



CONFERENCE OF INGOs
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Presentation of the outcome of the January Session of the Conference of INGOs (25-29 January 2016) by Ms Anna Rurka (President) to the Rapporteur Group on Democracy (GR-DEM) – 25 February 2016

Madam Chair, Ladies and Gentlemen,

First of all, thank you for giving me this opportunity to report to you on the session of the Conference of INGOs. We value your interest in our activities.

In view of the time available to me, I would like to submit to you a text giving a detailed account of our activities and only comment on some of them here.

The winter 2016 session of the Conference of INGOs offered several highlights. I would first like to thank you for your participation and for the discussions which took place at the plenary meeting, which showed the wisdom of holding this exchange on the Friday after the session of the Parliamentary Assembly. For future exchanges, I would like to encourage you to also put questions to the INGOs. They will be pleased to share their experience with you.

The Secretary General of the Council of Europe also agreed to have an exchange of views with the INGOs. His message was loud and clear: he called on INGOs to stand up to defend those who defend us.

I also wish to thank the Ambassadors of the Republic of Moldova and Bulgaria for their statements and comments during the presentation of the reports on the visits by the Conference of INGOs to these two countries. Your comments on the reports were very useful. We also invited two NGOs met during our visits: the Moldovan association Promolex, which shared its expertise on the situation of human rights defenders in the Republic of Moldova and Transnistria, and the Bulgarian Forum for Civic Participation, which presented its tool for measuring citizen participation in the decision-making process. In this connection, I would like to inform you that the choice of countries for the next visits has been approved. We will be visiting Romania, Germany, Hungary and Poland and will be calling on the Ambassadors of these countries to take part in preparatory meetings.

As regards meetings of thematic committees, several topics were discussed between the INGOs and Council of Europe experts: the Federation of European Bar Associations presented its study on data protection and the protection of privacy. The debate on the situation of unaccompanied foreign minors in Europe was initiated by the International Association of Social Educators.

The fight against racism and intolerance was discussed with the General Rapporteur on combating racism and intolerance and Co-ordinator of the No Hate Parliamentary Alliance. We were given a progress report on the “No Hate” campaign and will henceforth be taking part in the movement’s meetings.

The Democracy, Social Cohesion and Global Challenges Committee chose to hold a debate entitled "Migration towards and through Europe, an intolerable humanitarian crisis". This was an opportunity to gauge the importance of the open letter on migration which was sent to you in the light of developments of the migrant situation since November. A press release was issued setting out a common position of INGOs condemning national policies which run counter to or are likely to compromise the Council of Europe's values. I would also like to emphasise that INGOs are at your disposal to suggest good practices for dealing with migrants. This can be a good source of inspiration.

During the session, the Conference of INGOs also issued a call for action in support of the Turin process. The INGOs expect ratification of the revised European Social Charter and the collective complaints protocol by all Council of Europe member states. We are stepping up mobilisation of our national members in support of this process.

Some information on our current agenda:

I am currently calling on the INGOs of the Conference to provide input for a written contribution to the Committee of Ministers thematic debate to be held on 15 March. This call should have a wide impact as it is being made via a letter to the 325 INGOs a news item on the Conference website and Facebook and Twitter posts.

I would also like to inform you that, just as a meeting with INGOs in Brussels provided material for my statement to last year's ministerial session, we intend to organise a meeting with Bulgarian NGOs on the day before this year's Committee of Ministers session in Sofia. The theme will be the settlement and inclusion of migrants in host societies. The meeting will take place on 17 May 2016 in Sofia.

Today and tomorrow I will be participating in the 6th strategic meeting of protection mechanisms for human rights defenders organised by the FIDH and the OMCT. This meeting, hosted by the Commissioner for Human Rights, opens the way to co-operation enabling us to go forward in thinking about additional mechanisms which the Conference of INGOs could initiate together with other Council of Europe bodies to protect civic space and dialogue so that the leaders of NGOs which defend human rights as an indivisible whole can work in a favourable environment that respects their work. But before anything else, the term "foreign agency" should be removed from the vocabulary used to refer to NGOs.

As proposed and supported by the Ministers' Deputies on 2 December, we are also making progress on the organisation of a substantive debate on the political activities of NGOs and their access to a wide range of sources of funding as crucial points affecting their effective participation in the decision-making process. This event will take place on 6 and 7 June 2016 in Strasbourg, and it is hoped that the participants will include the Secretary General, the Commissioner for Human Rights, the UN Special Rapporteur on freedom of assembly and association, national authorities, donors and NGOs. You supported this idea and I thank you. The Committee of Ministers is of course invited to contribute to this event. *To facilitate the preparations, could you please provide us promptly with the contact details of representatives of your ministries of justice who might be able to help us to understand what meaning is given to political activities in the legislation of your country and the regulations governing the funding of NGOs in your country.*

Highlights of the summer session of the Conference of INGOs

Since the spirit of civic engagement that opens the doors to economic migrants and war refugees is largely the result of NGO activation at local, regional and national level, we are going to continue the debate on the consequences of migration. This will be done in the light of events between now and June. This debate, to which you are of course invited, will take place on Friday

24 June, in the morning. The secretariat will send delegations the programme of the session so that you can also, if you so wish, take part in the meetings of the thematic committees.

We are also planning four events during the session: a round table on the health economy as a major factor in social cohesion, a side event on religion and women's rights, an artistic performance on NGO freedom and a speed-dating event providing the opportunity for a dynamic theme-based meeting between the INGOs of the Conference and youth INGOs.

Thank you for listening. I should be glad to answer any questions.

Anna Rurka