



CONFERENCE OF INGOs
OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

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SUMMER SESSION CONFERENCE OF INGOs CONF/PLE(2013)SYN2

Strasbourg, 30 November 2013

DRAFT SYNOPSIS

MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF INGOs Thursday 27 June 2013

1. Opening of the meeting by Jean-Marie HEYDT, President of the Conference of INGOs

The members of the Conference of INGOs, meeting on 27 June:

2. unanimously **adopted** the latest version of the agenda dated 14 June 2013, with the following change: the discussion on participatory status was postponed as Daniel Zielinski, who was responsible for the preparatory texts, could not be present. This item had, however, been addressed at the Standing Committee meeting on Monday 24 June and it had been decided that a working group would meet in September 2013.
3. **Adopted** the synopsis of the meeting held on 24 January 2013 [[CONF/PLE\(2013\)SYN1](#)].
4. **Heard** the contributions and the debate on “NGO participation in political decision-making processes: a reality or still a challenge to be met?” The President began by noting that:
 - the Code of Good Practice had been translated into twenty languages to date ([link](#));
 - member states had set about implementing it.

The President invited Anne-Marie Chavanon, Chair of the Democracy, Social Cohesion and Global Challenges Committee, to introduce the people who would be speaking in the debate on “NGO participation in political decision-making processes: a reality or still a challenge to be met?” ([link to the programme for the debate](#)).

Ms Chavanon opened the discussion by stressing the importance of civil society’s involvement in the political decision-making process at all levels: local, regional, national and international.

Young people, and in particular the Youth Parliament, must be involved so that their expectations and concerns could be properly taken on board. The Schools of Political Studies offered an excellent platform for a network of wide-ranging organisations where all kinds of issues could be addressed. While the Code of Good Practice was a very useful toolkit, it also placed considerable demands on the powers that be. Citizen participation was crucial in order to create a new culture geared towards greater trust and a heightened sense of community.

Ms Chavanon invited the speakers, civil society experts and local and national authorities from various countries to pool their experience of practical participation by NGOs in democratic decision-making, and of attempts to introduce rules and mechanisms for this purpose:

Boris Tonhauser, presented the work of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions, the largest organisation of local and regional government in Europe, its members coming from over 50 national associations of towns, municipalities and regions from 41 countries. The CEMR worked to promote a united Europe based on local and regional self- government and democracy covering fields of activity such as governance, equal opportunities, the environment, regional policy, economic, social and territorial cohesion. ([link to the presentation](#))

Marc Sant, Local Councils' Association of Malta and spokesperson for the participants in the activity on youth participation in public life organised by ALDA in Strasbourg from 25 to 27 June, presented the [recommendations to improve youth participation](#) which had been drawn up by the group.

The Conference of INGOs welcomed the recommendations and agreed to continue to work with young people.

Ludvig Sandberg, Social Forum, Sweden, talked about NGO participation at the local level in Sweden and his use of the Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-making Process. Sweden had developed compacts at local and regional level which showed a positive trend towards creating a culture of co-operation. However, using the matrix of the Code of Good Practice he gave examples of the different levels of NGO participation in projects in different municipalities. Whilst there was a tradition of good NGO participation at the levels of information and consultation there was still progress to be made to reach the levels of dialogue and partnership. ([link to the presentation](#))

Tom Elkins, Compact Voice Manager, National Council for Voluntary Organisations, UK, explained the use and the impact of the Compact which was the agreement between the UK government and the voluntary and community sector. The Compact set out key principles and established a way of working that improved their relationship for mutual advantage. It covered areas such as involvement in policy design and consultation, funding, promoting equality, ensuring better involvement in service design and delivery and strengthening independence. It was made in November 1998, and renewed in 2010. ([link to the presentation](#))

Ihor Kohut, Director of the Ukrainian School of Political Studies and Chairman of the Board of the Agency for Legislative Initiatives, Ukraine, outlined the situation and challenges faced by civil society in a post-soviet country. Civil society was a new actor, the first civic movements emerged in the late 80s and progress has been slow for various reasons. There was a lack of will to engage, no civic culture of participation, a lack of financial support to NGOs, no practice of public debates. The process was slow but was evolving. ([link to the presentation](#))

Danka Latkovic, Governmental Office for co-operation with NGOs, Montenegro, explained the work of the governmental office which facilitated the involvement of NGOs in democratic decision-making processes through the implementation of the decree on terms and procedures for co-operation between state administration and NGOs, and the elaboration of a new strategy of development of the non-governmental sector. It provided training for civil servants on how to improve co-operation with NGOs and acted as coordinator with the contact persons in government ministries responsible for relations with NGOs. ([link to the presentation](#))

5. World Forum for Democracy "Rewiring Democracy: connecting institutions and citizens in the digital age", from 27 to 29 November 2013 in Strasbourg.

- **Heard** Eladio Fernandez-Galiano say that this second World Forum for Democracy would look at the subject of democratic participation, the aim being to showcase initiatives, experiments

and ideas that offered a response and a way forward. Creative labs would enable participants to introduce initiatives for enhancing citizen participation in democratic debate and decision-making. In this connection, he reiterated the request that had been issued to NGOs, asking them to send details of any initiatives to the secretariat. Special attention would be given to social networks, and how they could contribute to the advancement of democracy, making it more participatory. He explained that, following a specific request to this effect, the organisers had taken care to ensure that women were well represented at the event.

6. **Adopted** two recommendations:

- “Human rights and religions” with 63 votes in favour, 3 against and 1 abstention ([link to the recommendation](#))
- “Situation of the police and police trade unions in Tunisia” with 55 votes in favour, 1 against and 8 abstentions ([link to the recommendation](#))

Both of these recommendations had been extensively discussed by the Human Rights Committee and had been submitted to the Standing Committee.

With regard to the report on “Human rights and religions”, the Conference of INGOs welcomed the involvement of the Working Group and the rapporteur François Becker, who had been working on this subject for three years and had prepared a report to serve as a basis for the recommendation and two further texts. The Conference of INGOs adopted the internal motion for a resolution to draw up two supplementary texts to the Recommendation on “Human Rights and Religions”, which would be submitted at the January 2014 session, i.e.:

- * Respecting and promoting human rights – lines of enquiry and action to be proposed to leaders and members of religions
- * Human Rights and Religions – appeal to citizens and NGOs.

With regard to the recommendation on the police and police trade unions in Tunisia, the President of the Conference noted that this text followed on from the Council of Europe’s commitment to the Mediterranean countries. He said that Gérard Greneron was carefully pursuing this work and commended him on his dedication.

7. The Conference of INGOs and the countries of the Council of Europe’s Mediterranean neighbourhood

- **Heard** the President of the Conference speak about the follow-up to the mission to Tunis from 17 to 20 February 2013. The main points of his speech related to:

- the objective of studying the feasibility and the possible implementation of our operations and activities within the framework of the Mediterranean strategy;
- three types of meetings: with foreign affairs and human rights ministries, with civil society representatives and local actors and, lastly, with European and international foundations;
- the needs in terms of exchanges with colleagues from central European countries, regarding possible activities and the limits of what could be achieved. The Tunisians needed to acquire know-how about the role of civil society in dealings with the authorities, irrespective of who was in power. Tunisian civil society was looking for support not only of the North-South variety, but also along East-West and South-South lines. The possibility of a partnership with ALDA had been mooted;

- the reminder to all INGOs to send details of their partnerships with Tunisian local associations to Alain Koskas (kalain2892@gmail.com), the Bureau representative in charge of co-ordinating.
- **Heard**, on the same subject, Sophie Dimitroulias, who pointed out that feedback about what was happening in Tunisia has been received from women's associations, and that contact with associations in the southern Mediterranean was not a recent development. On 22 May, with the support of Lyons city council and Rhône–Alpes regional council, she had held a meeting in Lyons with the Democratic Association of Moroccan Women, the Association of Tunisian Women for Research and Development and Nadia Chabanne, a member of Tunisia's National Constituent Assembly. The contacts were ongoing. The current situation was having a terrible impact on Arab women and our support was vital.
- **Heard** Anje Wiersinga, who reported on the follow-up to the round table held on 23 January 2013 on the theme "Supporting the wishes, demands and priorities of women in the Arab world".
- **Heard** Anje Wiersinga present a [draft recommendation on the countries of the southern Mediterranean](#), whose main points were as follows: after referring to previous recommendations and resolutions, particularly those on "Gender equality: a universal value, principle and human right to be respected and promoted in all fields" ([link to the text](#)) and "Gender equality – A condition for success of the Arab revolutions" ([link to the text of the recommendation](#)) ([link to the text of the resolution](#)), the draft reiterated the support of the Conference of INGOs for the democratic reforms in progress in the countries of the southern Mediterranean. The text emphasised the concern about acts of violence committed against women with the approval or complicity of the authorities; it also noted the concerns and recommendations of the Arab Caucus (13 Arab organisations) regarding positions adopted by some Arab governments which were totally contrary to civil society good practice. Lastly, the text drew attention to studies of sexual harassment in Egypt. All these points were incorporated into the draft recommendation and supported by the Conference of INGOs.

Link to the decisions adopted by the Standing Committee at its meeting on 22 April 2013 concerning the follow-up to the visit by the President of the Conference of INGOs to Tunis (17-20 February 2013) – priorities for the implementation of the Mediterranean strategy: [CONF/SC\(2013\)DECISION1](#)

- **Heard** Sabine Rohmann speak about preparations for the intercultural conference on active citizenship and human rights to be held in the autumn 2014 in Oran (Algeria). This conference was postponed because of the forthcoming presidential election. The preparatory working group was pressing ahead with its work in organising the event.
- **Heard** the President speak about participation and the links between the activities of the Conference of INGOs and the North-South Centre. He noted:
 - that the partnership was very much that of the quadrilogue, both in spirit and in the way it was organised;
 - with reference to the composition of the Bureau of the Centre's Executive Committee, that from 28 June, he himself would take up the position of acting Chair, with elections to be held at the end of 2013;
 - the original nature of this body, enabling the Conference of INGOs to play its full part;
 - that the Mediterranean University on Youth and Global Citizenship would be held in Hammamet (Tunisia) from 1 to 8 July.

8. Open questions

Jean-Bernard Marie said that, as part of the follow-up to the “Declaration on genuine democracy” adopted in January 2013, he had agreed to take charge of the Working Group on follow-up, provided he received clear guidance from the Democracy, Social Cohesion and Global Challenges Committee. A letter would be sent out to the relevant NGOs so as to obtain some “core expertise”, enabling the follow-up to begin in earnest ([link to the declaration](#)).

9. Any other business

Under this item, the President provided the following information:

- Karin Nordmeyer had represented the Conference of INGOs at an event in Germany to commemorate 50 years of the European Convention on Human Rights on 26 June.
- A new member would be elected to the Bureau at the January 2014 session. Veysel Filiz, rapporteur, was stepping down because of new professional commitments.
- On behalf of Ermanno Bocchini, the President announced that the Code of Good Practice for civil participation in the decision-making process had been incorporated in the preamble to the regional law of Campania.
- Giovanni Rigone from the Lions Club had recently died. He had been an active member of the Conference of INGOs. The President paid tribute to his work and said he would be remembered.

Annelise Oeschger said that, as part of the follow-up to the Joint Declaration on “Acting together to eradicate extreme poverty in Europe” signed on 17 October 2012 by the quadrilogue, the “Extreme Poverty and Human Rights” Working Group led by Maritchu Rall and Jean-Gabriel Prieur would be holding a workshop at the Council of Europe on 17 October 2013 ([link to the joint declaration](#)).

Sabine Rohmann said that a conference on “The professional image and ethos of teachers” would be held on 24 and 25 April 2014, in co-operation with the Pestalozzi Programme of the Council of Europe’s Directorate General of Democracy (DGII) and the Education and Culture Committee of the Conference of INGOs.

10. Date of the next meeting

January 2014