the “Migration” Working Group into the “Europe-Mediterranean” Working Group

The Mediterranean has become one of the world's deadliest regions due to migration-related disasters. As a result, the Migration Working Group led by Jean-Claude GONON wished to situate its work in a “Euro-Mediterranean” geographical and political context. Its goal is not to supplant political leaders and analysts, but to seek to identify specific courses of action and ideas in order eventually to put forward practical examples specifically relating to the activity of NGOs, with the aim of tackling an issue that threatens to create deep divisions in Europe. ([See dedicated page](#))

2. Supporting two initiatives to raise the awareness of the NGOs members of the Committee:

- **A travelling exhibition** by AEDE about **the situation of migrants in Europe**.
- **A conference** held by MIAMSI under the patronage of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe entitled *“Mediterranean, a way through the sea: migration of peoples, culture and religion”* from 20 to 22 November 2015 in Pozzallo, Sicily, the aim of which was to address the issue of migration in a holistic manner.

3. Link between migration and climate: forced migration due to environmental constraints through

- **A discussion on the topic “Climate change and migration”** during the June session, with contributions from Karl DONERT, the Vice-Chair of the Committee, and François GEMENNE, an expert on environmental geopolitics. (See the June 2015 Synopsis and the [Committee's website](#))

- **A round table discussion on the topic of environmental refugees** during the climate debates organised jointly with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Dina IONESCO, head of division at the International Organization for Migration (IOM), also participated. See the synopsis and the [minutes of the proceedings](#) on the Committee's website.

III – Climate change and human rights, contribution of Council of Europe civil society to COP 21

1. Texts and lobbying

- A declaration by the Committee was adopted by the Conference of INGOs for submission to the statutory bodies of the Council of Europe, the European Union, the United Nations, the States Parties and relevant civil society organisations
- Development, adoption and wide-ranging dissemination of a position paper entitled “Climate Change and Human Rights” supported by the Conference of INGOs

[See the website](#) dedicated to these texts

2. Three side events given the COP 21 label

- **At the Palais de l'Europe**, a round table discussion entitled “*Towards an ambitious agreement at the Paris Summit*” was held on 29 September in collaboration with the Sub-Committee on Sustainable Development of the Parliamentary Assembly and was chaired by Lord Prescott, a former UK Deputy Prime Minister and former negotiator of the Kyoto accords, and Sir Alan MEALE, a member of the Parliamentary Assembly. ([See article](#))

This event was attended by NGOs, parliamentarians, a climatologist, a representative of the Human Rights Directorate of the Council of Europe and the Head of the Migration, Environment and Climate Change Division of the International Organization for Migration (IOM). Contributions to the committee's proceedings were also received from the delegate of the NGOs Working Group on “Climate and Human Rights” within the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) ([see article](#)) and the representative of the Anna Lindh Foundation.

Three key points emerged from this meeting:

- Ensuring that the Council of Europe has relevant and effective tools. In particular, it has a unique monitoring tool, the European Court of Human Rights. ([See the article on the website](#))
- The need in the opinion of PACE – a position shared by the Committee – for effective national legislation to strengthen action against climate change . ([See the article on the website](#))
- Growing awareness of the undeniable link between migration of all kinds and environmental constraints ([See the article on the website](#))

- In the “Climate Generations Areas” at COP 21:
 1. *Side event: “Citizens and local authorities: a common agenda for climate”*, 9 December 2015
 2. *Side event: “Climate change and human rights: focus on urban life”*, 10 December 2015

These two events, which were attended by intergovernmental organisations, NGOs, elected representatives with primary responsibility for climate issues in major urban areas, public debate leaders and representatives of the student movement COY, provided an opportunity to highlight examples of good practices and policy recommendations based on civic participation and respect for human rights. ([See the Committee’s website](#))

They helped to effectively drive forward the Action Agenda implemented by Peru, France, the United Nations and the UNFCCC Secretariat.

IV Main contributions to the activities of the Conference and other Council of Europe bodies

- **Fact-finding visit** made by the Conference of INGOs to **Moldova** (Thierry MATHIEU)
- **World Forum for Democracy 2015**: the Chair of the Committee moderated [Lab 4](#) on civil society responses in relation to “Freedom vs. control”
- **Parliamentary Conference on the MEDICRIME Convention** (Thierry MATHIEU, Vice-Chair of the Committee)
- **European Landscape Convention** of the Council of Europe
 - o Member of the jury for the fourth European Landscape Award of the Council of Europe (Anne-Marie CHAVANON)
 - o Contribution to the European Landscape Convention workshops. “*Landscapes and cross-border cooperation: landscapes know no borders*” – Andorra – October 2005 (Gerhard ERMISCHER and Patrice COLLIGNON)
 - o 8th Council of Europe Conference on the European Landscape Convention (Gerhard ERMISCHER, Coordinator of the Working Group on “Social Cohesion and Shared Territories”)
 - o Statements made at a meeting of the Steering Committee for Culture, Heritage and Landscape (CDCPP) – June 2015 (Gerhard ERMISCHER and Patrice COLLIGNON)

V Working Groups

Several of the groups were involved in the activities referred to above. For details of the objectives and activities of all of the Working Groups in 2015, see the Committee’s website: <http://www.democracy-coe.org>

VI – External promotion of the work of the Conference of INGOs and the principles and statutory bodies of the Council of Europe

The Chair and Vice-Chairs of the Committee spoke in an official capacity at numerous conferences in 2015, such as: the UNEP Eye on Earth Summit in Abu Dhabi, 5-8 October

2015, the conferences of the Anna Lindh Foundation in Paris (Karl DONERT, Vice-Chair), international conferences and seminars: “Smart cities and smart countries” in Paris, “Refugee Housing” in Berlin, 12 November 2015 and “The Necessity of an exchange of Good Practices for the City as a Project” at Paris City Hall on 5 December 2015 (Anne-Marie CHAVANON, Chair), and several national and international events in Monaco (Thierry MATHIEU, Vice-Chair).

Speakers who were given hearings or invited to participate in the Committee’s activities in 2015

Samir AKACHA, member of the [InterFaith Tour](#)

Abdel BELMOKADEM, founder and director of [Nes & Cité](#), author of [Tendez-nous la main](#)

Merete BJERREGAARD, Human Rights Directorate of the Council of Europe

Dimitrios CAVOURAS, Programme Officer at the [Anna Lindh](#) Foundation

Dave COLEMAN, founder of Cooler, a community interest group in Manchester

Albert DUBLER, former president of the [International Union of Architects](#)

Maguelonne DEJEANT PONS, Executive Secretary, European Landscape Convention – Council of Europe

Eladio FERNANDEZ-GALIANO, Head of the Democratic Initiatives Department and Head of the World Forum for Democracy

Léa FRYDMAN, member of the [InterFaith Tour](#)

Orsolya GANCSOS, Project Assistant for [European Local Democracy Week](#)

Samuel GRZYBOWSKI, founding president of [Coexister](#), author of [Tous les chemins mènent à l’autre](#)

Denis HUBER, Head of the Department of Cooperation, Administration and External Relations of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe

Yves HAUSS, climatologist

Dina IONESCO, Head of the Migration, Environment and Climate Change Division at the International Organization for Migration ([IOM](#))

Ariane JULIEN, member of the [InterFaith Tour](#)

Dominique JUNG, editor-in-chief of *Dernières nouvelles d’Alsace*

Bachir KANOUTE, town planner, Executive Coordinator of ENDA ECOPOP, focal point for Africa of the Observatoire international de la démocratie participative, Dakar (Senegal)

Claudia LUCIANI, Director of Democratic Governance at the Council of Europe

François LEBLOND, honorary regional prefect, former chairman of a public debating committee, President of COFHUAT (Confédération française pour l’habitation, l’urbanisme et l’aménagement des territoires) – [FIHUAT](#)

Charlotte MARCHANDISE-FRANQUET, President of the French Network of WHO [Healthy Cities](#), Deputy Mayor of Rennes (France) with special responsibility for Health and the Environment

Emmanuel MICHEL, General Secretary of [Coexister](#)

Sir Alan MEALE, member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Henri SMETS, international expert, member of the *Académie de l'Eau*, France

Niccolò MILANESE, Co-President of European Alternatives

Lucie NEUMANN, member of the [InterFaith Tour](#)

Sophie NEMOZ, lecturer and researcher, leader of the Conference of Youth (COY)

Gita PARIHAR, legal officer, Friends of the Earth England, Wales and Northern Ireland, delegate of the NGO Working Group on “Climate and Human Rights” of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)

Lord John PRESCOTT, former Deputy Prime Minister of the United Kingdom and former negotiator of the Kyoto accords, Chairperson of the Sub-Committee on Environment and Energy of the Parliamentary Assembly (PACE)

Françoise SCHÖLLER, journalist working for FR3, President of the *Club de la presse Strasbourg – Europe*

Jo SPIEGEL, Commissioner for Energy Transition of the Mulhouse Alsace Agglomération, Mayor of Kingersheim (France), author of [Faire \(re\)nâître la démocratie](#)

EDUCATION AND CULTURE COMMITTEE

1. Description of the working groups' activities
2. Participation in intergovernmental committee meetings
3. Representation of the committee in European and international conferences
4. Other activities

1. Description of the working groups' activities

Recognising current challenges, the Education and Culture Committee stepped up its activities in the area of education for democratic citizenship and living together at the beginning of 2015.

The terrorist attacks in Paris, Copenhagen, Tunis, Beirut and so many other towns and places throughout the world have confirmed the great importance of education's impact on societies.

1.1. Teachers interacting with their environment – A shared responsibility for education in European values

The working group was set up in June and agreed its objectives. On the basis of the Education for Change – Change for Education manifesto, the group will develop innovative approaches that should enable teachers to perform their new role. The priority issues are:

- education geared towards children, young people, students and adults and their diversity and multiple talents;
- teacher training;
- digital media and their impact on education.

Person in charge: Brigitte Besson

1.2 History teaching – Moving towards a European narrative for genuine education for democratic citizenship

This working group was also set up in June. It agreed its objectives as follows:

- developing inclusive democracy in the 47 Council of Europe countries;
- promoting democratic values and cultural co-operation;
- making everybody understand the benefits of living in open and inclusive societies.

The group will produce tools which will help to:

- build critical thinking;
- develop command of dialogue techniques for conflict resolution;
- prepare young people to better understand other people;
- boost their resistance to manipulation.

History teaching is a key area for developing these skills. The group will work in close co-operation with the Directorate General of Democracy (DGII) and will take account of all the key documents drawn up by the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly.

Person in charge: Jérôme Grosnon

1.3 Proper use of digital media in educational practice – A challenge for formal and non-formal education in democratic citizenship and participation

The working group will develop tools which will help players in the education sector to understand the impact of digital media on educational practice, living together in society, interculturalism, European history and education in general.

The aim will be to present good practices and set out pointers and guidelines for inclusive education.

The work is based on Committee of Ministers document [CM\(2015\)74 add final](#) of 19 May 2015, issued at the 125th session of the Committee of Ministers in Brussels.

Person in charge: Didier Schretter

1.4 Education in intercultural citizenship – Living together in Europe

The working group will develop innovative proposals based on:

- analysis of intercultural education projects in European towns and cities, in particular in schools and educational organisations;
- analysis of the difficulties encountered by children and young people from ethnic minorities, in particular Roma;
- a contribution to the development of inclusive societies.

The work will be done in close co-operation with the quadrilogue.

In December 2015, a survey of the INGOs in the Conference was launched concerning good practices in intercultural education.

Person in charge: Roseline Moreau

The working group heads and Sabine Rohmann met in Geneva in September for a two-day co-ordination meeting.

2. Participation in intergovernmental committee meetings

2.1. Steering Committee for Educational Policy and Practice (CDPPE)

Sabine Rohmann took part in the committee's plenary meeting in Strasbourg from 17 to 19 March.

As a member of the Bureau of the CDPPE, she attended the two meetings in Strasbourg in July and November.

2.2 Steering Committee on Media and Information Society (CDMSI)

Didier Schretter took part in the committee's two meetings in Strasbourg from 16 to 19 June and 8 to 11 December 2015.

3. Representation of the committee in European and international conferences

- Meeting of the Ad hoc Committee of Experts on Roma Issues (CAHROM), Strasbourg, 27 and 28 May 2015, Roseline Moreau
- 28th Session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, Strasbourg, 24 to 26 March 2015, Roseline Moreau
- Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Heritage, Namur (Belgium), 22 to 24 April 2015, with a statement by Sabine Rohmann
- World Day for people unable to go on holiday organised by the Secours Populaire Français, in co-operation with Léon Dujardin (ESAN), Paris, 19 August 2015, Didier Schretter
- Conference on Human Rights and Democracy in Action: Addressing Extremism and Radicalisation through Education, DGII, Strasbourg, 24 and 25 September 2015, with a statement by Sabine Rohmann
- [Launch of the ETINED Platform on Ethics in Education](#), 1 and 2 October 2015, Sabine Rohmann
- [Final conference of the EU/Council of Europe Joint Programme on Regional Support for Inclusive Education](#), Sarajevo, 5 and 6 November 2015, Brigitte Besson and Sabine Rohmann (who made a statement)
- European Parents' Association conference, welcoming statement by Sabine Rohmann

4. Other activities

4.1 Internal and external communication – Establishment of a communication strategy, Didier Schretter

Presentation of the Education and Culture Committee strategy to the Standing Committee

Participation in the preparation of a communication charter (to be approved in January 2016)

4.2 Statements during visits by groups to the Council of Europe, in liaison with the Visitors' Service, Roseline Moreau

The purpose of the statements was to present the Conference of INGOs and the work of the Education and Culture Committee:

- 9 June 2015: 35 young pensioners from Vendée (members of their association's Europe committee);
- 4 November 2015: 40 French teachers on in-service training.

4.3 Meetings

Statement and debate concerning education for inclusive societies at the University of Landau (Germany) in July 2015, Sabine Rohmann

Statement and debate concerning refugees and European values with 400 pupils, Trier-Saarburg district (Germany), Sabine Rohmann

Meeting in September 2015 with the chair and members of the Colombian association, REINICIAR, which won the Franco-German human rights prize, Roseline Moreau, Sabine Rohmann, Richard Stock

Sabine Rohmann, Chair

HUMAN RIGHTS COMMITTEE

Saying that human rights are being flouted or violated is a pointless cliché, as defending human rights is more than a matter of complaining. In 2015, the Human Rights Committee therefore focused its work on both substantive and topical issues.

Defending and promoting human rights consists in raising the alarm and then understanding the issues so as to respond properly and, even better, anticipate developments. As that does not happen automatically, the Human Rights Committee is working in line with the Action Plan of the Conference of INGOs adopted in June 2015, one of the aims of which is to boost the relevance of civil society among Council of Europe bodies so that the relevant activities are as effective as possible.

The Human Rights Committee therefore took account both of the dual approach of effectiveness and the conduct of activities harmonised with the agendas of the Council of Europe's various bodies and also of the need to address substantive and topical issues in carrying out its work:

- It was a regular and active participant in the Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH) and its drafting groups preparing studies on:
 - Reform of the European Court of Human Rights (GT-GDR)
 - Human Rights and Business (CDDH-CORP)
 - Human Rights in Culturally Diverse Societies (CDDH-DC)

- Draft feasibility study on “The impact of the economic crisis and austerity measures on human rights in Europe”
Heightened awareness of the importance of civil society's role on the steering committees provides the impetus for this long-term co-operation.

- The No Hate Web, No Hate Speech symposium in May on combating hate speech both online and offline, which was opened by the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Ms Battaini-Dragoni, the President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Ms Anne Brasseur, and the President of the Conference of INGOs, Anna Rurka, placed particular emphasis on school-age children. Experts from major Internet companies held discussions and exchanged good practices with secondary school pupils. Practical simulation exercises enabled the young people to receive training in the most appropriate practices for opposing hate speech.
The 2½-day seminar was not a one-off event, but was conducted in parallel with corresponding events of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE).

- Under the chairmanship of Anna Rurka, a meeting was held in Paris with the EU Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA), in particular with Waltraud Heller, communication officer, and Annica Ryngebeck, elected representative of the NGOs on the FRA's governing body and policy officer on the social platform, helping to provide a basis for the organisation of joint activities.
- Participation, together with Anna Rurka, in the high-level conference on "Implementation of the European Convention on Human Rights: our shared responsibility" in Brussels on 26 and 27 March 2015.
- There was a particular focus on the European Social Charter and the Protocol on Collective Complaints:
 - Régis Brillat, Executive Secretary of the European Committee of Social Rights, held a long exchange of views with all the INGOs in the Human Rights Committee during the summer session.
 - Several members of the Human Rights Committee accompanied Anna Rurka at the [joint Council of Europe/EU training session on collective complaints](#) held in Brussels on 22 September. Human rights organisations must do their utmost to promote this procedure, whose collective nature makes it unique.
The particular interest which the Human Rights Committee has shown in the Social Charter and the collective complaints procedure over the years stems from the low level of awareness of them, which has the effect of penalising European civil society. The INGOs in the Conference have a duty to promote the Social Charter and the complaints procedure among states and local NGOs. This is particularly true since the Charter and collective complaints are unrivalled levers for ensuring account is taken of the indivisibility of civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights, which form a coherent and indissociable whole.
- The Human Rights Committee accompanied Anna Rurka to Brussels on 21 September for a meeting on migration with relevant INGOs which work with the European Union and the Council of Europe.
- As every year, 17 October, International Day for the Eradication of Poverty, was marked by a major event, which was held this time at the Council of Europe. It was opened by Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni, Deputy Secretary General, accompanied by Ambassador Astrid Helle, Chair of the Committee of Ministers' Rapporteur Group on Democracy, and Giuseppe Palmisano, President of the European Committee of Social Rights, and focused, in particular, on children in extreme poverty. Agnes Von Maravic, Secretary of the Committee of Experts on the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (DECS-ENF), provided information about the new Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child, which the Committee of Ministers will adopt at the beginning of 2016.

Simultaneously, the Conference of INGOs was represented at Ulyanovsk (Russian Federation) on 16 and 17 October on the occasion of the general meeting of the federation of

social workers of the Russian Federation. The two-day event included plenary meetings, round tables and thematic visits.

- Several INGOs from the Human Rights Committee were invited again this year by the Committee of Ministers to the annual Exchange on the Religious Dimension of Intercultural Dialogue, where they presented contributions. The exchange took place in Sarajevo from 1 to 3 November. The themes were: “Building inclusive societies together”, “The role and place of religion in the public space”, “Teaching about religions and non-religious beliefs at school”.
- A recommendation [CONF/PLE(2015)REC2] on a new disability strategy was adopted by the Conference of INGOs on 25 June 2016. It drew the attention of Council of Europe bodies to the ending of the existing action plan for people with disabilities and stressed the fact that disabilities are multiple and that this diversity needs to be taken into account in a new dedicated action plan.
 - A second text on “Violation of economic, social and cultural rights through austerity measures: a serious threat to democracy”, which was also presented in June with a view to urging the relevant political bodies to keep on implementing fundamental rights in Greece, which has come under great pressure in recent years and again did so during summer 2015, has undergone consensual amendments. It will be presented for approval during the January 2016 session.
- The Human Rights Committee and the Education and Culture Committee jointly set up a group entitled “Towards an inclusive Europe: learning to live better together with our different convictions”. Around 20 teachers and trainers of 13 nationalities took part in the inaugural seminar held in Strasbourg in early October. Similar seminars are planned in several countries for 2016.
- The disability working group was actively involved in preparing and organising the [Council of Europe Conference on Promoting Human Rights of Persons with Disabilities: Ambitions, Impact and Challenges Ahead](#) held in Dublin (Ireland) on 5 and 6 November. Under the direction of Marie-José Schmitt, the working group prepared a publication on [Article 15 of the European Social Charter in the light of the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities](#), which was presented in Dublin. Anna Rurka spoke at the conference.
- It would be wrong to end this activity report without mentioning the areas of dissatisfaction, which can never be wholly avoided:
 - We have still not found the appropriate processes for offering stronger support to the human rights defenders in eastern Europe;
 - Our committee was unable to be physically present at some ad hoc meetings with national human rights NGOs and with direct victims of rights violations.
- To end on a positive note, the good relations with the secretariat and the climate of trust

within the Standing Committee are valuable sources of support for carrying out the joint task to which we are all committed.

Conclusion

Although they are regularly celebrated and proclaimed as sacred in many quarters, human rights are constantly being spurned, flouted and violated. For their part, INGOs and international and intergovernmental institutions dedicated to human rights are having difficulty in robustly opposing these denials of fundamental rights. What should be done? And how? These nagging questions are key concerns for the members of the Human Rights Committee.

In co-ordination with the various Council of Europe bodies, we must relentlessly continue the actions that fall within our areas of responsibility. At the same time, emerging challenges such as the spread of new types of social interaction resulting from the emergence of innovative technologies, migration trends, asymmetric armed conflicts and social tensions stemming from religious factors all mean that there is a need to step up the efforts to foster the participation of civil society in political decision-making processes, thereby helping to boost the quality and longer-term applicability of political initiatives and understanding of them.

The entire Conference is working towards this goal, and the Human Rights Committee is doing its utmost to contribute to the process.

Michel Aguilar
Chair of the Human Rights Committee

Transversal “youth” dimension – Activity report

October - December 2015 Anne Kraus

1. Context

The “road map” presented in September 2015 (at the end of its mandate) by the ad hoc discussion group on making the “youth” dimension more operational in the Conference was approved by the Standing Committee. It was to be implemented progressively by the entire Conference from the January 2016 session onwards.

2. General considerations

According to the road map and in line with the strategic objectives adopted by the Conference in June 2015, the goal is to “lend an ear to young people’s concerns and strengthen their participation in the work of the thematic committees and working groups, and to foster the participation of young members of our INGOs in the Conference sessions” while increasing the complementarity of our activities with those of other Council of Europe bodies.

Priority action areas of the Conference concerning young people directly

- Combating discrimination against vulnerable groups
- Active citizenship in an inclusive society
- Migration and territorial aspects of democracy
- Young people involved in combating radicalisation and the types of extremism that lead to terrorism

3. Implementation of initial activities (autumn – winter 2015 to January 2016)

a) Maintaining and stepping up links with the Council of Europe’s youth sector and with the CCJ and the CDEJ

- Monitoring the Think Youth! Newsletter, which links up the entire youth sector and its stakeholders, and reacting if necessary – http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/think_youth_FR.asp;
- Participation in the session of the CCJ/CMJ (i.e. the Council of Europe’s Advisory Council of Youth) in Strasbourg on 12-14 October 2015, (Anne Kraus was replaced by Julianne Lagadec for health reasons);
- Regular contacts with CCJ members via Skype to “systematise” exchanges of information;
- Participation in the joint meeting between the youth sector and the PACE (“Sub-Committee on Education, Youth and Sport): “Networking for Youth” “Young people as a key to conflict resolution and peace-building in Europe” on 27 January 2016.
- Exchanges between Anna Rurka and young people taking part in the World Forum for Democracy.
- Participation of a CCJ member in the Conference of INGOs’ visit to Moldova.

- Working meeting with Jean-Claude Lazaro, Director of the European Youth Foundation and Secretary of the Programming Committee for the youth sector, to identify themes, training, NGOs or youth schemes in Europe liable to help enrich the Conference's work. The European Youth Foundation (run under the auspices of the Council of Europe Youth Directorate) supports transnational youth work promoting youth citizenship, youth mobility, human rights, democracy and cultural pluralism. The Youth Directorate also draws up guidelines and legal instruments for the development of coherent and efficient youth policies at local, national and European level. It manages the European Youth Centres (EYCs) in Strasbourg and Budapest, where a team of educational advisers provides technical and educational support for the preparation, conduct and follow-up of youth activities.
- Contacts with various representatives of the No Hate Speech Movement.
- Regular contacts via social networks (Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter) with various leading figures in the youth sector to increase links and obtain useful information for the Conference.
- Meeting with a Council of Europe evaluator on the importance of relations between the youth sector and the Conference of INGOs;
- Drafting and dispatch of a letter by the President of the Conference, Anna Rurka, to all the stakeholders in the youth sector including the No Hate Speech Alliance to step up our co-operation as a reliable partner in the Alliance.

b) Transversal co-ordination of projects with the Thematic Committees and gender equality-related projects:

- Human Rights:
 - Exchanges on young people's needs in the face of various threats and potential action to be taken;
 - Co-operation has begun with the Working Group on Extreme Poverty to prepare for 17 October;
 - Co-operation with the Hate Speech Working Group:
 - to investigate how to distribute the survey on the perception of human rights by persons under the age of 35;
 - to assist in the transmission of information between the No Hate Speech Alliance and the Conference;
 - involvement of the Conference in the activities of the No Hate Speech Movement.
- Education and Culture:
 - Exchanges on young people's needs in the extensive field of education and digital technology:
 - identification of subjects to be addressed at the January 2016 session;
 - identification of subjects to be addressed in the future.
- Democracy and Social Issues:
 - Exchanges on subjects to be addressed:

- identification of good practices (integration of refugees, participation, etc.);
 - identification of groups which might be brought together in a working group.
- Gender equality
 - Exchanges on young people's needs and demands and differences in perception in some areas
 - Steps to hear the views of contributors such as the Gender Equality Expert, the CCJ and/or a member of the INGO IGLYO (who “express and define their own sexual orientations, gender identities and gender expressions without discrimination, violence or hatred. without limitation in their lives and communities, enjoying respect, celebration and positive recognition”).
- c) Discussion of the profile of young people receiving support from social workers and those who are in institutional care, excluded, have disabilities, are exceptionally gifted or are activists, etc.**
- Gradual establishment of contact with the NGOs/associations concerned
 - Exchanges with Anna Rurka and the Bureau with a view to choosing one or other of the activities for the “Step aside”
- d) Strengthening ties with youth INGOs, the European Youth Forum and any associations sharing the Conference of INGOs' values**
- Meetings and increased links with the European Youth Forum
 - Follow-up and analysis of publications and resolutions

Working meeting and various other exchanges with Jan Wilker, the EYF's Council of Europe contact person. [The European Youth Forum](#) is made up of about 90 National Youth Councils, youth INGOs or federations of youth organisations. It brings together tens of millions of young people from all over Europe, organised in order to represent their common interests. Representation, internal democracy, independence, openness and inclusion are among the main principles for the functioning of the European Youth Forum and its member organisations.

e) Public profile and communication networks:

- development of a Facebook page entitled “YOUTH & the INGO Conference”, attracting over 1000 subscribers with a young and highly international profile. The page is a means of passing on information of interest to young people from the Conference page. It gives us an opportunity to inform, raise awareness and raise questions and see what young people like or dislike;
- Twitter account, https://twitter.com/Anne_Kraus_CoE, 350 followers, people with a slightly older profile and already active in the field. The page is a means of finding out about activities and active groups and identifying subjects that are of interest to young people.

4. Evaluation

- Links with the Council of Europe's youth sector are clearly being enhanced. The statement sent by Anna Rurka and the fact that CCJ members are occasionally invited to take part in our sessions or activities will certainly have a positive impact. An effort is still required to keep the CDEJ members better informed of our activities.
- Links between the youth INGOs and the European Youth Forum are gradually being established and we must succeed in drawing more attention to our commitment to young people to make ourselves credible.
- Transversal co-ordination of projects with the Thematic Committees and gender equality-related projects is progressing well. It could be more regular between sessions but it was important to take time.
(It would be worth setting up a restricted section on our website which would enable committee and working group members and transversal co-ordinators to communicate spontaneously between sessions).
- Our visibility on social networks has clearly improved. Communication networks will take time to set up (they have not yet reached all young people).
- It would certainly be an asset to have a good slogan. It would be good if member INGOs would contribute to and disseminate our publications. Member INGOs are taking a long time to get on line.

5. Adjustment of the measures to be taken and main lines of action proposed for 2016-2017

The main and intermediate themes of the youth road map will be continued in parallel and progressively during and between sessions (“Make a difference!”)

- Improve the circulation of information internally (the transversal approach)
- Increase contact with member INGOs between sessions
- Improve the circulation of information externally (publicise the Conference of INGOs and its added value, create a space for dialogue and make it possible to build bridges between young people of different sensibilities)
- The organisation of a “contact event” at the June session enabling young people of different sensibilities (and both “institutionalised” and “non-institutionalised” young people) and the members of the Conference of INGOs to exchange ideas would be a really good idea as youth INGOs have expressed their willingness to co-operate on interesting projects. An event of this sort would help to develop communication networks and would probably encourage the member INGOs to call for young people to attend Conference sessions with a view to achieving an intergenerational profile and creating an open, innovative and modern forum for debate and expression (see the speed-dating project).

6. Next stages:

Validation of Standing Committee reports and projects in January 2016
Work on the activities approved by the Standing Committee in January 2016
Progressive development of the youth dimension (and transversal approach)
Interim report at the Standing Committee meeting of April 2016
Objective setting or realignment for the end of 2016, 2017 and 2018

Luxembourg, January 2016
Anne Kraus
Bureau member

Activity report by the Gender Equality Expert

Gender equality is a major element of the democratic base of states governed by the rule of law. The legislative frameworks and policies established in states must embrace this requirement for justice and humanism towards one half of their fellow citizens in law and in practice. They have a particular duty to do so bearing in mind that this is a factor contributing to the dynamism and innovation of public and private life in everyone's interest.

The Council of Europe has recognised this and adopted a strategy for gender equality for the period from 2014 to 2017, approved unanimously by its 47 member states. This is one of the Council of Europe's main driving forces, on which the Gender Equality Expert bases her work, and is a key phase in the construction of an alternative view of society and the establishment of an orderly, respectful pluralist democracy, allowing men and women to live together harmoniously and peacefully.

Activities to ensure that:

- women have a high profile role at the Council of Europe;
- charts, names, titles and functions are no longer discriminatory;
- these ideas are conveyed in works such as the autobiography of Emmeline Pankhurst, entitled "Suffragette" and prefaced in its French edition (Editions Ampelos) by Anne Nègre, <http://annenegre.blogspot.com/index-1.html>

1. Representation of the Conference of INGOs on various Council of Europe committees

Gender Equality Commission: It is made up of members appointed by the member states and currently chaired by Mr Sergiy Kyslytsya, Ukraine. It was set up in 2012 to help to secure the mainstreaming of equality in the Council of Europe member states and to honour international commitments working to the advantage of European women. States take stock of the progress of their legislation and public policies and work has been done in various areas such as the European Social Charter and the Turin Process and the law on gender in Malta.

- 15 - 17 April 2015 in Strasbourg, [7th meeting of the Committee](#)
- 18 - 20 November 2015 in Strasbourg, [8th meeting of the Committee](#)
- 15 - 16 November 2015, Berne: Invitation from the Gender Equality Commission and the Swiss Confederation to the Conference, ["Towards guaranteeing equal access of women to justice"](#). Legal or de facto discrimination remains in all legal systems, making access to justice difficult for all women, particularly those without resources and without education, and can result in denials of justice.
- 17 - 18 November 2015, Strasbourg: Training in gender mainstreaming with the Council of Europe's Gender Equality Rapporteurs, then exchange of views with the Gender Equality Commission. Various Council of Europe bodies were represented and some of the training is of specific use to the Conference of INGOs; <http://annenegre.blogspot.com/media/01/01/1935436067.pdf>

1.2. Committee on Equality and Non-discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly:

This Committee is chaired by Ms Gülsün Bilgehan, Turkey. It deals with equal opportunities issues in all fields and campaigns against all forms of discrimination. It has set up three sub-committees, one on gender equality, one on the rights of minorities and

one on disability and inclusion. Reports are presented and leading figures are invited to speak on specific subjects such as parity in the world and the problem of statistics seen from the viewpoint of the European Institute for Gender Equality, EIGE.

- Participation in the meetings in Paris on 1 June 2015, Strasbourg on 22 and 23 June 2015 and Paris again on 10 September 2015 and 2 December 2015.

1.3. Committee of the Parties to the Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence or Istanbul Convention. At its first meeting on 4 May 2015, Mr Erdoğan Işcan, the Turkish Ambassador to the Council of Europe, was elected as Chair of the Committee of the Parties, after which the election of the members of the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (GREVIO) was held. The Committee of the Parties invited the Conference of INGOs to its second meeting, in Strasbourg on 14 December 2015. The Gender Equality Expert, Anne Nègre, was appointed to represent the Conference and take part in the meeting. The Council of Europe helps states to adopt laws to make progress in the unremitting fight to be waged against the alarming numbers of cases of domestic violence. An exchange of views was held with Ms Feride Acar, the Chair of GREVIO. NGOs and INGOs have a key part to play in bringing together national federations to produce shadow reports, as they are now used to doing in connection with the work of the CEDAW.

2. Active participation in the work of the Conference of INGOs

The Gender Equality Expert was elected in January 2015 and was involved in all the meetings of the Conference of INGOs held in 2015. She put forward a strategic plan and spoke to the Human Rights Committee about discrimination. She took a position, with the support of a working group, on the discriminatory terminology used in French, particularly the expression “Droits de l’Homme” used for human rights. Discussion on this subject will continue within the Human Rights Committee.

The Expert also performed the following representative tasks:

- 22 April 2015, statement in the European Parliament in Brussels, at the invitation of the ruling AK Party of Turkey;
- 25 April 2015, [Millenia2025](#), University of Namur;
- 29 and 30 May 2015, Europe House, London, statement on the Council of Europe’s equality strategy;
- 2 July 2015, Brussels, colloquy on “Driving forward gender equality in Europe, combating discrimination in the work place and beyond”;
- 23 to 26 November: Official journey to Sofia, Bulgaria, in the context of the Conference’s visit on the subject of NGO participation in the decision-making process;
- University of Utrecht, Netherlands, on the collective complaints procedure of the European Social Charter, etc.;
- a round table entitled “Civil society, driving force of the Council of Europe Istanbul Convention” was organised by the Gender Equality Expert and featured statements by Matjaž Hanžek of the Committee on Equality and Non-discrimination of the Parliamentary Assembly and Johan Friestedt of the Violence against Women Division, Directorate of Human Dignity and Equality, DG II.

3. Lobbying activities

- On the Istanbul Convention, with the Committee of the Parties and the Group of Experts on Action against Violence against Women and Domestic Violence. Work was done with the INGOs before the election of the experts and the establishment of the rules of procedure.
- On the GBRW list, with Viviane Reding and other institutions, through meetings in Brussels and an update of the database of the profiles of 8 000 qualified women.
- In connection with COP 21, letters were sent to the French President and Foreign Minister and others and e-mails were sent to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and state representatives.
- On the CEDAW.

4. **Posting of equality training tools**, brochures, a powerpoint presentation, a guide on stereotypes, a MOOC and others, on the blog, annenegre.blogspot.com

5. Work currently under way or planned

- Activities and discussions with the committees and working groups, INGO-Service and the Freely Constituted Equality Group on human trafficking and violence against women.
- Preparation with the Human Rights Committee and NGOs (LICRA, *Association des Femmes Diplômées des Universités*, *Association Familiale Laïque*) of a symposium on sexism following on from the symposium on hate speech:
 - On 15 June 2016, participation of young people in role playing and other activities on sexism and stereotypes.
 - On 21 June 2016, at Council of Europe headquarters, an event on the theme “Religions as environments for the emancipation of women – advances and setbacks” with leading Buddhists, Catholics, Protestants, Muslims and Jews.

I would like to thank all the member INGOs of the Conference and all those which are in the process of joining us, the leading figures in the Conference and its President, the members of its committees and working groups, the various Council of Europe departments and INGO Service and all those who contribute to our campaigns such as Marion Minis, Edith Lommerse, Renée Gérard, Sonia Bressler, the philosopher who runs my blog, Anje Wiersinga and the members of her group and all my fellow campaigners in AFFDU, University Women of Europe, Graduate Women International and *Réussir l'Égalité entre les Femmes et les Hommes* for their indispensable help and support.

Dr Anne Nègre
Gender Equality Expert

ACTIVITY REPORT ‘OING DIALOGUE HUB’

February: The newly elected President of the of the Conference of INGOs, Anna Rurka, igned the bi-annual Agreement governing the INGO Dialogue Projects with the Coordinator.

March: *Hope in Järva* is the slogan of a social cohesion project in one of the suburbs in Stockholm, Sweden. The INGO Dialogue Hub was given the task of providing one of three trainings for the local community leaders. One of them aptly summed up the task by saying: “We need to break out of our isolation.”

June: The *Hope in Järva* organisers wrote : “It was a real pleasure to work with you and learn from your experience on dialogue hosting and facilitation. The Dialogue Toolkit has been a very helpful framework for the participants.”

July: The Dialogue Hub Coordinator was asked to provide a session for Ukrainian civil society facilitators who were in Switzerland. The Initiatives of Change-International General Assembly asked for the INGO Dialogue Teaser Workshop to which colleagues from Lebanon and Syria came.

October: The following is a brief overview from the implementation feedback following the above-mentioned March-April trainings in the Stockholm area :

- Two participants organised a dialogue on global citizenship and social inclusion, by bringing together people from Stockholm city, and those living in the suburban areas.
- Three participants facilitated dialogues among the clans of fellow-Somalians. Most of the members of the dialogue were ex-combatants, who were enemies in the battlefield, and who have now been given an opportunity for reconciliation.
- Another two participants brought together young people in the *Tensta* district to have a dialogue on segregation and stereotyping. They used many of the tools from the training.
- Another couple organized multiple dialogues on housing rights for the vulnerable and displaced residents of *Tensta*. The dialogue involved the *Svenska Bostad* local housingassociation, the media, local NGOs, residents of *Tensta* and the police. The dialogue has so far been successful in ensuring housing for the vulnerable residents who were to be displaced.

Finally, the following web statistics related to the [INGO Dialogue Toolkit website](#) shows a rapid rise of our key words; see the bottom line of the table below. One point we can draw from this is the big need: Current affairs in Europe and the world are very polarized.

<u>Internet Search</u>	<i>March 2013</i>	<i>January 2015</i>	<i>December 2015</i>
Dialogue	192 Mio.	174 Mio.	182 Mio.
Toolkit	89,9 Mio.	79,8 Mio.	56,3 Mio.
Dialogue toolkit	3,750	8,8 Mio.	12,8 Mio.

The relevance of our slogan 'From Polarization to Participation' is topical. Our site keeps the top score among the 12,8 million hits online, and we are ready to deliver on demand.

Outlook: Current inquiries about the INGO Dialogue Toolkit come from Norway, Ukraine, Cyprus and Pakistan. They are being examined for feasibility, partnership and project funding.

Furthermore we await responses to the offer about INGO Dialogue capacity made by our President, Anna Rurka, on 20 October 2015 at the 29th Session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe .

Christoph Spreng, Coordinator INGO Dialogues Email c.spreng@caux.ch

List of working groups

	Name	Co-ordinator	Working language
Commission Droits de l'Homme / Human Rights Committee	Handicap DISABILITY	Jean-Luc SIMON chairperson@dpi-europe.org Marie-José SCHMITT mariejose.schmitt@nordnet.fr	French/English
	Extrême pauvreté et droits de l'Homme EXTREME POVERTY AND HUMAN RIGHTS	Maritchu RALL maritchurall@noos.fr Jean-Gabriel PRIEUR jgeprieur@yahoo.fr	French
	Abolition de la torture en Europe ABOLITION OF TORTURE IN EUROPE	Nicolas HUET nicolas.huet@fiacat.org Sylvie DE PONTUAL s.pontual@fiacat.org	French/English
	Droits de l'Homme et Co-développement HUMAN RIGHTS AND CO-DEVELOPMENT	Hugo CASTELLI hugocastelli@hotmail.es Marie Christine DAVY mariechdavy@gmail.com	French/English
	Violence à l'égard des personnes âgées / VIOLENCE AGAINST THE ELDERLY	Jean-Michel CAUDRON Jean-michel.caudron@orange.fr	French
	Défenseurs des droits de l'Homme HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS	Dimitri MAKAROV dimitri.makarov@yhrm.org	English
	Prévenir et combattre la violence contre les femmes, la violence domestique et la torture des êtres humains PREVENTING AND COMBATING VIOLENCE AGAINST WOMEN, DOMESTIC VIOLENCE AND THE TORTURE OF HUMAN BEINGS	Aine FEENEY aine@feeneylaw.com Betty DOORNENBAL bettydoornenbal@gmail.com	French/English
	Eradication du discours de haine HATE SPEECH ERADICATION	Gilles BLOCH gillesbloch@wanadoo.fr	French
Commission Démocratie, Cohésion sociale et enjeux mondiaux / Democracy, Social Cohesion and Global Challenges Committee	Climat et Droits de l'Homme CLIMATE CHANGE AND HUMAN RIGHTS	Karl DONERT eurogeomail@yahoo.co.uk Edith WENGER elwenger@free.fr	French/English
	Quelle économie pour la santé ? HEALTH ECONOMICS	Thierry MATHIEU thierry.mathieu31@gmail.com	French/English
	Europe Méditerranée : les migrations EUROPE-MEDITERRANEAN: MIGRATION	Silvano MARSEGLIA silvano.marseglia@aede.eu Jean-Claude GONON Jeanclaude.gonon@gmail.com	French/English
	Cohésion sociale et territoire partagé SOCIAL COHESION AND SHARED TERRITORIES	Gerhard ERMISCHER gerhard.ermischer@civilscape.eu Bernard AUBERT bernard.aubert@wanadoo.fr	French/English
	Sociétés inclusives : du vivre ensemble au faire ensemble INCLUSIVE SOCIETIES: FROM LIVING TOGETHER TO DOING	Anne-Marie CHAVANON amchavanon@democracy-coe.org Emmanuel MICHEL delegue.general@coexister.fr	French/English

	TOGETHER		
	Citoyenneté européenne et cohésion sociale EUROPEAN CITIZENSHIP AND SOCIAL COHESION	Hélène PICHON helene.pichon@ceps-oing.org	French/English
	Perspectives de genre dans les processus politiques et démocratiques GENDER PERSPECTIVE IN POLITICAL AND DEMOCRATIC PROCESSES	Anje WIERSINGA anjew@hetnet.nl	French/English
Commission Education et Culture Education and Culture Committee	L'enseignant en interaction avec son environnement : une responsabilité partagée pour une éducation aux valeurs européennes TEACHERS INTERACTING WITH THEIR ENVIRONMENT: A SHARED RESPONSIBILITY FOR EDUCATION IN EUROPEAN VALUES.	Brigitte BESSON brigitte.besson.nancy@orange.fr	French/English
	L'Enseignement de l'histoire – vers une narration européenne pour une véritable éducation à la citoyenneté démocratique. HISTORY TEACHING: TOWARDS A EUROPEAN NARRATIVE FOR A TRUE EDUCATION IN DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP	Jerome GROSNON jgrosnon@orange.fr	French/English
	Du bon usage de médias numériques dans les pratiques éducatives – un défi pour l'éducation formelle et non formelle à la citoyenneté démocratique et la participation PROPER USE OF DIGITAL MEDIA IN EDUCATIONAL PRACTICES – A CHALLENGE FOR FORMAL AND NON-FORMAL EDUCATION IN DEMOCRATIC CITIZENSHIP AND PARTICIPATION	Didier SCHRETTTER didier.schretter@aeema.net	French/English
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