

CONFERENCE OF INGOS CONF/AG(2023)SYN1

MEETING OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Report of the Hybrid meeting

24 April 2023

14:00-17:30 First Session of the General Assembly open to CINGO members only

1. At 04:02pm the chairman GERHARD ERMISCHER, President of the Conference of INGOS, opened the meeting and asked for a moment of silence to commemorate the passing of our esteemed member and representative of Right to Die and also member of our CINGO Appellate committee Mr. Albert Otto Aycke Smook (1938-2023).

2. Nomination of the Rapporteurs of the meeting

Simon Matthijssen is appointed to be the rapporteur (voting results: room: 27 pro, 2 against, zero abstentions. Online 100% pro)

3. Draft agenda – for adoption

The agenda was adopted unanimously.

4. Report of the meeting of 5-6 October 2022 – for adoption
[CONF/AG\(2022\) SYN3](#) - [CONF/AG\(2022\) SYN4](#)

With comments taken into consideration, the minutes of the previous meeting were approved by a large majority.

5. [Report of the president](#)
- For approval

Ruth Allen (Standing Committee) gives an introduction.

- The Standing Committee tried to give a concise interim report, our overall three years strategy was defined in the year 2021. We have now entered the final year of our term. In the meantime, we have had to learn to deal with COVID and the war in Ukraine. We renewed the values driven leadership; we stayed focused on improving our influence in the Council of Europe.
- In between, we took the opportunity to participate and influence as best we could in the upcoming summit in Iceland. The report before us explains how we are trying to gain and increase influence and impact's power. Much of what we do is not visible, our time is in preparing, listening, calling attention and being visible. We hope that this report

elicits suggestions where we can improve and is read as if it is a precursor to next year's final report.

- Genevieve Laloy (vice president) adds that this report emphasizes our chosen focal points (which will be highlighted again in the next part of the General Assembly during a networking meeting).
- The representative of CISV International expressed her appreciation for the way the standing committee handled its task. She asks that the youth in particular not be forgotten, and that sufficient attention is always be given to them in all projects.
- A representative of the NGO "churches and freedom" appreciates the cooperation we seek with NGOs under pressure. We should, according to this speaker, focus not only on NGO rights but also on promoting peace.

The presidencies progress report was unanimously adopted.

Thanking Ms. Allen and Ms. Laloy for their introduction of this agenda item, the Chair reiterated that a questionnaire was circulating from the Expert Committee on NGO law on NGOs that are declared undesirable. It is hoped that other NGOs will also take note of this questionnaire and, if possible, wish to complete it.

6. Reports of Committees and rational for eventual prolongation of Committees

6.1 [Final report of the Committee "Interreligious and Interconvictional Dialogue"](#) - Gabriela Frey (European Buddhist Union (EBU) and Sören Lenz (Conference of European Churches (CEC)) first give the word to Liliane Bensedrine (future co-chair) of the committee:

- One of the important objectives of the Committee and one of the reasons to continue the work of the Committee for Interreligious and Interfaith Dialogue is to establish a permanent and inclusive platform for interreligious and interfaith dialogue within the Council of Europe. PACE called for this in 2015 in Recommendation 2080 to the Committee of Ministers. Intercultural dialogue, interreligious and interfaith dialogue is recognized by the European and UN institutions as an important means of prevention and fight against prejudice, rejection of otherness, hatred and violence against others who are different because of their culture and religion.
- By allowing a better knowledge and understanding, this dialogue allows to diminish the inter-religious and inter-faith issues that are sensitive and controversial. Moreover, the Council of Europe and the European Court of Human Rights underline the growing importance of religious issues in socio-political matters.
- This is why it is important to continue the work of our Committee, in continuity with the work of our Conference and in complementarity with the work of the Council of Europe particularly against hate crimes and all forms of racism and intolerance.

Sören Lenz, co-chair of the committee, adds:

- Our work can also be described in 3 points.
 - Transversality, our work with other CINGO committees:
 - Rights of migrants - preparation of a webinar on the interreligious and interfaith dimension - reception of migrants, refugees and asylum seekers
 - NGOs as advocates for gender equality and women's rights - Initial reflections on a webinar on the theme of religions and gender equality and women's rights. And: Reflections on a PACE side event: Working title: War and Peace. The current situation in Ukraine and the roles and perspectives of religions in Europe
 - Education: Compilation of inspiring practices in non-formal education and training programmes for dialogue formats. For example, pilgrim.at which combines

spirituality and environmental responsibility in an education programme for schools and teachers.

- schools and teachers. Or Emouna, the amphitheatre of religions at Science Po University.
- Visibility: The Committee has generated interest outside CINGO and the Council of Europe Presentation at Science Po Strasbourg
 - Intercultural working group of the European Parliament
 - Belgian Army / Interconvictional Chaplaincy
 - The requests from various organisations outside the Council of Europe and the presentation of our work have contributed to the visibility not only of our committee but also of CINGO.

Gabriela Frey, co-chair of the committee concluded:

- We are aware that by addressing the topic of interreligious and interfaith dialogue, we are dealing with a sensitive topic and that we have to find a respectful balance between secularism and faith based INGOs.
- Recent years have shown once again how religion, beliefs in particular are interpreted and used by some governments and organisations according to their interests and power to systematically justify gross violations of human rights or to commit acts of violence.

6.2 [Report of the Committee “NGOs as advocates for gender equality and women’s rights”](#) - Ms. Anita Schnetzer-Spranger (Zonta International) and Ms. Bettina Hahne (Soroptimist International) gave a particularly instructive and clear PowerPoint presentation.

In this presentation, they discussed *Objectives for the gender equality and women's rights committee* and explained what they have achieved:

- Survey about the objectives and goals of the NGOs of the committee
- Familiarization of committee members with the three most important Conventions for our committee, the Istanbul Convention, the Anti-Trafficking Convention and the Revised Social Charter
- Analysis of several examples of projects by our NGOs: what worked well and what worked not so well and why
- Presentation of the Istanbul Convention at the General Assembly of the INGO Conference (Spring session 2022). (Later in the presentation, the protection mechanism of the Istanbul Convention was further explained.)
- Webinar “NGOs and the monitoring of the Istanbul Convention”

The next part of their presentation included wishes for the future:

- Explore possible further webinars (on the monitoring of other Conventions; webinars in languages other than English/French)
- Analysis of what NGOs can accomplish for the Conventions depending on their structure and their functioning
- Exploring networking possibilities with other INGO Committees

In conclusion, the speakers discussed “the Role of NGOs (general)”, ‘the Role of NGOs in practice’ and finally “Points to take away”.

They ended with the remark that they are looking forward to comments, suggestions, input, and support and that they hope the General Assembly will allow them to continue their work.

6.3 [Final report of the Committee “Environment, Climate Change, Heritage and Health”](#) - Carol Ritchie (EUROPARC - Federation of Nature and National Parks of Europe (EUROPARC))

Unfortunately, the internet connection with Ms Carol Ritchie was so poor that she was unable to comment on her report.

6.4 [Final report of the Committee “Environmental and health crisis: governance and solidarity issues”](#) - Anne-Marie Chavanon (International Federation for Housing and Planning (IFHP))

Anne Marie Chavanon, chair of the Environment and Health Crisis Committee, summarized briefly the content of the committees' report:

The Environment and Health Crisis Committee, was involved in:

- Steering committees: CDCPP and DH-Bio, via on the one hand the presence of members in respect of their NGO, on the other hand the participation of the heads of these steering committees in the work of our committee.
- Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. Contribution through the provision of amendments to the work of the Governance Committee.
- GRETA with whom it had discussions in anticipation of a meeting organized by members of the Committee in Venice on 15 November 2022 on Human Trafficking aggravated by crisis situations

The Environment and Health Crisis Committee, was involved in linked with other CINGO committees via:

- Work meetings and various events, in particular thanks to the presence of common members. This was the case with the Actions for Social Rights Committee and the Committee on the Rights of Migrants.
 - The increasing violence in times of crisis requires closer collaboration with the Committee on the Rights of the Child and the Committee on Women's Rights.

The Environment and Health Crisis Committee, would like the CINGO Standing Committee and Secretariat's support for communications between this committee, other members of CINGO and other parts of CoE, in particular:

- to foster the organization of meetings at the Palais or in the regional offices of the Council of Europe
 - Help mailing invitations. More specifically inform the committees about the contribution possibilities
 - During events created by the Organization such as the World Forum for Democracy to encourage regular exchanges, such as the next networking event
 - Vis-à-vis other Council of Europe bodies
- open the possibility, with the concerned secretariats, of sending a committee representative to the PACE Committee on Social Affairs, Health and Sustainable
- disseminate the texts adopted by the committees to all the pillars of the Council of Europe on all themes, without exception. In particular to the Steering Committees, the Congress and PACE committees as well as the relevant GRs and the SG (formal transmission other than the Newsletter).
- inform the committee of the follow-up to the recommendations transmitted to the CM and other Council of Europe bodies (recommendations adopted by the Conference on the proposal of the Committee). Information on the response provided by the General Secretariat.
- Finally, while bearing in mind that the Conference is not an institutional body but that civil society is one of the assets that the Council of Europe seeks to develop, see how the work of the committees can be taken into account in the general framework of the activity of the Council of Europe. (Past work most often omitted by other bodies)

The Environment and Health Crisis Committee, wishes to continue its mandate for another year, because:

- ongoing work with the Governance Committee of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe on the revision of the European Urban Charter,
- programming of side event during the next UN-Habitat Summit to be held from June 5 to 9, 2023 in Nairobi
- contribution to the upcoming World Health Summit in October in Berlin and the upcoming SDG Summit to be held in September in New York.
- participation in several events and work in progress of member NGOs and European and international partner networks
- as SDS are a global priority supported by the Council of Europe, the Environmental and Health Crisis Committee considers it essential to get involved in their development as part of its work within the Organization, alongside the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress and the ministerial sector.

For a more detailed overview of the committees' activities, please follow the link above leading to the committees' full report.

6.5 [Final report of the Committee "Human Rights and Artificial Intelligence"](#) - Gilbert Flam (International League against Racism and Antisemitism (LICRA))

Due to calendar pressures, it was not possible for Mr Flam to attend on time and his presentation was rescheduled for Wednesday 26 April 2023.

6.6 [Report of the committee "Education for Democracy"](#) – Arja Krauchenberg (Lifelong Learning Platform (LLL))

The committee Education for Democracy was mainly involved in the following committees and other activities by having had contact with

- the committee on the Rights of the Child
- Health and Environment and Migration.
- Committee members are also members of these other committees, creating synergies in this way between their work and ours, mainly by attending the meetings and providing input.

The committee Education for Democracy was linked with other CINGO committees through

- Its' rather large number of committee members, from which several of them are also part of other committees and have participated in their sessions contributing in this way to the mutual exchange between different committees.

The CINGO Standing Committee and Secretariat could foster to support the work of the committee Education for Democracy and the communications between this committee, other members of CINGO and other parts of CoE, via members of the CINGO, by:

- Support the organization of exchange among the different committees to foster synergies and better cooperation to work towards common goals
- Share information about upcoming members' events to make it easier for members to mutually attend conferences and webinars and promote them in their own networks when the topic is relevant
- Publish information about results achieved by other members during past events or projects

other bodies of the CoE, by:

- Enhance the exchange between other bodies of the CoE and the Committee on Education
- for Democracy as education is at the base of all work of the Council. Inform committees about relevant events and encourage participation of members in these events

After the introduction of this latest report of a committee's work, the chairman thanked the speakers for their presentations and reiterated that we will vote on Wednesday, April 26, 2023, on the possible continuation for another year in the case that is desired and requested by the committees.

The chair reports that a new committee has signed up (Sports and human rights) that would like to give a brief introduction to find out if there is enough resonance in this conference and if there are NGOs that want to work together. He gives the floor to Maritchu Rall.

15:23 Break

15:50 Restart of the session

7. Introduction to the Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, Reykjavik, 16-17 May 2023; report from the Civil Society Summit on Council of Europe, The Hague, 28 February-1 March 2023

The Chair explained that there will be a summit of heads of state in Reykjavik in mid-May. This summit was decided on after the invasion of Ukraine, when it was widely felt that a re-energization of our values and goals was necessary to answer the questions of the new era. Following the mid-2022 initiative, five *eminences grises* commissioned a report to the committee of ministers of the council of Europe in October 2022.

It was not until November 2022 that a formal decision was made to hold the summit in Reykjavik.

In fast forward our conference on 14 December 2022 organized a webinar to get clear on the content of the message we want to send out in Reykjavik. It is not only about the sound of the officiating NGOs with participatory status with the Council of Europe, but about mapping the sound of all civil society. It was decided to organize a civil society summit in The Hague 75 years after the Hague Conference that laid the groundwork for the international organizations we now belong to.

Our conference decided in close cooperation with CURE (Campaign to Uphold Rights in Europe, for a strong and effective Council of Europe), in preparation for the Reykjavik summit, to organize a meeting with civil society in The Hague (late February-early March 2023) from which a "Hague declaration" by the cooperating organizations in civil society emerged and on the basis of which a short recommendation of our conference was prepared (to be decided by this General Assembly on Wednesday, April 26 2023).

As a conference, we should not forget how unique we are within the Council of Europe, because the Russian Federation has been removed from all the official bodies of the Council of Europe. Only we still have direct and indirect contacts with civil society in Russia (and in Belarus). The brutal war that Russia started and its consequences in the interior of the country show how exceptionally important freedom of association, freedom of expression, and implementation of the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights have always been. Unfortunately, in recent times, it appears that these kinds of basic rights

that this organization is specifically concerned with, have increasingly been taken for granted and have become jaded.

We can see that our proposed recommendation overlaps for about 40% with the Hague Declaration.

Obviously, the countries must now finally make it clear, also financially, whether they are serious about the Council of Europe being a particularly important instrument. After more than 14 years of budgetary stagnation, the organization is deflated, exhausted, emaciated. A euro per inhabitant is certainly not too much to ask, but it would do so much to benefit the instruments that the Council of Europe controls.

After this introduction, the president again explained that we should not expect miracles from the Reykjavik summit; it is a very short summit and no turns in existing policies are expected. The text that we want to bring to this summit will be presented to our general assembly on Wednesday. New textual changes - long overdue for submission, that reaches us this evening (23/4) - we will insert as best we can into the existing text to create a consolidated text to be voted on as late as coming Wednesday.

A lively discussion ensues.

The representative of the Committee against Torture (CAT) argues, among other things, the need for a strong human rights instrument, not only in relation to what is now happening in Ukraine, but also now that Turkey has dropped out of the Istanbul Convention, now that Georgia has made a last-minute decision not to adopt a so-called "foreign agents" law (but that could turn around at any moment) now that tensions are again rising seriously in Northern Ireland.

The representative of the European Buddhist Union (EBU) promises to send some suggestions by e-mail.

The representative of the Conference of European Justice and Peace Commissions (Justitia Pax) asks questions about our collaboration with civil society that does not have participatory status. He further notes that the standing committee has failed to publish its meeting minutes in a timely manner. To this, the chairman explains that in the past, meetings were held twice a year in a rather formal setting. Nowadays, about 12 meetings a year are held in a much less formal setting without translation. This means that the reports that are there of the meetings still need to be officially translated. He promises to pay attention to this. On the subject of civil society not having participatory status, the President reported that this is done by mutual agreement and that these are often NGOs that have a long track record and high standing within the Council of Europe but cannot be considered for participatory status because of their set-up or formal status.

A delegate from Greenpeace argues that the human right to a cleaner and healthy environment should be more firmly emphasized. Others argue that the various freedoms need to be named separately and especially more prominently in the text.

The delegate from International Federation of Action by Christians for the Abolition of Torture (FIACAT) suggests that it would be good if we included a text requiring all states to accept the reports from The Committee against Torture (CAT) directly. It is noted that our text is addressed to the heads of state but the biggest offenders on the battlefield in Ukraine are officially not related to any state. It is argued that this is not the first time that a country has used militia who cannot actually be identified as soldiers of a particular country. It is also noted that the Council of Europe has now committed itself to creating a

register of war crimes and that the Netherlands, in particular The Hague, has offered to continue keeping this register.

The delegate from CISV International suggests that we actively approach and inform our politicians about the Council of Europe and the dire need to release funds for it, among other things.

The representative of International Movement of Apostolate in Middle and Upper Classes (MIAMSI) pleads for a more emphatic presence of us in and near politicians he would like to cooperate with any organization in civil society that can help his canvases become reality. The discussion is particularly lively, people show gratitude for the help that has come for Georgia.

A delegate from Soroptimist International of Europe (SIE) points out the difficult position Armenia is in.

The representative of International Federation for Housing and Planning (IFHP) thinks youth should be mentioned in particular.

The Chair thanks members for the lively discussion he argues that Putin has managed to achieve exactly the opposite of what he wanted: Moldavia, Ukraine and others are turning away from Russia and want to belong to Europe and Europe itself is much more determined than in the past.

- The chair explained that, unfortunately, due to renovation activities at the Council of Europe, parliamentarians are meeting in the European Parliament building, to which we can only gain access with difficulty. It will be very difficult this week to address loose parliamentarians.
- He then points to the networking meeting organized on Tuesday morning around the six cores. Everyone is cordially invited to attend on Tuesday morning, April 25.
- There being no further business, the chair closes the meeting a little before 5:00 PM

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25 April 2023

09:00-12:00 Networking Event for the CINGO members

14:30-17:00 Second Session of the General Assembly open to member States

- Gerhard Ermischer (GE), President of the Conference of INGOs (CINGO), opens the afternoon session and welcomes all participants, those present in the plenary room and online.
- GE welcomes Nina Nordström (NN), Finnish Ambassador to the Council of Europe, and Riita Kittilä (RK) from SOSTE (Finnish Federation for Social Affairs and Health, the umbrella organisation of member social affairs and health NGOs and partners, in Finland).

1. [Report of the fact-finding visit to Finland](#)

- GE explains that this was his first country visit as President of CINGO in his mandate, after the travel and other constraints of the pandemic. He reaffirms that there was strong encouragement for the fact-finding visit to Finland, including from the ongoing

efforts and support of the Finnish Ambassador to the Council of Europe, Nina Nordström, and from the partners “on the ground”, including SOSTE. There was a high level of dedication from Finnish NGOs to contributing to the study visit, as it was also important for them to bring to the forefront their operational realities and challenges that they face.

- As a background to the study visit and to set it in the context, GE explains that the activities took place in the midst of the arrival of Ukrainian refugees displaced by the Russian invasion. He also reflects on the new developments in terms of exercising civic rights at the time, specifically around environmental awareness, such as the Extinction Rebellion movement protests, which were not unique to Finland. This reflected the wider developments of how civil society and civic movements have started to organise and mobilise themselves in the recent years.
- RK reflects that it was a pleasure for SOSTE to host the CINGO fact-finding visit to Finland, it was a great opportunity for SOSTE and numerous Finnish NGOs to learn more about the work of the Council of Europe and the CINGO. She reaffirms that the learning achieved from the cross-border perspectives of the study visit is important for identifying gaps and finding and implementing solutions to obstacles.
- By explaining where the Finnish civil society is finding itself right now, and giving specific reference to environmental awareness movement, RK confirms that what is needed is strength, resilience and most of all, independence, which helps it to be an equal partner in ensuring social justice prevails.
- NN thanks for the invitation to this session and for being asked to reflect on the CINGO fact-finding visit to Finland. The visit was very useful for Finnish authorities, which not only learned about the work of Council of Europe per se, but also of the civil society within Council of Europe, through CINGO, to make that important connection within the context of the institution.
- NN stresses the fact that Finland is very much looking forward to the Summit in Reykjavík, as this will be a very key event to advance the important changes in the work, presence, and visibility of Council of Europe.
- She thanks for the report on the fact-finding visit report, and she states that it raises many very important points about the vibrancy of civil society and has a lot of important subject matter about the need for maintaining and improving the openness, independence and strength of civic spaces across Europe. She finalises her intervention by reaffirming the ongoing support of Finland to civil society within the Council of Europe.
- GE thanks Finland for their direct support to CINGO in the person of Anu Juvonen, the Policy Advisor seconded to the Council of Europe, who brings with her many years of diverse civil society experience.

2. Debate on the Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe, Reykjavik, 16-17 May 2023 and CINGO draft Recommendation to be voted on 26 April 2023 (continued)

- GE explains that quite a few proposals for amendments have been received for the CINGO draft Recommendation, which the team has worked on now to incorporate them

into the document; the vote on the Recommendation takes place in the final session of the Spring General Assembly, on 26 April 2023.

- He refers to the dichotomy between, on the one hand, the strength of the CINGO and why (and how) it is important for the Council of Europe (in areas, such as, for example, ensuring that legal proceedings in the Court take their course and are adhered to), and, on the other hand where it has weaknesses, where its statutes do not grant it the level playing field within other bodies of the Council of Europe, as well as its financial resources are also limited and thus impact of the reach of the CINGO and its work. He also stresses further the fact that the funding issue is a threat for how important the work of CINGO is for the upholding of rights, democracy, and social justice in the Council of Europe member states and asks that CINGO members use their contacts and networks to engage with their national parliamentarians, to support the advocacy for the work and importance of the CINGO.
- The representative of the European Buddhist Union (EBU) asks for a document that is concise and punchy that can be given to parliamentarians on what we are asking for, in terms of national representation ministerial support within the Council of Europe, because the very essence of funding availability is to enable us in the CINGO to fight for and save democracy in Europe.
- The representative of the Federation for Education in Europe (FEDE) also adds about the importance of funding for the maintenance and sustainability of programmes and posts within the Council of Europe, for example in areas such as education for democracy, disability, where important and effective programmes existed but sadly do not anymore, due to cuts and lack of funding.
- A member of the CINGO Youth Delegation states that adequate funding is also important for strengthening the awareness of the work of CINGO and our effectiveness vis-à-vis national level actors.
- The representative of the European Buddhist Union (EBU) also refers to the lack of knowledge of the INGO-Service and states its excellent work must be much more highlighted, so that the “dots are connected” better by external audiences.
- The representative of the European Network Churches on the Move (EN/RE) states that individual CINGO members can also make waves and engage in raising awareness of the importance of CINGO work.
- The representative of the International Movement of Apostolate in Middle and Upper Classes (MIAMSI) reaffirms that we must also promote the work and importance of our work in the context of preserving human rights not just amongst ourselves but also with the other bodies of the Council of Europe, as well as vis-à-vis parliamentarians.
- The representative of University Women of Europe (UWE) reflects that the access to the various bodies of the Council of Europe is no longer transparent and accessible, and unless this is remedied, our importance and standing within the entire institution will be threatened. She also asks for the addition to the Reykjavík draft Recommendation about the need for equality between men and women.
- The representative of International League against Racism and Antisemitism (LICRA) states that there is an ambiguity in the paragraph on the fight against impunity for war crimes and crimes against humanity.

3. 16:00 - Exchange of views with Marija Pejčinović-Burić, Secretary General of the Council of Europe

- GE welcomes Marija Pejčinović-Burić (MPB), Secretary General of the Council of Europe, to the afternoon session of the CINGO General Assembly.
- MPB thanks for the invitation and the opportunity to meet and address the members of the CINGO, reaffirming that she cherishes the interactions with the CINGO members. She states that in the upcoming Council of Europe Annual Report 2023 there will be further call for the need to protect and strengthen civil society against the democratic backsliding and the shrinking of civic space in Europe. She makes it clear that vibrant civil society and INGOs, human rights defenders, who are there on the ground providing help to marginalised and ostracised groups – “this is human rights in practice”. She further refers to the need to strengthen the protection and promotion of civil society space in Europe and lays out what governments need to do to strengthen civic space for the benefit of all people.
- MPB refers to the support of civil society for Ukraine and the people of the invaded country, talks about the justified expulsion of Russia from the Council of Europe. and outlines the work of the Contact Group for working with pro-democracy civil society organisations in Belarus, reaffirming that the ongoing support to such groups, which are effectively persecuted, is extremely important for the Council of Europe.
- MPB speaks about the development in the Council of Europe strengthen its work with the CINGO within the institutional structures of the Council.
- MPB talks about the upcoming Reykjavík Summit and how important it will be for the upholding of the work of the Council of Europe, particularly the democratic principles that we all stand for in the institution.
- Her message of this day is that while civic space and the role of civil society is under pressure, the upcoming Summit will allow for bringing this to the fore and act to reverse this worrying trend, so that the importance of civic participation is reaffirmed and continues to flourish.
- Christoph Spreng (CINGO Standing Committee Vice-President) asks how the role of Civil Society (CINGO in particular, and NGOs and other civil society in the Member States) could be further strengthened within the CoE. He states that our hope is to see more transparency, consultation, and participation of CINGO/civil society in drafting processes, decision making and monitoring of CoE standards.

MPB states that she already hinted on this in her current mandate and her engagements as Secretary General of the Council of Europe, including recently in Helsinki, where it was said there and then in Turin, that we stand ready to make headway to strengthen the role of civil society in the CoE structures. She talks about the Civil Society Portal, which has been used for two years already and has led to several important exchanges at the level of the Committee of Ministers, leading ministers to discuss amongst themselves the important issues related to the recognition of civil society. During the Reykjavík Summit it will be reaffirmed that civil society must be given transparent and strong platform for engagement and that both Council of Europe and member states need to do their utmost to support a vibrant civic space on our continent. There is work still to be done, but it continues to be delivered and remains high on the agenda for the Council of Europe.

- Ruth Allen (CINGO Standing Committee member) asks should the Council of Europe identify and give special visibility to those of its instruments that are of particular relevance for keeping democratic institutions, and the values they are anchored in, up to date and fit for purpose in our contemporary circumstances. She further asks if the Council of Europe could go further than the possible Summit “Reykjavik Principles of Democracy” by creating and promoting a set of “European Cutting-Edge Fundamentals of Democracy” to be regularly updated and confirmed.

MPB thanks for mentioning the fundamentals and for the support and reflections in the preparation of the Summit (which will be only the fourth summit of the CoE). She is aware that some of the proposals went beyond what is now under the title of the Summit Principles, but she hopes that the “Principles” are nevertheless adopted and then implemented by the member states. She believes that the document is already an ambitious one and is looking forward to the “Principles” to be adopted and implemented, to enable all to move collectively in the same direction in the long run. She repeats that democratic backsliding predates the pandemic and the Russian war in Ukraine, and that the areas of concern which remain in place need to be addressed on ongoing basis. She hopes that the Reykjavik Summit will be an opportunity to reverse those challenging trends and to reaffirm the Council of Europe values and confirms that the Reykjavik “Principles” include a specific reference to the vital role of civil society. MPG states that visibility is not only partially to know about the organisation, but also to see why and how we can work in all areas, and that we have moved on visibility, with examples of events of the Council of Europe at national, member state, level, such as events on human rights, democracy, values of the CoE.

- Piotr Sadowski (CINGO Standing Committee member) asks can the Social Charter mechanism be more substantially strengthened. He states that civil society does not feel that the current reform process leads to an overall strengthening of the system or to easier access for Civil Society to collective complaints.

MPB thanks for this question and states that the European Social Charter is unjustly undermined, particularly when we talk about the principal pillars of the CoE. If one wants to specifically speak there are two pillars, one is the European Social Charter, and that the system should be more relevant, not least because it is a mechanism that has already been in place for over 60 years. In her mandate, already two years ago MPB has called for three areas to support and strengthen the European Social Charter more substantially, through political support (this being the crucial one), improvement of procedures, and further substantive procedural developments to be considered.

- Goran Miletić (CINGO Standing Committee member) asks if MPB could inform us of the latest state of play regarding the creation of a register for war crimes and the role of the CoE in a future system of holding states and governments accountable for the crime of aggression.

MPB states that this is a very pertinent question in the current times, and that accountability is in her view the main area where the Council of Europe can and should be engaged in supporting Ukraine; justice must be done, and part of justice is accountability. MPB promised President Zelensky that the CoE will do its utmost to support any such tribunal to address the need for justice for Ukraine, also offering its own expertise because of having its own court and judicial procedures. MPB talks about the “Register of Damage” and what needs to be done is the introduction of a place where claims can be lodged and dealt with quickly, in a more rapid manner than court proceedings which can take longer, 5-7 year, procedures. The solution proposed by the CoE is an enlarged partial agreement, under which the Register is the first step in setting up a compensation mechanism (followed by a compensation commission and

then a compensation fund), which should be placed in the Hague because of the already existing judicial institutions that deal with criminal justice. MPB hopes that the Register will become the first legally binding instrument for dealing with the cases of war crimes committed against Ukraine (noting the importance of the founding members in the Register).

- Genevieve Laloy (CINGO Standing Committee Vice-President) asks if MPB could inform us of the latest state of play regarding the accession of the EU to the Human Rights Convention and the Court of Human Rights and what implications will that have.

MPB thanks for this question, because it is important to end on a positive note, the CoE Parliamentary Assembly has been very keen on the upcoming Reykjavík Summit because both Ursula von der Leyen and Charles Michel will be present there, to make headway on the accession of the EU to the Convention and to the Court, to complete the whole process and deal with any remaining issues. Of course, she states, until the negotiations are completed, nothing can be said as being done.

4. End of meeting of the second day of the General Assembly

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26 April 2023

09:00-12:30 Third Session of the General Assembly open to CINGO members only

The President opens the session and explains that revisions have been made to the document - CINGO recommendations to Summit of Heads of States and Government of the Council of Europe, Reykjavik, 16-17 May 2023. The report in final version will be discussed and voted on later this morning.

1. Reports of Committees and rational for eventual prolongation of Committees (continued)

- 1.1 [Final report of the "Civil Society Committee on the Rights of the Child"](#) - Michel Grangeat (MG)

The Chair (MG) presented the report. The committee has worked effectively in the last period and focused on the CDENF sub-committee priority on Rights of the Child in Parental Separation and Care Proceedings. Later this year it will need to refocus on the next CDENF priority of the child's voice within judicial processes. The CDENF work on both topics will now carry on until 2024 (possibly beyond).

The CINGO committee has participatory status in the CDENF sub-committee considering these issues but with no voting rights. However, the sub-Committee is very participative, and we are very much heard and welcomed through verbal representation and in our written submissions. MG has attended all the meetings as the CINGO representative. Other CINGO members attend as observers. This has been a major and interesting piece of work on children's rights and good judicial practice - and it is vital NGO voice and influence is there.

MG notes the committee is looking for a new representative to the sub-committee as the focus of CDENF moves to good practice in children's participation in judicial processes as this is not his area of expertise.

The CINGO committee is also represented in the Lanzarote Committee of CoE which focuses on child protection. It has recently focused on abuse of children as a result of the war in Ukraine and also the relationship between children's rights and the Istanbul Convention.

The committee works with other committees and is looking towards a joint webinar with the CINGO Migrants Committee. New members are very much welcome – please use contact details in the report to join the committee.

The committee seeks an extension of mandate to ensure we remain represented in CDENF work and develop further impacts. We have planned further work in 23/24 including a webinar in May on good practice in children's involvement in judicial proceedings, also a joint webinar on migrant children and one on Ukrainian children.

MG also recommends there is a follow-on committee from April 2024 when MG will hand over the Chair at this point. The current committee has met its objectives and there is much more to do. Please contact Michel and the committee via civilsocietycommittee.rc@gmail.com. All interested members are very much welcome.

Question from floor: Is there any focus on gender differences in the work with CDENF? MG notes that not been a current focus but we have representation from relevant INGOs on women and girls' rights in the committee who raises these issues, and we will look into this more in the future.

1.2 [Final report of the Committee "Rights of persons who are migrants"](#) – Daniel Guéry

There are 25 INGOs in the committee which has "communication unit" to manage information flows. The [slides](#) presented covered reports on webinars held including:

- Session on "push backs" and difficulty of tackling this under different member states' jurisdictions.
- Session on trafficking and the impact of war in Ukraine, particularly impact on women and children, in the war and amongst those fleeing the war, at borders and in receiving countries.

The committee is working closely with Human Rights Commissioner and developing work with PACE. It also organized webinars on related issues.

October 2022, the committee carried out a field visit to Greece to investigate multiple migration issues, including experience of different route, needs and service responses. This was supported/facilitated by large NGO in Greece, Smile of the Child. Number of NGOs helped the CINGO committee understand the challenges and good practices in very wide range of situations. The [report](#) is online on INGO website.

Later in the meeting, the committee will propose for adoption by CINGO recommendations for a new global approach to rights of migrants.

The committee would like to continue and asks for extension of its mandate to continue follow up work regarding the findings of the visit to Greece and other activities including collaboration with other CINGO committees – and to pursue the implementation of the statement they hope to adopt today.

1.3 [Final report of the Committee "Action for Social Rights"](#) – Anna Rurka (AR)

Last two years committee – with collaboration of 15+ INGOs – has delivered a number of webinars. There is draft recommendation on the agenda today to reinforce the need for CoE to support further work to strengthen and promote the Social Charter in concrete and meaningful ways. AR was pleased to hear the Secretary General of CoE reinforced the

importance of Social Charter yesterday. The work of the committee is needed going forward and so asks for an extension of mandate for another year.

The [Social Rights Tracker](#) development has progressed and is being developed through an agreement with the University of Strasbourg which enables remuneration of trainees/interns who are helping promote and develop the tracker. This is a very helpful collaboration with the University, a model for involving students and young interns in the work of the CINGO. Anna Diaz, Social Rights Tracker Intern, introduces the development work of the Social Rights Tracker, to capture good practices, breaches, and collective complaints.

The President spoke to reinforce the importance of the Social Charter as a vital protection for rights. It is a CINGO priority and important that the CINGO committee managed to get into the CoM drafting committee on revisions. We continue to build allies with specific Ministerial supporters across member states.

1.4 [Final Report of the committee AI](#) - Gilbert Flam

The agenda point had been shifted due to time conflicts and replaced the point on the Committee for Education for Democracy.

Work last two years has focused on themes including responding to rapidity of technological change and impacts on civil society. Civil society needs to consider fundamental values and implications of fast changing AI. At international level – in and beyond Europe - we have to deal with political systems with values different to our own. We need to keep pace with global developments. The power and speed of processing of computers is developing rapidly. There may be need for a new legal framework to protect citizen's rights from AI developments (such as ChatGBT) and risks to data protection. Risks include growth of “fake news”, a problem for CoE and its CAI, and for all NGOs. Law lags behind AI but we must use existing laws that do apply through invoking rights conventions and laws. There is also a strong domination of men and male perspectives in AI sector with implications for gender equality.

Committee believes CINGO should continue to explore all this further and asks to extend its mandate. There are two webinars in planning; first on media and second on security including use of enhanced AI for video surveillance (being used across the world to increasingly monitor civil society through face recognition etc). New mandate will look at place and priorities of civil society in developing rules for AI.

The representative of the Federation for Education in Europe (FEDE) stated that the Education and AI committees are liaising, and this has included a successful webinar. There is a forward work plan including academic integrity and AI.

The President thanked all committees for their written reports. He assured them the comments for improved ways of working including relationship to the Standing Committee and Secretariat will be discussed and taken on board by the Standing Committee and feedback will be provided to committees. The Standing Committee and Secretariat also seeks to improve the process for committees to write and submit reports in French and English. Requests for reports will go out earlier in advance of the October General Assembly.

2. Vote on one year prolongation of the mandate of the Committees that have submitted their request

2.1 Committee “Rights of persons who are migrants” – **Passed unanimously.**

2.2 Committee “Action for Social Rights” - **Passed unanimously.**

- 2.3 Committee “Interreligious and Interconvictional Dialogue” – **Passed. One abstention, none against.**
- 2.4 “Civil Society Committee on the Rights of the Child” – **Passed unanimously**
- 2.5 Committee “Environmental and health crisis: governance and solidarity issues” – **Passed unanimously**
- 2.6 Committee “Human Rights and Artificial Intelligence” – **Passed. One abstention, none against.**

Chairs of committees need to be agreed by CINGO GA.

New Co-Chair arrangements proposed for Committee “Interreligious and Interconvictional Dialogue” as Sören Lenz is stepping down. Proposed new Co-Chair is Liliane Bensedrine – **Passed unanimously**

3. Vote on draft Recommendations submitted

Vice President Genevieve Laloy Chairs this session

- 3.1 [Recommendation for a Global Approach of the Rights of Refugees and Migrants and the Role of Civil Society](#)– [Explanatory note](#)

Rights of People who are Migrants Committee introduced the document:

This proposed document has been developed over two years. It builds on the prior work in CoE and CINGO. It focuses on two key matters – 1) the responses of NGOs to migrants and 2) the access of migrants to services and protection of their fundamental rights. The committee undertook consultations including the visit to Greece which compared current understanding with the reality on the ground in a country receiving many migrants.

The document is founded on the principle of a holistic approach i.e. considering the combined elements needed to support migrants and refugees, and how this can shape policy, practice and political responses. “Holistic” in this context means: education, health, safety and physical integrity, accommodation. The importance of the last came to the fore following the visit to Greece.

Policy makers need to understand the value and contribution of NGO sector – that all sectors need to support migrants with respect for their rights and needs in order to sustain social cohesion and harmony.

Opened for discussion:

The representative of Zonta International (ZI) (online): commends work of the committee. Notes however there is no mention of women and girls’ specific needs and required response for them.

Committee response: the report does include reference to prior foundational work on the needs of migrant women and girls. There is also a chapter on trafficking which is something particularly relevant to experience of women and girls. The committee is open to further work on this and in its extended mandate would be pleased to work on this theme and further stress aspects impacting women and girls. There are other themes that also need elaboration and we will collaborate with other INGOs on these.

The representative of the European Buddhist Union (EBU) – notes importance of recognising implications of convictional beliefs and religions for supporting migrants.

Vote: Passed. Two abstentions, none against.

3.2 [Recommendation on the right to social protection as a human right - The need to act against the non-taking up of rights](#)

Committee presentation – Anna Rurka (online): This follows committee’s webinar on action against non-take up of rights. The document recommends CINGO asserts social protection is a right and that “non-take up” needs action by states. The major causes of non-take up include lack of information and digital exclusion (limiting access to online information/help). Recommendations focus on practical steps including simpler procedures for welfare benefits (e.g. adoption of more universal provision) to make social protection more efficient. It suggests a number of other simplifying measures and ways of making support/services more “human”. The committee has identified some good practice e.g. in Belgium. This draft recommendation being adopted by CINGO will give the committee more legitimacy in working with the PACE to promote the approach across Europe where 40% of people receive social protection/welfare benefits.

Open for discussion

No comments or questions

Vote: Passed unanimously.

4. Vote on the [Recommendation of the INGO Conference to the Summit of heads of state of the Council of Europe](#) for the Summit of Heads of States and Government of the Council of Europe, Reykjavik, 16-17 May 2023

President Gerhard Ermischer (GE) opens the session: This document is aimed at the Reykjavik Summit which will be very formal and rigid. This shorter document complements the much longer Hague Declaration. There is little expectation politicians will read the latter in detail. The CINGO recommendations are intended to be easily read and digested by Ministers. The shorter document is also more specific on civil society participation and recognition priorities. It is necessarily concise.

The original has been circulated ahead of the General Assembly. Amendments have been included in the report through late drafting. GE highlights main areas of change in the last draft circulated to delegates.

Vice-President Genevieve Laloy Chairs the discussion

The delegate from Greenpeace: Supports changes in Point 6 on environment and alignment with Hague declaration. Notes that the original High Level Experts report for the Summit made no mention of environmental crisis. Needs to come to the fore through Reykjavik Summit and we need to be consistent in this message.

The representative of International League against Racism and Antisemitism (LICRA): The language still includes in French “Droits de l’Homme” rather than “Droits Humains” i.e. not gender inclusive in both languages. Notes some things missing in report e.g. action on specific rights abuses in Turkey and mention of all territories where there is armed conflict. Also raised issue of whether “hate crimes” should be “hate speech and crimes”. Made some comments on some other areas of wording. Also raised issues about the paragraphs on judicial actions against war crimes and whether these could be more specific to feasible judicial actions.

The representative of University Women of Europe (UWE): The statement does not include gender inclusive language including use of “Droits de l’Homme” in French and that this should be changed to “Droits Humains”. This would be a symbolic change.

The President makes a clarification: “Droits Humains” is now used throughout the French version of the document and added in parenthesis where “Droits de l’Homme” is in the name of the statutes or conventions. Change of name of the latter may require re-adoption of the laws/conventions by states which could be problematic but that is a legal matter and CINGO can still propose. It was noted that the direction of change in international Francophone institutions is to “Droits Humains”. The importance of this change was acknowledged in the room and none dissented from the proposals of the President.

The representative of International Movement of Apostolate in Middle and Upper Classes (MIAMSI): concerned that delegates are being asked to vote on an incomplete draft.

The representative of University Women of Europe (UWE) also reflected on ensuring a democratic process of drafting.

Comment from the floor: the text could include reference to importance of impacts of rights – particularly environmental rights – on young people. This has been included the statement on “intergenerational” impacts although this does not quite capture participation of youth in democratic space.

The President reminds the delegates that there is a tight deadline for this text to be ready. The draft was circulated for comment before and during the General Assembly. Amendments have been made and the final proposed text circulated today. The Secretary General will receive the document and the President has been invited to present the recommendation later this week within the CoE. It is important the vote happens this morning so the most people can vote as some will leave the Assembly at lunchtime.

Genevieve Laloy says that all the comments made today can be taken into consideration in finalisation.

Vote: Passed, 3 abstentions, none against.

Mary-Ann Hennessey reminds the conference that next year the participatory status of all INGOs will be reviewed and all information and contact details in the [CINGO database](#) must be up to date

14:00-16:30 Fourth Session of the General Assembly open to CINGO members only

5. Presentation of Youth Project on youth participation in consolidating civil society by Iordanis Chorooglou (EYBA) & Giorgi Agirbaia & Ece Ciftci

- [Presentation Power Point.](#)
- Promote actions for and by young people to best represent civil society.
- Call on CINGO committees to share interesting practices and inspiring projects that could help to integrate young people more fully.
- Thanks to the CINGO and the CoE for providing the opportunity and financial support for young people.
- *Comments, questions and suggestions from the floor:*
 - o Request from the Migrants' Rights Committee: that someone from the youth delegation join the committee to give young people a voice.
 - o G.E. encouraged all the committees to do the same.
 - o Put a link on the website to make the work of this "Youth" team visible.

6. Presentation of the Expert Council on NGO law by Jeremy McBride

- Three opinions were given

- 1. The 1st concerns Belarus
- 2. Managing of risk Migrants at sea
- 3. Croatia
- A 4th opinion had been given concerning Georgia but the law has changed and the opinion has therefore been withdrawn.
- Question in Greece concerning registration.
- Cross borders activities: failure of a number of countries to apply the article.
- Necessity to clarify the concept of Beneficiary ownership
- Work with CINGO in Belarus and Russia.
- Question of *Undesirable organizations*
- Various studies currently being carried out (cfr Council of experts on NGO law - Conference of INGOs). (see [Expert Council on NGO Law - Conference of INGOs \(coe.int\)](http://coe.int)).
- ***Comments, questions and suggestions from the floor:***
 - G.E. underlined the excellent and important work of the Council of Experts.
 - We need instruments to force states to implement CoE decisions.
 - The Council of Experts has a series of candidates to join it, which shows the interest and expertise available to us.

7. Presentation of two examples of representation of CINGO in CoE bodies

The following testimonies provide examples of the CINGO's involvement in various CoE bodies.

At the last General Assembly, we mentioned in particular the collaboration between the Committee on Migrants' Rights and the Steering Committee on Migration, as well as other collaborations and representations within the CoE's steering committees.

Here are two more examples of CINGO cooperation, synergies and representation:

7.1 HistoLab / Observatory for History Teaching in Europe

Beata Zwierzynska, member of the Standing Committee and Kristina Smolijaninovaite, CINGO representative to the HistoLab

- Cfr Power point de Beata (pending)
- Kristina S. is unfortunately unable to join the team, but Beata has provided some information about her.
- Beata put in the chat 2 references to retrieve. The Confronting Memories programme ; Brochure Observatoire de l'enseignement de l'histoire en Europe ; Website : Observatoire de l'enseignement de l'histoire en Europe (coe.int)
- Presentation of the PP + links on the Chat & information on the CoE website
- ***Comments, questions and suggestions from the floor:***
 - G.E. mentioned the importance of history teaching. This observatory is financed by the countries that are interested.
 - This committee hopes that the CINGO will be able to provide a critical and attentive voice.
 - The representative of Federation for Education in Europe (FEDE) This project dates back 4 years. This project was initially called the HOPE project. The FEDE is one of the 5 INGO partners in this project (EuroClio, FEDE, etc.). Reviewed the history of the development of this project. The project is largely funded by the EU and the CoE. Regrets that the involvement of these INGOs is not highlighted. FEDE becomes an advisory member. There is no effective

collaboration between CINGO and OHTE. Wished to add that she was a member of the Bureau.

- Geneviève Laloy stressed the importance of a constructive and positive approach and of seeing how to defend the voice of civil society on the CDEDU Steering Committee. A number of INGOs were represented on the Committee and contributed high-quality expertise, which was not called into question. However, it would be more effective and more representative if we, as CINGO, had a common, concerted, federated voice.

7.2. Davos Alliance

Luc-Emile Bouche-Florin, CINGO representative to the Davos Alliance

- [Présentation PP](#)
- Baukultur: term used in all languages to avoid translation problems.
- Great importance of citizen participation and information.
- L-E. Bouche-Florin, Representative on the adhoc steering committee.
- Good work carried out by the various bodies.
- *Comments, questions and suggestions from the floor:*
 - G.E. Participation in this type of convention is essential.
 - Conventions are often triangular: governments, civil society and the business world. How can we ensure, via the social charter and human rights, that access is available to all?
 - The members of the Alliance the members of the CoE, the members of the Heritage and Spatial Planning Steering Committee.
 - The Alliance is open. This was a first meeting initiated by the states and the ministers of culture. UNESCO was present.
 - Satisfaction (optimism) to see that we are present in this Alliance.
 - The role of young people in this Alliance is desirable.
 - Promote long-term, sustainable instruments.
 - Congratulations on the Davos project.
 - It was recommended that the CP give evidence // CDEDU. Ask older, experienced INGOs to share their experience with the INGOs & people currently involved in the steering committee.
 - GRECO example: the FEDE lacks examples of corruption in education. Successful cooperation between a civil society body.

8. Closing remarks by the President / Date of the next Session

We would like to thank the secretariat for all their hard work.

Next session: **9 to 11 October 2023**