



CONFERENCE OF INGOs
OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

CONFERENCE DES OING DU
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

Standing Committee

CONF/SC(2017)SYN4

MEETING OF THE STANDING COMMITTEE REPORT Friday 30 June

Present: Miguel CABRAL (left meeting early), Jean-Michel CAUDRON, Karl DONERT, Gerhard ERMISCHER, Oren GOSTIAUX (left meeting early), Anne KRAUS, Julianne LAGADEC, Claude-Vivier LE GOT (left meeting early), Salomon LEVY, Anne NEGRE (left meeting early), Maritchu RALL, Iamvi TOTSI, Thierry MATHIEU (left meeting early), Alexandra-Luminata PETRESCU, Anna RURKA, Didier SCHRETTTER

Apologised for absence:

Jessica CHAMBA, Antonina DASHKINA, Simon MATTHIJSSEN, Cyril RITCHIE

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

The President underlined the importance of cohesion within the Standing Committee, which was a key factor in the strategic policy and impact of the Conference within the Council of Europe and in the conduct of the Conference's business in terms of promoting its policy.

2. Agenda: Adopted unanimously.

3. Appointment of the meeting rapporteurs: Oren Gostiaux, followed by Jean-Michel Caudron

4. Welcoming of new members of the Standing Committee

The new members each introduced themselves, described the work of their INGOs and gave details of their function(s) within the Conference of INGOs.

5. Information on the operation of the Standing Committee and the Conference of INGOs

The new members were asked to study the Rules of Procedure of the Conference, which set out the terms of reference of the Standing Committee and the arrangements for the operation of the thematic committees.

The Conference of INGOs' core business was the right to freedom of association in the various sectors of public policy, and this had to serve as the basis for all its work. The right to freedom of association was not confined to the setting up of associations, but also involved their operation and the dialogue which they maintained with public institutions, including through the work of the Expert Council on NGO Law chaired by Cyril Ritchie.

Alongside the work of its three thematic committees, the Conference was currently addressing the crosscutting issues of:

- migration and North-South relations, where work was co-ordinated by Jean-Michel Caudron;
- youth, co-ordinated by Anne Kraus.

The Conference President was assisted by two special co-ordinators: Marie-José Schmitt for the European Social Charter and Christoph Spreng for human rights and business.

The working groups which each thematic committee could propose to the Standing Committee for approval had to be in line with the strategic and thematic priorities of the relevant committees. They had to satisfy four criteria for approval:

- be consistent with the monitoring process conducted by the Council of Europe's various steering committees or committees of parties;

- contribute to the process of drawing up standard-setting documents by the Council of Europe in terms of providing an alternative or new perspective;
- contribute to the assistance programmes conducted by the Council of Europe and aimed at civil society in the member states;
- put forward proposals regarding issues not hitherto addressed at the Council of Europe but falling within its areas of activity (human rights, democracy and the rule of law).

It was necessary to be modest about the INGOs' voluntary contribution and acknowledge that they did not have the human or logistical resources to deal with issues that were marginal to the Council of Europe's activity. It was better to focus efforts on finding new perspectives concerning the organisation's core activities.

While the working groups were policy levers, their work had to produce practical outcomes, which could be short written contributions (policy papers, declarations, recommendations or resolutions), activities carried out in member countries, side events in partnership with the other pillars of the Council of Europe or debates during sessions of the Conference of INGOs. The chairs and vice-chairs of the thematic committees were the main guarantors of the quality of the work done. It was not a matter of having more and more working groups by simply accepting all the proposals made. It was necessary to guide the INGOs in the choice of objectives so as to align the INGOs' interests with the priorities of the Conference of INGOs and of the Council of Europe.

6. Steps to be taken before the next Standing Committee meeting

Each committee had to draw up a roadmap covering the strategic and thematic priorities which it chose, backing up the working groups which the thematic committee chairs and vice-chairs could initiate or approve when the INGOs submitted proposals to them.

However, under the rules of procedure, it was the Standing Committee which ultimately approved the setting up and work programmes of the working groups, as well as the roadmaps of the thematic committees.

The roadmaps of each committee would also have to be approved by the INGOs at the next meeting of each committee. The roadmaps formed thematic programmes which the individual committees undertook to carry out during their three-year terms, while leaving a degree of flexibility for addressing issues or taking action in line with the constantly changing socio-political situation. The roadmaps were not long documents, but were clear and properly structured and showed the progression of the activity and internal and external thematic consistency.

They would form the basis for an action plan for the Conference of INGOs to be drawn up by the new Bureau elected in January 2018. The action plan would have to be approved at the Plenary Conference in June 2018.

7. Information on events planned

10 October 2017: event to be held at the Council of Europe by the Conference of INGOs on the threats of the return of the death penalty in Europe

17 October 2017: International Day for the Eradication of Poverty

8-10 November 2017: World Forum for Democracy

8. Ad hoc committee on representativeness within the Conference of INGOs

Anne Kraus, co-ordinator of the ad hoc committee on representativeness within the Conference of INGOs, gave the new members details of the purpose of the ad hoc committee, which was to ensure that the Conference of INGOs had an effective operational framework satisfactory to everyone. All INGO members should be able to contribute easily to the Conference's work and come together to shape policy at European level. That was a key challenge.

Four priority measures had been agreed:

- create a database of resource persons based on their areas of expertise;
- improve the communication strategy;
- move towards project-based management;
- identify key themes linked to the activities of the Council of Europe's steering committees.

9. Involvement of members in the Conference of INGOs' communication strategy and preparation of the new project management methodology being developed by Conference members

Didier Schretter gave details of the strategy for communication and promotion of the Conference of INGOs' activities inside and outside the Council of Europe, involving three stages:

- develop and implement tools;
- co-operate regarding relevant content;
- co-ordinate efforts and adopt a more professional approach.

He then presented the project-based management approach. The Conference of INGOs could become an incubator for projects conducted by the member INGOs, backing up the Council of Europe's programmes.

In this connection, it would probably be necessary to raise additional funding for specific projects, with possible involvement of INGO-Service.

10. Ad hoc working group on anti-corruption and public ethics mechanisms

GRECO (Group of States against Corruption) had been asked by the Conference President what could be done to pre-empt risks of corruption to which the member INGOs and the Conference of INGOs itself were exposed.

Christophe Speckbacher from the GRECO Secretariat presented the findings of the consultation of the INGOs in the Conference (30, or 10%, had responded), according to their length of membership of the Conference and their sector of activity. The analysis had involved empirical comparison of the submissions by the INGOs and the documents (reports, procedures, etc.) which could be found on the Conference of INGOs portal and the Council of Europe website.

GRECO's conclusions, the final version of which would be submitted at the end of October, were that there were currently few risks of corruption within and around the Conference, but that there was a need for a more formal approach regarding its operation and the circulation of information concerning the activity of all persons who had a long-term or short-term role in representing the Conference.

Several avenues for improvement were put forward, which were actually minor and easy to implement. The mechanisms for addressing corruption risks to be introduced at the Council of Europe would also be applicable to the Conference of INGOs:

- produce annual activity reports on a lasting basis;
- expand exchanges concerning anti-corruption practices;
- devise and implement a code of good conduct (which could be based on that being drawn up at the PACE), appended to the rules of procedure, incorporating the principle of general transparency, enhanced integrity rules, straightforward procedures for providing clear information about the Conference of INGOs' activities, oversight procedures, etc.;
- be alert to conflicts of interest or the abuse of positions within the Conference for personal or professional purposes, as well as to ideological and/or religious proselytising, etc.;
- ensure that INGOs were not disguised lobbyists or pro-government NGOs;
- etc.

An ad hoc working group on anti-corruption and public ethics mechanisms would be set up at the Conference, with five members (one from the Verification and Dispute Committee, two from the Expert Council on NGO Law, one from the Standing Committee and one from the Conference of INGOs [who would have to be a specialised legal expert]).

11. 2017 World Forum for Democracy: Conference of INGOs lab

The theme of the next World Forum for Democracy, to be held from 8 to 10 November, would be “Is populism a problem?” The Conference had proposed a lab devised by Jean-Michel Caudron and Anna Rurka on the theme of “Participatory democracy tools, an antidote to populism?”

12. Practical information about the Standing Committee seminar on 8 October and the Standing Committee meeting on 9 October

INGO-Service would cover accommodation expenses for the nights from 7 to 8 and 8 to 9 October. **Booking requests should be submitted to Maritchu Rall.**

The seminar would be held at the European Youth Centre. The secretariat would look into the feasibility of interpretation.