

Resolution CONF/PLE(2019)RES1 adopted by the Conference of INGOs on Friday 12 April 2019

The future of the Council of Europe: Civil Society's commitment

Context:

70 years after the founding of the Council of Europe, its values as well as its institutions are under threat and face severe challenges. This has been clearly stated by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe in his most recent report entitled "Ready for future challenges – Reinforcing the Council of Europe". The future of the Council of Europe as a pan-European standard-setting, monitoring and co-operating intergovernmental Organisation is of great concern to all the institutional structures of the Council of Europe.

The disconnection between the values that define us and the daily practices we see around us contributes greatly to public distrust in democratic institutions and to the erosion of the liberal and constitutional democracy, which we are witnessing today. The decline in the trust placed by individuals in the political system of representative democracy shows above all that the social contract between those who are governed and those in power must be protected, strengthened, or even, in some cases, renegotiated. This contract can only be implemented by accessible and transparent democratic institutions that listen and respond to the needs and aspirations expressed by society, with due regard for the rule of law and international legal and human rights standards. To strengthen or regain the public trust, public authorities need to demonstrate clearly that civil society's voice and contributions matter and produce change. It is paramount that society can confirm this, through direct citizen participation and by NGO participation, in all stages of the decision-making process, including the Council of Europe itself.

Organized civil society has helped to achieve the Council of Europe's aims at both national and international level for the past 40 years. According to its Statute, "the aim of the Council of Europe is to achieve a greater unity between its members for the purpose of safeguarding and realising the ideals and principles which are their common heritage and facilitating their economic and social progress".

The discussion about the future of the Council of Europe is on-going, and the Conference of INGOs shares the Secretary General's view that we need a stronger Council of Europe with greater impact of its conventions and treaties.

The Conference of INGOs wishes to refer to the following:

- SG Report 2019, "Ready for future challenges – Reinforcing the Council of Europe";
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2007)14 of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers to Member States on the legal status of non-governmental organisations in Europe;

- Guidelines CM(2017)83 on Civil Participation in Political Decision-Making adopted by the Committee of Ministers in 2017;
- Recommendation CM/Rec(2018)11 of the Committee of Ministers to the member States on the need to strengthen the protection and promotion of civil society space in Europe, adopted in November 2018;
- 12 Principles of Good Governance established by Centre of Expertise for Good Governance of the Council of Europe;
- Conference of INGOs Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in Decision Making;

Resolution:

The Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe:

1. Supports the Secretary General's position that the member States must guarantee an adequate and sustainable financial basis for the Council of Europe to undertake its tasks and live up to its responsibilities;
2. Recalls that Civil Society already contributes in a very significant way to various monitoring mechanisms, its input should be further explored to guarantee a greater efficiency and effectiveness of these mechanisms;
3. Stresses that Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law are interdependent, and one cannot exist without the other. The Conference of INGOs fears that undermining one of these pillars will have a negative impact on all of them;
4. Emphasises the continued need to safeguard and achieve genuine democracy and strengthen public trust in democratic institutions. Inclusive societies require well established tools for meaningful participation in the democratic decision-making process, which can empower citizens and NGOs and help young people to be confident in a common European future;
5. Considers pro-active education for democratic culture and human rights as essential to sustaining adherence to democratic values, principles and practices;
6. Underlines that reinforced interaction with civil society through a space for substantial, formal, honest and open debates on the strategic orientations of the Organization represents a real opportunity and strength for the Council of Europe;
7. Commits itself to create an open environment for constructive dialogue within organised civil society as well as between civil society and public authorities to help establishing a new sense of cohesion in democratic society and to bring this Resolution to the attention of its members.