

CONF/PLE(2019)SYN1

**MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF INGOS
DRAFT SYNOPSIS
Wednesday, 10 April 2019**

1. Opening of the meeting by Anna Rurka, President of the Conference of INGOS

In her opening words the president, Anna Rurka, stressed the serious political and economic crises that the Council of Europe was facing. She gave an outline of the important events of the Session such as the exchange of views between the INGOS and the candidates for the post of Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

2. Designation of the rapporteur of the meeting: Richard Pirolt

3. Agenda

The agenda was adopted after correcting errors in the dates and times of the plenary meetings.

4. Synopsis of the meeting of 29 June 2018

The synopsis was unanimously adopted.

5. Presentation of the [2018 Annual Activity Report of the Conference of INGOS](#)

Anna Rurka congratulated all the INGO members at all levels (Standing Committee, Thematic Committees and Working Groups) for their substantial contributions. For the second time during the current mandate an effort was being made to follow and implement the Action Plan. 2018 had been a challenging year and the President underlined the diversity of activities and topics all of which were important for the Conference of INGOS and the Council of Europe as a whole. She also highlighted the contribution to the reform of the implementation System of the European Convention on Human Rights and in particular to the work carried out in the Steering Committee, which was very important for civil society. Freedom of Association was a basic priority. NGOs in several member States were facing restrictive laws and worrying developments.

The activity report 2018 was unanimously adopted.

6. Presentation of the new [Code of Conduct of the Conference of INGOS](#)

It had taken over a year of work to prepare the draft Code. The current draft was a new version of the Code, revised after the discussion in the plenary meeting in June 2018. The need to have a Code of Conduct emerged after the problems of corruption within the Parliamentary Assembly over two years ago. Following that GRECO had been asked to prepare recommendations for the Conference of INGO regarding its own mechanism of regulation of the risk of corruption.

After consultation of the INGO Conference plenary in June 2018 a questionnaire had been sent out and more than 100 suggestions for changes/amendments came back.

Maybe not all suggestions had been taken into account literally, but the spirit was at least taken into account with a more legal wording. Of course, improvements could always be made but it was of the utmost importance for the Conference of INGOs to adopt it, as the Conference needed to have stability and the relevant legal tools.

The document that was presented to the Conference of INGOs for adoption had been approved by the Standing Committee on 21 January 2019.

After some debate the Code of Conduct was adopted.

Vote: 0 against, 2 abstentions, adopted by the majority.

Special thanks were expressed to the members of the drafting group for their hard work over 2 years.

7. [Recommendation of the Conference of INGOs on the Right to decent housing for all](#), presented by the Human Rights Committee

Reasoning: On 17 October 2017, the Conference of INGOs had organised a seminar on decent housing. One of the outcomes was this draft Recommendation.

Miguel Cabral presented the Recommendation that had been approved by the Human Rights Committee. The recommendation was adopted with two minor corrections.

Vote: Adopted: 0 against, 2 abstentions, the corrections would be included.

8. [Recommendation of the Conference of INGOs on Poverty and precarity among students in Europe](#), presented by the Education and Culture Committee

Financial aid and decent housing were essential to students. Student poverty was often overlooked as it was not reported on in the media. The ESAN network had organised a workshop on the topic and data showed that the living conditions of many students were unacceptable. EUROSTAT statistics indicated that 84 million people (17% of the EU population) were living under the poverty line. The number of poor students would almost automatically increase, 50% of students were financed by their families. According to research carried out by the University of Hannover, 35% of students need to seek paid employment in addition to their studies.

Comments: 3 minor remarks and changes proposed. The Recommendation was adopted with the minor corrections.

Vote: Adopted: 0 against, 3 abstentions, the corrections would be included.

9. Presentation of the Youth Delegates of the Conference of INGOs, selected for the year 2019

Since the reform of the Conference of INGOs in 2008, the participation of youth in the work of the Conference has been considered a necessity and a high priority. The Bureau has been striving since 2015 to make the Conference of INGOs an intergenerational body. In order to do so the Association INGO-Service agreed to finance the participation of young people (youth candidates) in the Conference of INGO activities for 2019.

The young persons were selected from INGO members in partnership with the Council of Europe Youth Department and the Advisory Council on Youth.

Out of 100 applications, 30 young people were eligible. The applications were ranked on a scale of 0-10 and were evaluated by Annelise Oeschger, Anne Kraus, Rares Craiut and 3 members from Advisory Council on Youth. 6 persons were selected to be youth delegates and would participate in the two sessions in 2019. The selection process was now in place for next year.

10. Discussion on the role and position of NGOs in the Council of Europe, follow-up to the Warsaw Conference

Anna Rurka recalled that in 2014 there had been a discussion in the Committee of Ministers on the role and contribution of INGOs to the Council of Europe. The Committee of Ministers, through its Rapporteur Group on Democracy (GR-DEM) has followed closely the activities of the Conference of INGOs.

In 2015, the Chair of the GR-DEM recommended to the secretariat to consult the INGOs about practical measures to strengthen interaction with the Committee of Ministers. Some changes were made as a result, such as the invitation to the President of the Conference to inform the GR-DEM of the outcome of the sessions of the Conference, the annual exchange of views between the President and the Ministers' Deputies and the participation of the Permanent Representations in the plenary meeting of the Conference of INGOs to discuss the situation of NGOs in member States. On the occasion of the 70th Anniversary of the Council of Europe, Poland had proposed to organise a seminar in Warsaw that focused on the role and place of the NGOs in the Council of Europe. This initiative was supported by Finland, at that time Chair of the Committee of Ministers, the Secretary General and the Conference of INGOs itself.

There was a warm welcome in Warsaw on behalf of Government, the Polish Minister for Foreign Affairs and the Dean of the University of Warsaw. Representatives of the EU Fundamental Rights Agency and OSCE / ODHIR were invited as speakers in order to compare existing participatory mechanisms at other European and intergovernmental levels.

Annelise Oeschger underlined the engagement of Anna Rurka, she saw a window of opportunity in the Conference. She also thanked the Secretariat and Mary-Ann Hennessey for their remarkable support to the Conference of INGOs.

In connection to the discussion on the participation of NGOs in Council of Europe, the representative of the European Association of Institutions of Non-Formal Education of Children and Youth (EAICY) announced that EAICY was giving up its participatory status with the Council of Europe following a decision taken during its 2018 General Assembly. This decision was motivated by a change in its statute and the will to be closer to Brussels and to European Institutions that could provide financing for its activities.

11. Information on the work led by the Drafting group in charge of proposals regarding the Rules of Procedure or other statutory provisions of the Conference of INGOs

Christoph Spreng reported on a year of work on revising the Rules of Procedure. He highlighted two main aspects of the revision:

- good ethical governance, fitness for purpose
- operational efficiency

A questionnaire with four basic questions had been sent out to the INGOs. The information had been summarized and the full version had been presented to the Standing Committee in January 2019. The mid-term report was available online since 6 February. Christoph Spreng pointed out that the feedback has demonstrated the need for reorganization and in-depth reflection. The Rules of Procedure would be attached to the Code of Conduct

Anna Rurka thanked the drafting group, it was important to give the Conference of INGOs a good management basis and show to the new SG that the Conference could be more efficient.

12. Presentation of the project of the Conference of INGOs and the Directorate General of Democracy on the strengthening of the freedom of association in the member States of the Council of Europe

Item not taken

13. Information on the Recommendation CM/Rec (2019)1 of the Committee of Ministers to member States on preventing and combating sexism – Caterina Bolognese, Head of the Gender Equality Division, Anne Negre

Anne Nègre thanked Caterina Bolognese as the new Recommendation was important for many people, Artificial Intelligence was transforming the decision-making processes, it had become part of our daily life, changing our rights. Research had shown that currently AI is not gender neutral, so today gender equality is not done in algorithms. Also, only about 15% of programmers are female and this makes for a salary difference between women and men. AI reproduces the exclusion of vulnerable people, not only women. As an example, she mentioned stereotypes in categorizing photos on Google.

The #Metoo movement was fighting sexual harassment but there was still a lot of sexism considered in parliament, the fight against domestic violence goes on and there are experts to explain gender ideology. The Council of Europe understood the need for a Recommendation to fight sexist stereotypes and the text was unanimously adopted on 27 March 2019.

Caterina Bolognese looked back to 2016 when the Council of Europe held a Conference in Bern on combating sexist hate speech. Then, in 2017, the #Metoo movement exploded and became a top priority at the Council of Europe. The Recommendation was one thing, but a circle of peer pressure needed to be built up and therefore the civil world was needed.

The Recommendation contained actions for governments to tackle sexism in language, social media, Artificial Intelligence, hate speech and for both public and private sector.

14. Information by INGO Service –Annelise Oeschger, Heleen Jansen

After some information given by the President and Treasurer of the INGO Service, Anna Rurka thanked INGO-Service for being present all week and for organizing the dinner on Thursday.

15. Date of the next meeting – Friday 12 April 2019