



CONFERENCE OF INGOs
OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

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CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

The Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe CONF/PRES/SPEECH(2015)2

Speech by the President of the Conference of INGOs, Anna Rurka, on the role and functioning of NGOs at the Council of Europe, meeting of the Rapporteur Group on Democracy (GR-DEM), 17 February 2015

Madam Chair, Ministers' Deputies,

I am honoured to address you today as the newly elected President of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe. In the four minutes allotted, I will be unable to present all the aspects of the Conference's activities, so I will focus on two points:

1. The role and work of the Conference of INGOs within the Council of Europe;
2. Proposals for co-operation with your body, in addition to the practices already introduced by my predecessor.

The INGO Conference is one of the four pillars of the Council of Europe. Its purpose is to facilitate the work of international non-governmental organisations within the Council of Europe and defend the indivisibility of human rights, the rule of law and democracy. The Conference is made up both of organisations specialised in advocacy and defending the interests of particular groups and also of INGOs which represent the various professions (lawyers, teachers, social workers, etc.). These INGOs are great multipliers for your activities on the ground.

The work in the Conference is divided into three committees: Human Rights; Education and Culture; and Democracy, Social Cohesion and Global Challenges. Within each committee, different groups work on particular topics, various side events are held and representatives of the Council of Europe's various bodies are invited to take part in discussions. The Conference meets twice a year (in January and June). The Standing Committee and the working groups also meet in the Council of Europe's premises in April. The INGOs meet the cost of their representatives' travel to the Council of Europe. Only the travel expenses of the members of the Standing Committee are defrayed by the Civil Society Division.

The INGOs involved in the Conference's activities have understood that the interests of the people for whom they work take precedence over their organisations' individual interests. That is the principle which enables us to agree joint positions on complex issues which may divide INGOs operating within other institutions. The Conference of INGOs works with all the INGOs holding participatory status which wish to take part in the activities carried out.

Our contribution to your activities:

My first proposal stems from my election manifesto. I should like to link the activities of the Conference more closely with the grassroots which I believe is formed by civil society in each member state. The work of the Conference of INGOs has focused on and will continue to focus on strengthening the role of civil society in Council of Europe member countries so as

to broaden the democratic arena. Our role is to tell things as they are and discuss them, taking account of the relevant points of view. We are therefore going to hold regular meetings with civil society in Council of Europe member states so as to identify the obstacles to and levers for democratic governance of a kind geared towards the participation of civil society in the decision-making process, at local, national and regional level. If you give the go-ahead, this work will be the subject of constructive dialogue with the various states. We are therefore going to draw up reports on our meetings, and I will propose that we discuss them with you in due course. Our willingness to work in this direction clearly shows that participatory status is not an exclusion criterion; on the contrary, it serves to strengthen the inclusive aspect of participation.

My second proposal concerns the thematic co-ordination of our activities. I propose that a meeting be held between the chairs of the Conference of INGOs' three thematic committees and the Committee of Ministers' rapporteur groups. Thereafter, depending on what the Committee of Ministers wish us to do, we would hold exchanges of views to enable you to engage directly with the INGOs. In my humble opinion, precedence should be given here to a thematic approach. We would therefore have to focus on issues of mutual concern to us.

Madam Chair, Ministers' Deputies, I remain at your disposal for any discussions and thank you for your attention.

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