



CONFERENCE OF INGOs
OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

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CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

The President

Strasbourg, 24 April 2017

Mr Pedro AGRAMUNT
President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Members of the Bureau of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe

Dear President,
Dear Members of the Bureau,

First of all, I would like to congratulate you on the steps taken to propose an additional PACE mechanism of protection against corruption. As you know, the Conference of INGOs has also undertaken such an approach in order to assess, with GRECO's help, the external and internal risks, taking into account the interactions between INGOs members and between them and other political stakeholders within and outside the Council of Europe.

The letters from the NGOs that you received before this spring session of PACE confirm the importance of maintaining the high level of integrity and rule of law within the Council of Europe. The allegations regarding the conduct of some PACE members are still unresolved. It is essential for all of us that these allegations are investigated. We expect that PACE will make responsible decisions in consequence of the facts proved by independent and external bodies. This is crucial for the credibility of the Council of Europe as a whole.

I didn't react when the leader of European People's Party (EPP/CD) called for further regulations in the interaction between PACE Members and civil society representatives. I thought that this position is an isolated phenomenon that will not draw your attention. If this is not the case, then let me recall that the participatory status granted to INGOs by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe is a recognition of the quality of the work of these organizations. The status gives them certain rights and commits them to interact with the different departments and institutions of the Council of Europe. Any registers and or any additional measures aiming to control the interaction between these INGOs and PACE members are not acceptable or necessary and would bring the accreditation process with the

Council of Europe into doubt. The Parliamentary Assembly must not act as certain Member states which wish to silence the most critical INGOs. We cannot forget that CSOs/NGOs are the freely-constituted associations of citizens, exercising citizens' rights to hold and express an opinion on any subject, including in relation to the performance and integrity of the government, the parliamentarians and the national and international institutions. These citizens have elected their representatives whose duty is to protect their rights.

I am convinced that we need to strengthen our interactions so that you, Mr President, and PACE as a whole, are regularly informed about our work, our concerns and our proposals. We have already established the regular exchanges of views with the Committee of Ministers. In addition, the Ambassadors are regularly invited to take a floor during our plenary meetings. This practice has contributed to an improved mutual understanding.

In this perspective, I suggest that we establish annual exchanges of views between the President of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe and the Parliamentary Assembly at our respective plenary meetings, in order to create new opportunities for dialogue and collaboration.

I hope that my proposal will meet with your interest and approval.

With my highest consideration,



Anna RURKA