



CONFERENCE OF INGOs
OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

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CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

**Third Summit of Heads of States and Government of the Council of Europe
Warsaw, 16 - 17 May 2005**

Address by

**Annelise OESCHGER,
President of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe**

The main reason why civil society is in a position to address you here today is thanks to the Council of Europe's pioneering role in this field.

As far back as 1952 it granted consultative status to the international non-governmental organisations, or INGOs. In 2003 the Committee of Ministers granted INGOs a participatory status in order to "reflect the active and constructive role of NGOs" and to involve them more closely "in defining Council of Europe policies and actions".

The Conference of INGOs thus became one of the Council of Europe's mainstays.

You are affirming this recognition here today before all the citizens of Europe.

Our contribution to the Summit opens with a request to the Council of Europe itself: we would ask you to reaffirm the unique role played by this pan-European Organisation in promoting a Europe without dividing lines and to provide it with the necessary resources for carrying out this task.

The Council of Europe's legal instruments, supervisory bodies, research work and field activities make it the natural ally of all those who defend its values day by day.

Human rights are important because they are the expression of what we dream of for every individual human being. Human rights protection must prioritise those who have suffered most from repression, violence, unheeded exposure to avoidable dangers, discrimination or destitution. These are intolerable situations which we have the collective responsibility for and the means of eradicating.

You as Heads of State and Government and we as citizens belonging to organised civil society, commit ourselves to the Council of Europe because we bear the same values. INGOs are therefore your natural allies. They contribute to the development of social cohesion. Thanks to their proximity to the populations and the structures in which they live, they observe dysfunctions and can predict developments on the ground. They alert the public authorities and put forward proposals to the policy-makers. The Council of Europe and increasing numbers of national and local authorities are expecting NGOs to play this political role. This participatory component of democracy complements its representative component.

Participatory democracy means recognising the citizen as a player in pursuing the common weal. The fact of recognising a citizen as a player is crucial for the future of our democracies. Citizens become involved when they see that they are respected and that they can influence the development of their communities.

We often speak of money collected for good causes disappearing into “black holes”, but we never mention the human efforts which are wasted because they are not acknowledged. NGOs transform these efforts into constructive, enduring energies. Seek out the unrecognised efforts of millions of citizens in your countries and support them. They are the best possible investment.

If they are to be able to play their role properly, NGOs must be allowed to act in a stable, sustainable environment. This is why we would ask all the States to provide the legal and economic conditions for NGOs to operate effectively and lastingly.

Clear political support on your part for the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe will strengthen our capacity for creating fresh citizen commitment to the cultural project borne by the Council of Europe. We assure you that you will benefit from our constructive, long-term political energy.