

January 26th 2018

Honourable President of the Conference of INGOs, dear Anna Rurka, Excellences, distinguished audience, ladies and gentlemen,

It is my great pleasure to address the plenary meeting of the winter session of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe.

First, let me thank Ms Anna Rurka and her hardworking team for this comprehensive report. It was an honour to host your delegation in Estonia from September 25th to 27th 2017.

We appreciate that your delegation was particularly interested to hear about the impact of e-state and e-governance on civil participation in the political decision-making process.

Let me now come to the report and present the Estonian government's comments on it.

Firstly,

Estonia has chosen partnership approach regarding the relations between the government and civil society.

For us, a seamless society is no longer simply a tax-gathering and service providing state and taxpayers using these services. It is a much more cohesive system.

We have learned that flexible cooperation between public sector, non-profit sector and businesses is the most efficient and affordable way in making decisions about public life and in implementing them together.

Our main goal is to deepen this cooperation, which provides better and more sustainable solutions. It falls to the state to enhance such cooperation between different sectors.

Secondly,

About finances and resources.

As the report states, resources are of critical importance for NGOs in Estonia.

In order to have full and transparent financing of associations, Estonia has prepared, in cooperation with different stakeholders, a number of codes, principles and other guiding documents. Our ministries deliver funding to non-profit organizations through open calls, through contracts of strategic partnerships, through project based funding or other transparent methods.

In late 2017, the government expressed its wish to further analyse the social impact bonds. It is one of the ways how private sector in cooperation with third and public sectors can contribute to the overall well-being of everyone in our society.

Thirdly,

I'd like to make a few points about e-governance.

Using the most advanced information and communication technology (from the very beginning of our regained independence early nineties) enabled Estonia to establish a modern, efficient and democratic state. Over the years, it has completely changed the way we interact with our government and how we run our daily lives.

For e-governance is about using technology to promote a more dynamic and trusted relationship between the state and its citizens. It has helped us to make and manage the change. E-governance promotes governance which is more accountable and thus bolstering trust and confidence.

The World Bank in its 2017 report on "Digital Dividends", highlighted that countries, which gain the most from their digital investments are those where technology goes hand-in-hand with changes in the legal system, economy and people's skills development.

Above all, technology-enabled governance enhances freedom and empowers citizens to have open dialogue with public authorities. Participation in public life and discussion about government policies is increased. Such an open government and governance promote a shared responsibility between power holders and citizens.

Building a digital society is something very complex and there is no single model which fits all. Each nation must tailor their own one according to their needs. This develops our ability to listen, to build capacities, resilience and future democracy.

A state is also a tradition and new technologies must embrace these traditions rather than try to replace them. This requires transference of knowledge and experience.

Let me conclude by reaffirming Estonia's commitments:

(a) to bringing government and public sector fully into digital age in order to improve public services for citizens and businesses;

(b) to empower and enable civil society involvement in digital age.

And last, but not least:

We can agree with the conclusions of the report and will remain open for future cooperation.

Thank you for your attention.