

**Council of Europe Secretariat**

**Directorate of Internal Oversight**



COUNCIL OF EUROPE    CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

**Evaluation (2012)7**

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**EVALUATION OF THE NORTH-SOUTH CENTRE  
OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

**- EXECUTIVE SUMMARY -**

## **Independent external evaluation focused on the value added by the Centre**

1. This evaluation is part of the 2011-2013 strategy of the North-South Centre (NSC), which was endorsed by the Executive Committee on 2 November 2011. It was carried out in the form of an independent external evaluation commissioned by the Directorate for Internal Oversight (DIO) of the Secretariat of the Council of Europe (CoE). The ToR were established after an exchange of views between the DIO and the NSC Bureau on 26 March 2012. Written comments received from members of the Executive Committee were also taken into account.
2. The evidence basis for this report consists of 35 interviews with insiders (staff members, executive committee members, officers in the CoE bodies) and outsiders (European Union officers, participants in the activities of the Centre), 131 documents screened, and 133 answered questionnaires (out of an emailing list of 445 addresses). The authors assess that the interviews cover the whole range of viewpoints and can then be considered, as a whole, as a sound evidence base. The documents are mainly used for cross-checking and refining the findings which emerged from the interviews. The results of the questionnaire survey complement the evidence basis with interesting insights, although the authors cannot guarantee that they constitute a fully reliable source.
3. A draft version of this report was circulated to 28 concerned organisations and institutions, of which 12 returned written comments. The authors took stock of the comments received and extended their consultations when significant changes had been introduced. Dissenting views have been mentioned.

### **Added value**

4. *Question asked: Considering its mandate, objectives, functioning, and assets, does the Centre add value to CoE's activities in its priority areas? ... and to the activities of other direct contributors?*
5. The authors consider that the Centre supplies the CoE with a platform where a range of external issues have been addressed in a way which was cost-effective, flexible, and responsive. Hence, they consider that the Centre has added value to the CoE and to the Member States which contribute to the partial agreement, and has the capacity to do so in the future.
6. However, this added value is challenged in the current context for two reasons: (1) the pressure on public budgets brings many Member States to reconsider all their non-compulsory international commitments, including the CoE partial agreements and (2) the new Neighbourhood Policy of the CoE deprives the Centre of its privileged role in the dialogue with non-European States and societies. Moreover, a widening range of co-operation players are active in the geographic and thematic areas covered by the Centre, including a number of CoE Member States acting on a bilateral basis.
7. In this new challenging context, the Centre has not yet found the clear emblematic goal which would make its added value easily understood by a large enough group of CoE Member States and by the CoE bodies, and which would form the basis of a sound performance reporting.

## **Relevance**

8. *Question asked: Are the Centre's main activities relevant to the actual needs of the beneficiary countries and targeted groups?*
9. The three historical regular activities of the Centre are (1) the Lisbon Forum, (2) the North-South Prize, and (3) the Molina University on Youth and Development. In addition, the NSC is running comprehensive programmes in the fields of youth and education (mostly financed by the European Union). It has also developed a Euromed cooperation programme focused on women's rights, history teaching and intercultural dialogue (including its religious dimension).
10. The three historical activities were very much consistent with the initial goal of the Centre, i.e. changing European citizen's minds about North-South solidarity. Over the last years, these activities were adapted to a certain extent in order to keep relevant with the extended goals of the Centre.
11. Overall the authors assess that the Centre's activities have reached relevant people, organisations, and institutions in both European and non-European countries, who consider their participation as useful. These achievements are coherent with the mandate of the Centre, although coherence is rather easy to achieve with an all-encompassing mandate.

## **Critical mass**

12. *Question asked: How far is the budgetary set up relevant to achieve its mandate and objectives?*
13. The authors understand that the activities of the Centre are assumed to generate the desired outcomes at large scale by attracting and strengthening relevant multipliers, and retaining them in sustainable networks. Building upon a rapid screening of a dozen of activities, this report concludes that the above assumptions stand. Moreover, the Centre typically achieves such outcomes with limited resources, by raising funds (EU and voluntary contributions), mobilizing in-kind support (from e.g. Portuguese and Spanish authorities, Agha Kahn Foundation), and involving a high number of relevant experts on a voluntary basis. These achievements owe to the Centre's own assets, i.e. networks and confidence in the neutrality of proposed activities. However the Centre's capacity to raise financial and in-kind contributions may dilute its activities in multiple inconsistent directions.

## **Governance**

14. *Question asked: To what extent is the governance based on clear and agreed upon rules, principles, criteria and objectives, clarity of roles and obligations of the Secretariat, the Executive Committee, the Bureau and the Chair, transparency and adequate consultation, effective partnership among the quadrilogue participants, input from the Think Tank?*
15. The statutory texts establish the Executive Committee as the ultimate decision-maker on strategic issues. The bureau is to play a monitoring role and, in a slightly extended configuration, acts as the jury for the North/South prize. The director and the secretariat are in charge of implementation and management. The director is accountable to the Executive Committee, its Chair, and the CoE Secretariat. The authors consider that governance arrangements have not worked optimally in the sense that some strategic issues have been perceived as insufficiently

discussed in the Executive Committee meetings and that oversight was not enough separated from other functions. Addressing such problems might be a matter of fully implementing the recent reform of the Centre rather than introducing new changes in the governance arrangements.

16. Overall a high priority is given to seeking consensus among Member States and stakeholders. The authors consider that such a practice is probably needed in the context of the Centre but that it reduces its capacity to make clear strategic choices, something which in turn may contribute to blur its added value. This is the second problem identified in this evaluation, and it is closely connected to the first one.

### **CoE-NSC relationship**

17. *Question asked: To what extent have the Council of Europe's organisational structure, management support and coordination mechanisms effectively supported the NSC and support other Partial Agreements in general?*
18. Co-ordination between Lisbon and the CoE Secretariat has considerably improved over the last years, showing that the location of the Centre in Lisbon is not a constraining factor in this respect.
19. The authors consider that the Centre benefits from good enough relationships and coordination with all bodies of the CoE, except the Committee of Ministers (CM). In comparison with other partial agreements, the Centre mainly suffers from a loose connection with that very important body. This problem is worsened by the absence of annual reporting to the CM and the lack of a liaison officer in Strasbourg. However, the authors consider that strengthening information and multiplying contacts would not suffice as long as messages lack clarity. The nature of the Centre's outcomes (network building) and impacts (soft mindset changes and long term democratic benefits) makes it difficult to deliver meaningful performance reports on an annual basis. Moreover, the Centre faces a more fundamental difficulty in having to communicate on too many goals, too diverse activities in too many policy areas connected with various ministries across Member States. This third identified problem is again connected to the fact that a wellfocused goal has not yet been found.

### **Recommendation: refocus the Centre's goal rapidly**

20. The identified problems are 'vital' ones as far as several Member States consider withdrawal, something which might bring the number of contributors to less than sixteen, and put the existence of the partial agreement into question. The authors consider that a new start could be initiated by constituting a core group of Member States, of which some are currently outside the partial agreement, sharing a common interest in a clearly refocused goal. Such a refocusing exercise cannot be done only within the Centre's Executive Committee, which includes some potentially exiting members and not the potentially entering members. On the contrary, it could be entrusted to a strategic working group set up jointly by the CoE Committee of Ministers and the Centre's Executive Committee in order to propose a sustainable solution within six months. As far as possible, any decision taken before the finalization of this refocusing exercise should be of a provisional nature.

## What if the partial agreement has to be terminated? (Scenario 0)

21. If the recommended strategic exercise was not successful in attracting a strong enough support from a group of CoE Member States sharing the same clear goal, then the issue of closing the Centre should be considered. In this respect, key issues would be to: (1) merge some activities of the Centre into general CoE activities, (2) envisage that some activities be implemented in Lisbon in the framework of an agreement between CoE and Portugal (as in the case of the Wegerland Centre in Norway), and (3) optimize the resilience of the networks currently supported by the Centre in co-operation with relevant other institutions, on a case by case basis.

## Three scenarios for the future

22. This report suggests three scenarios which could feed into the deliberations of the above quoted strategic working group. All address the vital problem of demonstrating the Centre's added value by suggesting a severe refocusing of the geographic and/or thematic scope of the Centre.
23. In the **first scenario**, the Centre would contribute to develop the acceptance of diversity inside European societies by promoting dialogue involving the main cultures from which migrants originate. The geographical focus would be Europe, but also worldwide as far as migrants to Europe originate from all regions of the world. The thematic focus would be on inter-cultural dialogue. This scenario involves significant cuts in the Centre's ambitions, especially in the neighbourhood regions. It would correspond to the priorities of the present EU funding, but would miss other EU funding possibilities. However, most of the historical activities of the Centre would remain fully relevant.
24. In the **second scenario**, the Centre would contribute to making the CoE approach to human rights and democracy accessible to the current and future actors of the democratisation process in the neighbourhood of Europe. The geographical focus would be Southern Mediterranean countries, Middle East and Central Asia. The thematic focus would be on democracy primarily. This scenario is in line with the current policy developments in the CoE, and it has been privileged in the feedback received on the emerging conclusions of this evaluation. However, an issue is to identify a niche where the Centre adds enough value at a time when the neighbouring policy is not fully stabilised. Activities beyond neighbouring countries would have to be phased out, especially in Africa where the Centre has good networks, and considerable efforts would need to be made to cover Central Asia where the Centre is less present. In this respect, the option of setting a liaison office closer to these regions could be considered.
25. In the **third scenario**, the Centre would bring Mediterranean players in the area of democracy and human rights to exchange views on good practices and to develop a common long term vision where relevant. The geographical focus would be on Southern Mediterranean countries and Middle East, but not on Central Asia. The thematic focus would be on democracy and human rights. This scenario focuses on a region which belongs to the common neighbourhood of the CoE and EU, and where fast changes are occurring. Competition with the many players currently investing in this region might exacerbate. Mediterranean countries would be invited to become full-right members of the partial agreement with a view to explore further ways to strengthen their links with the CoE.