



CONFERENCE OF INGOs
OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

CONFERENCE DES OING DU
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

WINTER SESSION CONFERENCE OF INGOs

CONF/PLE(2017)SYN1

MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF INGOs

SYNOPSIS

Friday 27 January 2017
Strasbourg, Palais de l'Europe
Room 1

1. Opening of the meeting by Anna Rurka, President of the Conference of INGOs

Anna Rurka extended a warm welcome to Snezana Samardzić-Marković, Director General of Democracy (DGII), who gave a [speech](#) in which she talked about the challenges facing both civil society in member states and the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe.

Anna Rurka introduced Eladio Fernandez-Galiano, Head of the Culture, Nature and Heritage Department (DGII), who thanked the Conference for its hard work and excellent co-operation over the years. He urged the Conference to continue its efforts.

2. Agenda: adopted
3. Appointment of the meeting Rapporteur: Anna Kraus (morning), Jean-Michel Caudron (afternoon)
4. Synopsis of the meeting of 29 January 2016: adopted
5. [2016 activity report of the Conference of INGOs](#): adopted
6. Information from the Gender Equality Expert - Anne Nègre.

Anne Nègre said it was important that elected representatives within the Conference draw on the information provided by INGOs so as to improve the relevance of any proposals they might make to the various Council of Europe bodies. She pointed out that even though gender equality was a priority for governments, lack of funds was still a barrier to progress. She deplored the sharp regression of gender equality in some countries such as Poland or the Russian Federation, with the changes to the law on domestic violence. She warned that the rise of populism was threatening to roll back achievements that had long been taken for granted and reminded participants that the right to equality was a fundamental one. She mentioned

numerous initiatives undertaken on behalf of the INGO Conference in her capacity as Gender Equality Expert ([see page 22 of the INGO Conference Activity Report](#))

Thematic debate “The information society – progress made and the threats facing public authorities and NGOs?” ([link to the report](#))

7. Texts to be adopted:

- [Migration Roadmap](#) (Jean Michel CAUDRON) – adopted the following amendments
- CONF/PLE(2017)REC1 [Recommendation on the need for standards safeguarding client confidentiality](#) (Michel AGUILAR) – adopted with 8 abstentions
- CONF/PLE(2017)DEC2 Declaration: [The European Social Charter is central to the dialogue between the Council of Europe and the European Union](#) (Turin Process) adopted unanimously
- CONF/PLE(2017)DEC1 [Support for the letter of the Council of Europe Secretary General on the proposed legislation which would decriminalise certain domestic violence in the Russian Federation](#). Adopted with one objection, the need to align the French translation with the English text

8. Information from the President:

Recap of the results of the consultation on surrogacy: all the INGOs had received a letter outlining these results. It transpired that there had been a lively and democratic debate within the Conference but that no agreement had been reached. The INGO Conference was unable to adopt a consensus position on this issue therefore. 9 INGOs had spoken out against surrogacy while 8 were in favour provided it was strictly supervised. 6 INGOs felt that the INGO Conference was not sufficiently qualified to take a substantive and credible position on the subject. The President noted that prior consultation had been necessary so as to avoid polarising the discussion within the Standing Committee. It was essential that the Conference be proactive about choosing the topics it wished to address and not allow itself to be used as an instrument by other Council of Europe entities.

In the context of the debate on allegations of corruption in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) which had taken place during the winter session, [the President and Vice-President of the INGO Conference met the PACE President](#). Ahead of the meeting, Anna Rurka had written to the President of the PACE. The discussion on the mechanism(s) for preventing corruption, and on whether there should be a joint mechanism or separate ones for each Council of Europe institution, also raised questions about our own functioning. It was therefore proposed that a discussion group be set up to consider what changes were needed regarding the protection mechanism or a code of conduct (of the kind found in the PACE) for the INGO Conference. This proposal was supported by the INGO Conference.

The President told participants that Israël Mensah had stepped down as Vice-President of the Conference of INGOs following his move to another INGO and the two legal opinions on whether such a situation was in compliance with the INGO Conference’s rules of procedure. Given that the Bureau’s term of office was due to expire in January 2018, the Standing Committee would not be holding elections for the vacant post in June 2017. Instead, it had taken note of the Vice-President’s resignation and decided not to hold any elections before January 2018.

The President asked the INGOs to suggest topics for the forthcoming thematic debates.

9. Situation of NGOs in member states of the Council of Europe
 - [Report on the visit to Poland](#) presented by the President of the Conference of INGOs, with background information from Jędrzej Niklas representing the [PANOPTYKON Foundation](#). Government's comments presented by the Permanent Representative of Poland to the Council of Europe.
 - [Report on the visit to Romania](#) presented by the President of the Conference of INGOs, with background information from Andrei Pop representing the [Foundation for the Development of Civil Society](#). Government's comments presented by the Permanent Representative of Romania to the Council of Europe.
 - [Report on the visit to Germany](#) presented by the President of the Conference of INGOs, with background information from Mirko Schwaerzel representing the BBE – ([Bundesnetzwerk Bürgerschaftliches Engagement](#)), a national network for civil society. Government's comments presented by the Permanent Representative of Germany to the Council of Europe.
10. CONF/PLE(2017)RES1 [Situation of NGOs based in Turkey](#) – declaration of support adopted
11. Upcoming activities and date of the next meeting (30 June 2017). At the next plenary meeting, the terms of office of the current Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the thematic committees would come to an end and new teams would be elected. The procedure was scheduled to begin at the end of March.