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WINTER SESSION

**Democracy, Social Cohesion and Global Challenges Committee
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DRAFT SYNOPSIS

FOR THE ATTENTION OF MEMBERS OF THE DEMOCRACY, SOCIAL COHESION AND GLOBAL CHALLENGES COMMITTEE

The Democracy, Social Cohesion and Global Challenges Committee met at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg on 24 June 2015, with Anne-Marie Chavanon in the chair.

In her own name and on behalf of the Vice-Chairs, Karl Donert and Thierry Mathieu, the Chair extended a warm welcome to the NGOs present and to the speakers on the agenda for the meeting. She thanked the interpreters, Katia di Stefano, Jean-Jacques Pedussaud and Julia Taner, for their valuable assistance.

The highlights of the meeting would be the contributions from the InterFaith Tour participants and their departure, the item on the committee's work in the run-up to the Paris Climate Summit at the end of 2015 and the launching of the working groups.

The committee

1. *Agenda*

Adopted the agenda as it stood.

2. *Synopsis*

Adopted the synopsis of the meeting held on 27 January 2015, which went beyond a mere list of decisions and set out the key points of the discussions, in particular the content regarding the urgent debate on the theme of "*I'm Charlie, I am..., The march held on 11 January 2015: a great hope and responsibility*" [CONF/DEM(2015)SYN1].

3. *Departure of the InterFaith Tour from the Council of Europe*

Heard statements by Samir Akacha, Léa Frydman, Ariane Julien and Lucie Neumann, the four participants in the second edition of the InterFaith Tour set up by the COEXISTER association, which had been presented by its founding president, Samuel Grzybowski, at the January 2015 session.

Samir Akacha, aged 27, Muslim, chair of the Marseille COEXISTER group, had joined the association following a visit it had arranged to Jerusalem to meet those working for peace in the West Bank and Israel. Having been deeply moved by the experience, which had brought him into direct contact with Jews and Christians for the first time, he had become active in the association. In his words, while religions were sometimes sources of conflict, they were also sometimes sources of beauty when human beings decided to put their differences aside and work together. However, interfaith work was, above all, a tool for engaging in dialogue with the whole of society, not just believers. According to a recent poll, a third of the French population were atheists and a further third agnostics.

Lucie Neumann, aged 19, Christian, chair of the Paris COEXISTER group, had joined the association following what had been an overwhelming experience for her, namely the Train of Commemoration in Auschwitz two years previously. That had led her to begin considering what could be done to combat sectarianism and the lack of communication.

The aim of the InterFaith Tour was to go and meet people involved in setting up interfaith initiatives throughout the world. Finding out what was being done and trying to bring back to France good practices in social cohesion in order to improve coexistence was an extension of her own commitment in voluntary interfaith work. There would probably also be a change in perspective regarding the various initiatives: five young men had set out the first time; this time, there were three young women and a young man.

Israël Mensah, Vice-Chair, welcomed the reference to the Train of Commemoration, which he had helped to set up, and urged young people always to link intercultural dialogue and interfaith dialogue, which each embodied components of the other.

Ariane Julien, aged 27, atheist, who had just completed a Master's degree in social science, was guided, above all, by human factors, the desire to understand the attraction of religions and the wish to create links between communities of believers and/or non-believers.

Lea Frydman, aged 19, of Jewish culture, wished to show with the journey that the commitment of young people in politics for social action was possible. She believed in promoting social action through interfaith exchanges. Within the association, these exchanges stemmed from interaction between the various beliefs and learning about the other communities' rites and rules. In her view, a key feature of the project was living together seven days a week for 10 months. Dialogue and acceptance were the key aspects. Interfaith work was not an end in itself, but a form of dialogue to promote social action.

The journey would last 300 days, with 10 days being spent in each country across Europe, the Middle East, Africa and then Asia, South America and North America, in a total of 34 countries, including around a dozen already explored by the previous team, including India, Burkina Faso and the United States. The aim was to document dialogue initiatives, explained Samir, so as to attempt to introduce them in France, for instance the "Long Night of Religions" in Berlin, which the association was attempting to organise with the city of Paris in summer 2016. Another example of solidarity involved the meals served by volunteers in the largest Sikh temple in the world to a group of 100 000 to 150 000 people, without discrimination on grounds of caste, religion or ethnic background.

Compared with the academic work done by the first team, the approach this time would be more journalistic so as to publicise the various initiatives with reports, articles and computer graphics

which could be easily shared online. The aim here was to raise awareness of the great wealth of initiatives and their diversity throughout the world.

The trip was being funded with grants (COEXISTER and Spark News), support in return for data, films and images (Vienna Interfaith Centre, Angers film production company) and funding from embassies and the French Ministry for Foreign Affairs.

In the course of the discussions with the committee, Samir Akacha added the following: “We work together to promote the values of solidarity and exchanges. COEXISTER takes action in secondary schools to deconstruct anti-Semitic, Islamophobic and racist prejudices. We are talking about a whole: we agree to disagree. The aim is not to achieve some kind of syncretism but to become more secure in our own beliefs so as to be able to exchange with other people while respecting them so as not to want to change them but to learn from differences. I myself feel that I have become a better Muslim through contact with Jews, Christians, atheists and agnostics because they ask me questions which Muslims would not ask, as the answers would be obvious to them. That involves looking for the relevant texts and considering the context, history and sociology. COEXISTER is a group which makes you think about yourself and others to form a kind of community”.

After thanking the speakers and wishing them all the best for their trip, the Chair joined the President of the Conference of INGOs, Anna RURKA, in presenting them with a T-shirt bearing the Council of Europe’s “profession of faith”, namely “*the enjoyment of the rights and freedoms set forth in this Convention shall be secured without discrimination on any ground such as sex, race, colour, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin*”, and a symbolic credit-card format address book in the colours of the Council of Europe’s flag for recording the contact details of the new friends they would meet. She looked forward to welcoming them back to the committee when they returned in June 2016.

4. *Climate change and migration, contribution to the 21st Climate Conference to be held in Paris from 30 November to 12 December 2015*

Discussed the links between climate, human rights and migration.

By way of introduction, the Chair underlined how the topic tied in with the comments made the previous day at the Council of Europe by the UN Secretary General, calling on Europe to make a leap forward regarding climate change, in particular in the areas related to environmental migration.

Karl Donert, Vice-Chair of the committee and co-ordinator of the Working Group on Climate Change and Human Rights, together with Edith Wenger, who had initiated the group, described the direct impacts of climate change on the areas at risk and on migration flows:

- ✓ fragility of coastal and island areas close to sea level where hundreds of thousands of people lived;
- ✓ the risks of a mismatch between water resources and needs for food crops, which could possibly cause conflict in the countries affected and imbalances in host countries, including in Europe;

- ✓ the many different causes (political, economic, social and environmental) which could not be disentangled;
- ✓ the resulting push and pull factors (some areas being seen as more attractive than others) and the changing and complex nature of migration routes;
- ✓ the illogical nature of certain movements, in particular the destinations chosen by smugglers;
- ✓ the economic, social and environmental pressure caused by migration movements of varying degrees of suddenness and by diseases unknown in the host countries.

François Gemene, environmental geopolitics expert, said in a video contribution that environmental degradation had become one of the key factors in forced migration throughout the world. According to him, in 2013, 22 million people had been displaced because of natural disasters alone. This migration, which was often internal, would ultimately lead to international redistribution, which would demand organised co-operation.

Moreover, the status of climate refugee, which currently was not legally recognised, would not suffice to solve the problem of climate migration, which tended to be infra-regional.

Edith Wenger, European Environmental Bureau (EEB), founder and co-ordinator of the Working Group on Climate Change and Human Rights, referred to the committee's contributions regarding COP21, in particular the declaration issued at the Warsaw Summit in 2013 and the position paper supported by the Conference of INGOs, which was intended to be an information and reference document for NGOs. She urged members to distribute it. Tens of thousands of NGO members would be taking part in the Paris conference, and the NGOs at the meeting should take action alongside grassroots associations such as Alternatiba.

Jean-Pierre Ribaut, former senior Council of Europe official responsible for the environment sector and currently delegate of Pax Christi and representative of the Holy See on certain Council of Europe bodies, briefly presented Pope Francis's encyclical on climate and the environment, "Laudatio Si", published on 18 June 2015.

After underlining the pernicious nature of climate change given the speed at which temperatures were rising and the slow impact of the preventive measures, he stressed the importance of the encyclical, which addressed all aspects of human life. In his view, it was an ecological, economic, sociological, financial management, political and ethical treaty. As a common good of and for everybody, the climate was described in it as a human right. The text was a call for action and for a change in the habits of all individuals, regardless of their beliefs.

The committee

Took note of ATD-Fourth World's recommendation, at this point in the debate, that impact analyses of preventive public policies should take account of the poorest 20% of the population.

Was invited to take part:

- in the side event being held on 29 September 2015 at the Palais de l'Europe, in liaison with the Parliamentary Assembly Sub-Committee on Sustainable Development chaired by Lord Prescott, the Council of Europe's Directorate of Human Rights and the International Organisation for Migration (IOM);
- in the side events in the process of being approved which had been submitted to the UNFCCC secretariat.

5. *World Forum for Democracy*

Was informed by Eladio Fernandez-Galliano, Head of the Democratic Initiatives Department and co-ordinator of the World Forum for Democracy to be held from 18 to 20 November 2015, about organisational arrangements and the reasons for the topic chosen for the 2015 forum (*Freedom vs. control: For a democratic response*).

Following the attacks in Paris, the climate theme, which had been considered first to go along with COP21, had been replaced by issues of freedom and security relating to the measures taken by states to deal with terrorism while ensuring that the right to privacy and freedom of information were preserved.

He urged the NGOs to take part and said that activities at ground level would have priority as contributions to labs at the annual forum.

6. *European Local Democracy Week (ELDW) 2015*

Heard a call for contributions by Denis Huber, Head of Co-operation, Administration and External Relations of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, assisted by Orsolya Gancsos, project assistant, on the theme of “Living together in multicultural societies: respect, dialogue, interaction”. Consideration could also be given to other topics of interest to civil society. Many different types of activity (including sporting activities) could be carried out throughout October.

As the Congress could not appeal directly to the 200 000 local authorities in Europe, NGOs were asked to help. They should register any relevant activities or events themselves on the dedicated bilingual site.

Took note of the invitation from one of its members, Jean-Gabriel Prieur, delegate of ATD-Fourth World, to the action day on poverty, which he wished to link to ELDW and which would take place at the Council of Europe in Strasbourg on 16 October 2015.

7. *Participation by the committee in the work of other Council of Europe bodies*

Heard reports by:

- Thierry Mathieu and Anne-Marie Chavanon, who had spoken at the meeting of the European Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG) on 16 and 17 April 2015, at which government and NGO representatives had agreed to collect good social cohesion practices;
- Gerhard Ermischer, who had spoken at the 8th Council of Europe Conference on the European Landscape Convention, at which NGOs had been invited to speak alongside government representatives for the first time;
- Anne-Marie Chavanon about the meeting of the Jury of the Council of Europe Landscape Award, at which the committee had represented the Conference of INGOs on 16 and 17 April 2015.

8. Committee work programme: launch of the working groups

Took note of the setting up of eight working groups divided into three hubs:

=> **Global challenges hub**

- [WG Climate Change and Human Rights](#), co-ordinated by Karl Donert (EUROGEO)
- [WG Health Economics](#), co-ordinated by Thierry Mathieu (IARHH)

=> **Human and territorial cohesion hub**

- [WG Europe-Mediterranean](#), co-ordinated by Jean-Claude Gonon (AEDE), with input from Jean-Pierre Hicheri (CITI)
- [WG Shared territories](#), co-ordinated by Gerhard Ermischer (Civilscape), Bernard Aubert (ISOCARP)
- [WG Inclusive societies: from living together to doing together](#), co-ordinated by Anne-Marie Chavanon (IFHP), Emmanuel Michel (COEXISTER)
- [WG Development of a network of intercultural alliances](#), co-ordinated by H el ene Pichon (CEPS)

=> **Governance and participatory democracy hub**

- WG Code of good practice for civil participation in the decision-making process, co-ordinated by Antonella Valmorbidia (ALDA)
- [WG Gender Perspectives in Political and Democratic Processes](#), co-ordinated by Anje Wiersinga (IFUW).

=>> **Committee members were invited to join the groups of their choice by registering on the committee's website (<http://www.democracy-coe.org>) or calling the co-ordinators directly.**

9. Other business

Was informed by Daniel Guery, delegate of MIAMSI (international Catholic action movement), about the holding of a symposium entitled "*Mediterranean: a road in the sea – migration, peoples, cultures and religion*". At the symposium, MIAMSI wished to address migration in all its complexity. The event would be held in Pozzalo in Sicily from 20 to 22 November 2015 under the patronage of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

Daniel Guery provided committee members with a compendium from the Council of Europe's Directorate of Human Rights setting out its recommendations and those of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe concerning migration, along with the European Court's relevant case-law.