

MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE of 9 October 2017

Apologised for absence: Maritchu RALL (President of INGO Service), who was replaced by Marie-José SCHMITT (Treasurer of INGO Service)

Absent: Laura GUCCI (Vice-Chair of the Bureau)

Invited to discuss item 6: Didier SCHRETTTER, advisor to the President on the development of a communication strategy, and Sophie TOUBLANC (AEDH), consultant in charge of the project, advisor to the ad hoc committee on “the representativeness and impact of the Conference of INGOs”

The Standing Committee:

1. unanimously **adopted the agenda** after it had been presented in the light of the objectives and expected results
2. unanimously **adopted the synopsis** [[CONF/SC\(2017\)SYN4](#)] of the meeting held on 30 June 2017
3. **appointed Jean-Michel CAUDRON rapporteur for the meeting**
4. **Adoption of the roadmaps of the thematic committees**

It was first underlined that freedom of association was the lifeblood of the Conference of INGOs and was the thread running through all of its activities. The Conference should focus in particular on the way in which the NGOs can achieve their statutory aims in different sectors of public policies.

Each thematic committee presented an initial version of its roadmap, with its plans for working groups to contribute to the priority areas identified in the roadmap.

The Standing Committee noted that each thematic committee would have three specific working groups at the same time (a group can last for one or two years). Moreover, three cross-sectoral groups, corresponding to common areas of activity, could be implemented in a co-ordinated manner, on the basis of the initial activities of each of the three committees. Specific time would be set aside for the meetings of these cross-sectoral groups during the sessions:

- freedom of association,
- digital society,

- inclusive society and “territories”.

It was agreed that each of the thematic committees would be responsible for co-ordinating one of these three cross-sectoral groups, in collaboration with the other committees. In addition to specific productions during or at the end of each committee’s mandate, it would be crucial to reflect on possible joint projects linked to these cross-sectoral lines of action. Nowadays, the different partners within Council of Europe perceived a divergence between the outcome of the work of the thematic committees (and their working groups) and the positions taken by the President, as the spokesperson for European civil society, which were acknowledged by the different Council of Europe bodies. The Standing Committee therefore needed to address this divergence by choosing objectives that might be more modest and achievable in the light of the context but quantifiable, visible and always relevant for the members and partners of the Conference.

The Standing Committee had decided to apply the “gender mainstreaming” approach to three cross-sectoral lines of action: gender equality, youth and migration. The latter could be adapted in accordance with priorities. That meant that the Conference should take account of this dimension in all of its activities and all of the issues it addressed.

The chairs of the thematic committees should send the roadmaps and working groups, as approved by the Standing Committee, to the Bureau and the Secretariat by 10 November at the latest. The President would then send a letter to all INGOs, informing them of the semi-structured method used and of the content of the documents proposed. These documents would be discussed and receive the final approval of the INGOs at the meetings of the thematic committees during the January session and would finally be returned to the Standing Committee for the adjustment of the final documents.

5. Responsibilities of each member of the Conference of INGOs

A specific document would be prepared in a collaborative manner so as to identify the tasks and responsibilities of each member of the Standing Committee. However, with a view to ensuring that these could come into operation before the winter session, the Standing Committee had agreed on a number of principles.

To enable each member to take note of documents and study them prior to a Standing Committee meeting, all documents on the agenda discussed during the meeting, irrespective of whether they concerned the Standing Committee, the thematic committees or the Conference, should be forwarded to the Secretariat **14 days before the meeting**.

The Secretariat was asked to send to all members of the Standing Committee a message informing them each time a document was put online. As had been ascertained, it was difficult to check each time whether new documents had been published. The Council of Europe website did not offer the possibility of subscribing to the RSS feed when the website was updated.

A dedicated Standing Committee Google drive was to be opened so that they could work on certain documents in a collaborative manner. If someone wished to have the opinions of other colleagues, he or she could post the document, accompanied by an e-mail to the Standing Committee, informing it of the fact that the document had been published online in the Google drive.

Members were reminded that in accordance with their mandate, **each of them was obliged to attend the Standing Committee meetings**, from beginning to end. Each participant would have to sign an attendance sheet prepared by the secretariat.

After each thematic committee meeting during the session, **the Chair and Vice-Chairs of the committee were invited to propose a short flash/info** for publication on the website.

6. Ad hoc committee on “Representativeness and impact of the Conference of INGOs”

Anne KRAUS presented the progress made by the ad hoc committee on “Representativeness and impact of the Conference of INGOs” with regard to the priorities approved by the Standing Committee at the meetings in April and June 2017:

- raising the awareness of the representatives of INGOs: welcoming and training new representatives of INGOs and organising more unofficial activities during sessions so as to encourage genuine collaboration between the INGOs and strengthen joint projects;
- organising activities which are in keeping with the concerns and work of the other bodies of the Council of Europe and the European Union;
- the systematic and efficient use of the expertise of INGOs: Karl DONERT, member of the ad hoc committee, placed emphasis on the need for better use and visibility of the expertise offered by INGOs;
- support for projects carried out within the Conference of INGOs (Didier SCHRETTTER, member of the ad-hoc committee and Sophie TOUBLANC, advisor to the ad-hoc committee): the role of the technical committee's support for projects was clarified. To begin with, the working groups, the committees and the Bureau would be able to call on it for methodological support in carrying out planned projects/activities and to help improve the consistency of the overall work of the Conference;
- communication within the Conference: exchanges concerning the communication strategy that was being prepared by Didier SCHRETTTER, the communication advisor.

Miguel CABRAL DE PINHO replaced Simon MATTHIJSEN on the ad hoc committee. All contributions from members of the Standing Committee were welcome.

The committee would submit concrete proposals at the January 2018 session for approval and implementation in respect of the Action Plan 2018-2021.

7. Short and medium-term work on communication

Didier SCHRETTTER presented the progress of his work on improving in-house communication and raising the external profile of the Conference, so as to increase its impact. The only way to do this was to make better use of social networks and instant communication tools, while complying with the Conference's communication charter.

The aim of the blog he had set up was to pass on information from the official website to the e-mail boxes of all individuals interested in the activities of the Conference of INGOs. The next step was to allow an information flow in the other direction.

Given that the work on communication had started before the new chairs and vice-chairs of the thematic committees had been elected, he wished to have their thoughts on the proposed approach. To that end, a remote meeting would be held between the representatives of the committees and Didier SCHRETTTER before the January session. The Standing Committee considered this work to be still under preparation.

8. Form and modalities of work during the sessions of the Conference des INGOs

Anne KRAUS moderated an active session of exchanges on the form and modalities of work during the sessions of the Conference of INGOs (length of meetings, number of meetings, their objectives, collaborative work between INGOs, and modes of expression). The aim of this work was to propose a more dynamic and interactive calendar of sessions, including speaking time and, in addition to all the official discussions, informal moments for exchange between INGOs.

9. Adoption of a declaration on the 10th anniversary of the Recommendation (2007)¹⁴ of the Committee of Ministers on the legal status of non-governmental organisations in Europe

Unanimously adopted ([see publication on the website](#)).

10. Dissemination of the work of the Conference of INGOs (publications, articles, media, etc.)

Deferred to the meeting of the Standing Committee in January 2018

11. Expert Council on NGO Law

Cyril RITCHIE presented the work plan of the Expert Council on NGO Law.

12. Ad hoc group on an anti-corruption and public ethics mechanism

The Standing Committee was awaiting the final publication of the report of the Group of States against Corruption (GRECO), requested by the President of the Conference on 21 November 2016, following problems of corruption within the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and the doubts with regard to the trustworthiness of NGOs in this context. The draft report had been distributed to the entire Standing Committee at the meeting and would be sent out by e-mail. Salomon LEVY, Chair of the Verification and Dispute Committee, offered to collect the proposals of the members of the Standing Committee so that they could be used in the instrument as a code of conduct and ethics etc., to be proposed to the Conference of INGOs.

Most of the members of an ad hoc drafting group had been appointed. The Standing Committee had approved the terms of reference of this group at its previous meetings:

- Simon MATTHIJSEN and Alexandra Luminata PETRESCU (substitute) for the Standing Committee;
- Cyril RITCHIE for the Expert Council on NGO Law;
- Salomon LEVY for the Verification and Dispute Committee;
- a member of the Conference of INGOs: a representative of the Global Organisation of Parliamentarians Against Corruption (GOPAC) (name not yet communicated)

The work of this ad hoc group was overseen by the President of the Conference and by Jane CROZIER on behalf of the Civil Society Division.

Contributions by members of the Standing Committee should be sent to Salomon LEVY before 13 November 2017.

This mechanism should be presented and submitted to the plenary meeting of the Conference at the 2018 winter session (subject to progress in the work).

13. Opinion of the Standing Committee on the INGOs requesting participatory status

Following the lack of consensus with regard to the candidature of three INGOs and in order to guarantee that everyone could take part in the discussion, the President proposed a vote by secret ballot. Outcome of the vote on the question: "Do you think that the following INGOs should be granted participatory status?"

- Datüb (World Union of Ahiska Turks): 4 for, 10 against, 1 abstention;
- ACCESS (Advocacy Centre of Europe Standards): 3 for, 7 against, 5 abstentions
- European Deaf Blind Network: 7 for, 3 against, 5 abstentions.

The Standing Committee had no reservations with regard to the other INGOs proposed or refused for participatory status.

14. Information on the procedure for election of the members of the Bureau at the January session

Salomon LEVY, Chair of the Verification and Dispute Committee, clarified the procedure for the election of members of the Bureau.

The call for candidatures would take place on 24 October 2017 and it would be possible to submit applications up to 24 November 2017.

Each candidate would have one opportunity to disseminate a document to all of the INGOs via the secretariat. He or she would be able to take the floor for 3 minutes (for the post of President of the Conference) or 2 minutes (for the posts of Vice-Presidents or Rapporteurs) during the time set aside for this at the winter plenary session in late January 2018.

15. Adoption of the programme of the January Session

The Standing Committee instructed the Bureau to finalise the calendar for the session, in the light of the principles that emerged from the exchange on the form and arrangements for work during the sessions of the Conference.

16. Forthcoming events

The Standing Committee approved two events planned in connection with the 2018 sessions:

- 1) January 2018: "Human rights defenders in Council of Europe member states: current challenges and new responses". Persons in charge: The Chair and Vice-Chairs of the Human Rights Committee in liaison with the 'International Youth Human Rights Movement' and the Human Rights Houses Network (HRHN),
- 2) June 2018: "The role of women for peace in post-conflict periods", proposal submitted by Anje WIERSINGA, representative of International Alliance of Women, in co-ordination with Anne NEGRE, Gender Equality Expert.

17. Summaries of the two days' meeting

The rapporteurs were preparing reports on the two days' meeting.

18. Any other business

Two days before the meeting of the Standing Committee, the Chair of the Conference had received a proposal from Claude-Laurent GENTY (President of Honour of the Conference) suggesting that they set up a Committee of Wise Persons, bringing together the Past Presidents of the Conference and the Chairs of past standing committees .

While underlining the importance of the persons who, in the past, had held positions of responsibility in the Conference (and who had therefore also been members of the Standing Committee), the Standing Committee opposed this suggestion. As the persons mentioned could be called on by the Standing Committee to act experts, where necessary, it did not consider it a good idea to add further official bodies, which made internal governance more complex.

19. Dates of the next meetings

The next session will take place from 22 to 26 January 2018.