



CONFERENCE OF INGOs CONF/AG(2025)Decisions1

MEETING OF THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Strasbourg, 8-9 April 2025
Hybrid meeting

Summary Notes and Decisions Adopted

Please note that this is an executive summary of the General Assembly; it does not provide an exhaustive description of all matters raised.

Acronyms

CoE – Council of Europe

CINGO – Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations

CSOs – civil society organisations

NGO – non-governmental organisation

FRA – Fundamental Rights Agency

ECHR – European Convention on Human Rights

ECtHR – European Court of Human Rights

OING-Service - International Non-Governmental Organisations Service (the association under French law responsible for the co-financing and co-management of CINGO's activities)

Tuesday 8 April 2025

First session of the General Assembly

1. The meeting was opened by Gerhard Ermischer, President of the Conference. The rapporteurs of the meeting were **appointed**: Ruth Allen and Ciaran King and Genevieve Laloy. The [draft Agenda](#) was **adopted**.
2. The President made a short oral report of activity. He thanked members for their engagement. CINGO has provided a lot of consolidated feedback on draft Council of Europe (CoE) recommendations, often in very short time frames set by the CoE. Key concerns of today's discussion will be on the war of aggression in Ukraine, the restriction of civic space in many countries and the direct impact this has on limiting the work and freedoms of Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).
3. The Conference then received a talk from the Ambassador of Ukraine, who showed support for CINGO's draft Recommendation to the Council of Europe and its Member States on the ongoing war of aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine. He indicated that the preparation for the Special Tribunal will likely be finalised in May 2025.

but the location is still to be agreed. The Register of Damage has been finalised and the next stage is to establish the Compensation Commission, which will be finalised this year.

4. The situation in Ukraine was presented in a moving testimony from: Maksym Butkevych – human rights defender, co-founder of the NGO “ZMINA”, journalist, and Ukrainian Armed Forces serviceman. He was illegally captured by the Russian Federation while serving in the Ukrainian Armed Forces and was recently released from captivity.

This was followed by a testimony about the situation of women in Russian prisons from Lyudmyla Husieinova – Head of the NGO “Numo, Sisters”, human rights defender, and former civilian detainee illegally held by the Russian Federation.

5. The President of CINGO reminded members of the vital importance of civil society working together to protect each other across Europe.
6. The discussion of a draft Recommendation to the Council of Europe on the ongoing war of aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine **was deferred to Wednesday**. The President asked members to send comments by email before Wednesday morning.
7. Civic space and cooperation with EU: The President noted that while the European Court of Human Rights (ECtHR) at the CoE is the main mechanism for recognising violations of human rights in Europe, the mechanisms for implementation and enforcement are weaker than those available at the European Union. Bringing these bodies closer together could be very beneficial.
8. Waltraud Heller, Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) gave a presentation on the practical impact on CSOs and human rights activists of the current, general political and economic situation. Ms. Heller discussed strategies to support CSOs (the 5 Rs): Recognition and awareness; Regulation; Resources; Representation; and Resilience and protection. CINGO discussed the need for increased cooperation between CINGO and CSOs in Brussels and the European Union.
9. Mr Christian Moos, European Economical and Social Committee (Civil Society Organisations Group) addressed the Conference. He spoke of emerging policies and laws posing a risk of CSOs being isolated. Mr Moos discussed the need for closer cooperation and collaboration between CSOs in the CoE and EU and the need to be adaptable to changing circumstances, particularly in light of the rise of the far right.
10. The President announced that in response to the current situation for CSOs, CINGO Standing Committee has decided to organise a large online meeting in June 2025 to connect with a wider network of INGOs (including organisations without participatory status with the CoE) and FRA as well as major figures of the CoE to participate and discuss these issues more widely. He also noted there are two ongoing important consultations by the European Commission: i) [Public Consultation on the European Democracy Shield](#) ; ii) [the Multi annual financial framework](#) (7-year EU budget). CSOs are invited to contribute.
11. Strategy of the Conference of INGOs on civic space and discussion of a draft Recommendation to the Council of Europe on the shrinking Civic Space and actual political developments: due to limited time, a decision on this **was deferred to Wednesday** and the members were asked to send comments in writing before Wednesday morning.
12. The Conference received a report from Jeremy McBride, President of the [Expert Council on NGO Law](#) of the Conference of INGOs. He noted the significant concerns about increasingly limited space for CSOs: there are a number of violations of Article 11 ECHR before the ECtHR and in a range of contexts, indicating that many States are not respecting these fundamental rights. He reported that the Expert Council had refreshed its website. He pointed out that the CoE has adopted a new Convention for the protection of lawyers

which will be open for signature in May 2025 with its own monitoring mechanism. Also, the work on a new Committee of Ministers' Recommendation on the Legal Status of NGOs in Europe (updating [Recommendation \(2007\)14](#)) should be finalised by the end of 2025 with a consultation process in July and August 2025.

13. The Conference heard a presentation by Agnes Von Maravic, Head of Children's Rights Division, Council of Europe, on the CoE Children's Rights Strategy to 2027. She reviewed the priorities for the next phase of work including AI and the development of a child impact assessment tool; sexuality education and gender equality; LGBTQI+ issues; child friendly justice; children's rights to participation in decisions concerning health and the situation for children of Ukraine. On child friendly justice, there are two draft recommendations awaiting adoption by the Committee of Ministers – on best interests in parental separation and on best interests in care proceedings, respectively - with which CINGO was strongly involved.
14. A presentation and exchange of views was held with Michael O'Flaherty, Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe. His key priorities remain peace in Ukraine including the inclusion of Ukrainian women; responses to migration and migrant rights; working with most forgotten and marginalised people, particularly Roma communities. The first thematic report on empowering Roma women is due this year. He raised concerns around spread of oppressive 'foreign funding' laws and excessive policing of protests. Particular concern about the targeting of LGBTQI+ activists. An exchange of views with members ensued.
15. Ambassador Francesca Camilleri Vettiger, Permanent Representative of Malta to the CoE, presented the priorities of their upcoming presidency. Key issues, in addition to the very challenging political environment, include a focus on children's rights including the 15th anniversary of the Lanzarote convention; violence against women and other forms of discrimination and LGBTQI+ rights; youth empowerment and the CoE action plan on Ukraine. An exchange of views with members ensued.
16. The CINGO Committee on Migration Issues presented their [communication on a fact-finding mission to Poland](#) in the period 10-14 February 2025. A [Communiqué on Internal security and border management in the context of migration: Respect for human rights is essential](#) was subsequently discussed and **endorsed** by the Conference by consensus.
17. The President and other members of the Standing Committee presented the [report on CINGO's official country visit to North Macedonia](#), 4-6 November 2024, with the participation of Uranija Pirovska, Executive Director of the North Macedonian Chapter of the Helsinki Committee for Human Rights explaining the situation of CSOs in the country. Mr Nazim Rechi, Deputy to the Permanent Representative of North Macedonia to the Council of Europe, commented the report and informed participants about a series of changes which occurred after the visit. After an exchange of views between members, the Report was **endorsed** by the Conference.
18. A presentation was made by members of civil society organisations in Georgia concerning the rapidly worsening situation for freedom of association and speech, foreign funding, democracy and the rule of law in the country. An exchange of views with members ensued in which CINGO expressed its deep concern and solidarity with colleagues and civil society about the deepening problems including smear campaigns, police brutality and arbitrary detention. CINGO will continue to support and show solidarity with civil society in Georgia.

Wednesday 9 April 2025

Third Session of the General Assembly (open to CINGO members only)

19. The draft Recommendation to the Council of Europe on the ongoing war of aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and the draft Recommendation to the Council of Europe on the shrinking Civic Space and actual political developments were both brought back for discussion and decision.
20. [Recommendation to the Council of Europe on the ongoing war of aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine](#): The Conference discussed the draft. Amendments were made to the text which was subsequently **adopted** by consensus. The President of CINGO will now inform the Permanent Representation of Ukraine to the Council of Europe (PR) and it will be sent to all PRs to the CoE, other CoE bodies, and observer Member States.
21. [Recommendation to the Council of Europe on the shrinking Civic Space and actual political developments](#): The Conference discussed the draft. Amendments were made to the text and the recommendation was subsequently **adopted** by consensus. The President of CINGO will now inform all Permanent Representations to the CoE, other CoE bodies, and observer Member States.
22. A detailed proposal for the creation of a [new Committee for the International Volunteer Year 2026](#) was presented. This committee will take advantage of 2026 being the year of volunteering and also marking the 50th anniversary of the establishment of CINGO. The Conference voted unanimously (in-person and online) in favour of establishing the committee. Rita Marques (Centre for European Volunteering - CEV), and Carmen Moreno (Volonteuropa) were elected unanimously as co-chairs of the committee.
23. The Task Force on Civic Space Monitoring gave an account of its work and discussions among INGO delegates and with external partners. In the light of this, it made the following proposals :
 - a. to organise within the taskforce and in the context of the future General Assemblies, a regular informal exchange open to a broader range of CSOs, institutions and partner organisations to exchange on specific issues related to civic space;
 - b. to set up an *ad hoc* working group, with the participation of the task force, to work on ways for CINGO to contribute to the setting-up of the alert mechanism recommended in the Recommendation adopted on civic space; a first intermediary report could be presented at the October session of CINGO.These two proposals were **approved** by consensus.
24. The CINGO Youth Strategy coordinator, Ece Ciftci presented the activities and discussed future initiatives aimed at increasing youth involvement in CINGO's mission. The assembly highlighted successful youth projects, share insights from previous engagements, and outline the upcoming priorities for enhancing youth participation in civil society. During the course of the General Assembly, a roundtable was held on 7th April on "Youth Strategy and Needs Reflection Session & Empowering Youth Organisations Voices with Cooperation" and a session on 8th April on "Literacy for Inclusion: Remembering the Past, Shaping the Future". This session emphasised the importance of historical literacy in understanding discrimination, focusing on the Holocaust's impact on marginalised communities including Roma and LGBTQI+ people. A short report on the youth strategy actions and future priorities is available [here](#).
25. The Committee for Interreligious & Interconvictional Dialogue [reported](#) on the launch of its new Internet [Platform](#), with the support of OING Service: this will contribute to the visibility of the Committee's work and outreach to a wider audience of delegates interested in, and concerned by the subject. This is part of the strategy to renew the PACE initiative on a permanent platform for interreligious dialogue. The next committee webinar will be held on Tuesday 15 April at 6pm on the topic of: Jeunes artisans de la Paix / Youth for peace initiatives.

26. The Committee on the European Social Charter and its Monitoring Mechanisms introduced a proposal for a draft statement on the announced EU anti-poverty strategy. Following an exchange of views, the [final statement](#) was endorsed and **approved** by consensus.
27. A statement calling for the immediate release of Ekrem İmamoğlu, Mayor of Istanbul, and return to respect for human rights and rule of law in Türkiye, was proposed by the European Young Bar Association and LICRA. The two texts were merged and the [common statement](#), with some small changes, was endorsed and **approved** by consensus,.
28. A [draft recommendation](#) on combatting gender bias and promoting women's rights in artificial intelligence and sciences was proposed to the conference. After debate amongst members, **the President indicated that further comments would be welcomed by 24 April (note)¹ for further improvement and the finalised statement, approved by this written procedure, will then be sent to the relevant bodies of the CoE.**

Committee Reports

29. The committee on [NGOs as advocates for gender equality and women's rights](#) made a [report](#). The committee members presented their current priorities, referring to the persistence of sexism in everyday exchanges, the importance of feminism today and the ongoing limits to women's professional opportunities. The committee asked for all committees to ensure they cover gender, women's rights and related issues of discrimination and to approach the committee as needed. The Committee is organising two webinars: one on "engaging men and boys in gender equality: a new perspective" taking place on 26th May 2025, and on women in the workplace – evaluating discriminatory practices and identifying solutions ([link for registration](#)).
30. The [Sport and Human Rights Committee - Access to sport for all is a fundamental right](#) made a [presentation](#). Their work promotes ethics and inclusive practices in sport including tackling gender and other discrimination. Their projects include promoting good practices; drafting a charter of young European sports persons and draft a recommendation on inclusive and ethical sport. Study visit undertaken to Netherlands to explore their success in sports prowess. The Sport and Human Rights Committee is collaborating on the Consultative Committee of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport. The Committee would like to collaborate with the Parliamentary Assembly's Committee on Culture, Science, Education and Media following its participation in the Conference held in Athens on 4-5 November 2024 on "Promoting safety, integrity, equality and inclusion in sport", at which a representative of the CINGO Sport and Human Rights Committee was able to speak on the drafting of the Charter for Young European Sportsmen and Sportswomen.
31. The future work of the [Civil Society Committee on the Rights of the Child in Europe - Protecting and promoting the well-being of children of all ages](#) (see six monthly [report online](#)) was presented including the work within the main bodies of CoE on diverse topics, the importance of transversality, the voice of civil society within the steering committees and expert groups. The joint work with the Youth Strategy will be important in the next period and in the October General Assembly.

¹ NOTE : comments should be sent to Anne Negre (anne.negre[M*]orange.fr), with copy to:

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- Gerhard Ermischer (gerhard.ermischer[M*]coe.int)
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* Replace [M*] by "@"

32. The [Committee on Migration Issues](#) - Accommodation of migrants, a major issue for the respect of human rights presented a [report](#) on its work. The committee has been working on accommodation for migrants in situations of vulnerability and the aim is to draft a recommendation and have undertaken a field investigation which is being written up. It also held several webinars and is working on the operation of the EU Pact and its compliance with CoE values and rights framework. [Plans for activities for 2025-2026](#) were presented to the General Assembly.
33. The [Inclusive Territories, Environment, and Health Committee](#) presented [its activities](#) from the past year and made three proposals for short term action: i) **a call to NGOs to celebrate the upcoming Heat Action Day on 2 June 2025**, organised by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, by tailoring local events through collaborative actions with local authorities based on exemplary practices presented by the competent director of the Red Cross and the City of Rotterdam; ii) **a proposal for a resolution and a recommendation** from the Conference of INGOs on a draft new Council of Europe Convention on the Protection of the Environment through Criminal Law, and a draft additional protocol to the Oviedo Convention on the Protection of Human Rights and Dignity of Persons with regard to Involuntary Placement and Treatment in Mental Health Care Services, both submitted to the Parliamentary Assembly; and iii) **a recommendation regarding COP 30**, to be held in Brazil next November 2025 under the sign of local and global "mutirão" (community work in Tupi-Guarani, an indigenous language of the Amazon community).
34. The [Committee on Education for Democracy](#) presented [their report](#).
35. As regards the [Committee on Human rights, Democracy and artificial intelligence: civil society in action](#), information will be posted online.
36. In parallel to the General Assembly, OING-Service held elections for the designation of 5 members of the board. Henk Baars (EN-RE) was elected with 48 votes and appointed Vice-President. Wielie Elhorst (FEGCLGBT) was elected to the board with 46 votes. Joyce Herrent (EYBA) was elected with 50 votes and appointed Secretary. Thea Mohr (EBU) was elected with 45 votes and appointed treasurer. Harry Rogge (EUROGEO) was elected with 47 votes and appointed as President.
37. The next CINGO General Assembly is scheduled to take place on 13th-15th October 2025.
38. At the end of the discussions and some final observations, the President of CINGO thanked all the participants and formally closed the meeting.