



"Speed-dating" event for youth NGOs, summer session (Strasbourg, June 2016)

Human Rights Defender **Intigam Aliyev**, Conference President, **Anna Rurka** and Permanent Representative of Norway **Astrid Helle** talk about challenges that NGOs are facing in a time of shrinking space for civil society (Strasbourg, 6 June 2016)



Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs)

More can be found on www.coe.int/en/web/ingo/home
Twitter: @CoE_NGO – Facebook: @CONFINGO

President of the Conference of INGOs: Anna Rurka (Poland)

CIVIL SOCIETY'S VOICE IN THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

Conference representatives contributed to the work of 25 intergovernmental committees, in particular to the work of the European Committee on Legal Co-operation (CDCJ) on "The legal regulation of lobbying activities in the context of public decision making" and the work of the European Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG) drafting "Guidelines on Civil Participation in Political Decision Making". The conference participated in the 2016 World Forum for Democracy by sponsoring the participation of 25 young people from around the globe and two innovation labs related to digital civic participation and intercultural learning. Resolution CM/Res(2016)3 governing the participatory status for NGOs emphasises their role in promoting the Council of Europe's values and standards and reinforces the Conference of INGOs' vocation as one of the institutional pillars of the Council of Europe.

VOICE OF SOLIDARITY WITH EUROPEAN CIVIL SOCIETY

The year 2016 saw the creation or adoption of laws, policies and measures in different corners of Europe which could restrict the ability of NGOs to engage in public policy reform, social activism or international co-operation. The conference responded to these threats in several ways. The President of the Conference led delegations to Bulgaria, Poland, Romania, Hungary and Germany to discuss the state of civil participation in decision making and freedom of association. An event dedicated to "NGOs under threat: the shrinking civil society space" reached a wide audience, including representatives of member states. Its conclusions called for stronger protection of freedom of association, promotion of a culture of participation in political decision making and avoidance of excessive restrictions on funding sources for NGOs.

The conference adopted a recommendation on the protection of human rights defenders in the Transnistrian region of Moldova and the president issued statements in support of civil society representatives in the Russian Federation, Azerbaijan and Turkey. Furthermore, the conference invited representatives of 16 Turkish NGOs to Strasbourg for an informal exchange of views in light of the prolonged state of emergency and its impact on freedom of association, expression and assembly.

VOICING ISSUES OF CONCERN TO EUROPEAN CIVIL SOCIETY

The conference held events to highlight important European issues, most notably a thematic debate focusing on those NGOs responsible for rescuing, registering, housing and feeding refugees. The conference's president issued a statement expressing concern for the refugees and migrants in Turkey under the state of emergency and for the NGOs which help them. The conference's equality expert hosted a multi-faith panel with the Parliamentary Assembly, asking "Are religions a place of emancipation for women?" To highlight civil society's role in preventing radicalisation and promoting intercultural life, the conference visited the area of Molenbeek in Brussels. A fun "speed-dating" exercise encouraged INGOs to get to know each other and to promote youth participation in public life, while other events looked at ageing and health, fighting extreme poverty, building inclusive societies and access to social rights.