



CONFERENCE OF INGOs CONF/PLE(2020)SYN1

MEETING OF THE CONFERENCE OF INGOs Thursday 15 October 2020 9.30-13.00 Online meeting Meeting report

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

Anna Rurka thanked the participants, who numbered 200 over 2 days, for their presence and commitment during these difficult times of the pandemic and lockdown.

There was a minute's silence in memory of Jean Philippe Durrenberger and Edith Wenger who had been active and respected members of the Conference of INGOs.

Jean Philippe Durrenberger had worked to connect peoples and cultures. He was the official representative of European association EAICY within the Conference of INGOs until 2018.

Edith Wenger gave her unfailing support to the great causes of ecology in Alsace, South America and other parts of the world. She was the official representative of European Environment Office within the Conference of INGOs.

2. Nomination of the Rapporteur of the meeting – Richard Pirolt
3. Draft agenda – for adoption – adopted unanimously

Anna Rurka said that there was no voting tool available during this session, but votes or abstentions could be given through the chat function of Kudo.

4. Exchange of views with Marija Pejčinović Burić, Secretary General of the Council of Europe (45') followed by a question and answer session.

The Secretary General underlined the vital role of civil society and the long cooperation between the Council of Europe and civil society in all aspects of its work. Civil space was shrinking in Europe before the pandemic and excessive restrictions have affected, in particular, human rights defenders, democracy activists, and those involved in the rescue and support of migrants and refugees. The Council of Europe is committed to preserving space for civil society and the Committee of Ministers had recently endorsed a series of proposals to

implement the Helsinki decisions aimed at strengthening the role and meaningful participation of civil society organisations within the Council of Europe.

The Secretary General expressed her appreciation of the work of the Conference President Anna Rurka, in particular her work on reforming the Conference, her opening up the Conference to national NGOs through the country visits and follow-up reports and the enhanced cooperation with other Council of Europe bodies.

She closed her intervention by saying that NGOs had an irreplaceable role at the Council of Europe.

[See full speech of the Secretary General](#)

Questions and answer session -

The Council of Europe's response to the Covid-19 pandemic - The Council of Europe had responded rapidly to the pandemic, highlighting the need for restrictions whilst safeguarding individuals' rights within the framework of Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law.

To help Governments who were dealing with the Covid-19 crisis preserve fundamental rights, the Secretary General had issued a toolkit for governments outlining principles to respect. Other Council of Europe bodies such as the Venice Commission, GREVIO and GRETA had responded similarly, the webpage of the Council had been adapted, 14 external field offices adapted their activities and intergovernmental cooperation was enhanced. The Secretary General added that civil society was involved in this intergovernmental work through the Conference of INGOs.

Gender equality: this was a major topic in 2020, women were being discriminated against and domestic violence against women had increased with Covid-19 crisis. The Secretary General said that 45 member States had now signed the Istanbul Convention. Those who have ratified the Convention are encouraged to implement measures, and she will encourage more states to sign and to ratify the convention and tackle the root causes of domestic violence.

Some states are stepping back: there are states who have signed the Convention but are now questioning whether or not it is the best tool. On the other hand, there are non-member states that want to sign it.

A new Recommendation on migrant and refugee women is currently being drafted. The Secretary General mentioned the importance of GREVIO's work. Good practices in member States need to be showcased.

One of her major concerns was the ongoing reform at the Council of Europe. The advancement in information technology was rapid and she stressed the importance of both online and physical meetings.

The Council of Europe's Directorate of Internal Oversight was currently carrying out an evaluation of the Conference of INGOs. Already certain improvements were noticeable under the Presidency of Anna Rurka including the adoption of the Code of Conduct. Further efforts

to help streamline the Conference and expand its possibilities were ongoing. The Secretary General was looking forward to seeing the results of the evaluation.

The Secretary General said that the Helsinki decisions also aimed at improving transparency. This included the creation of a specific web portal to guide NGOs. This portal as well as an e-handbook for INGOs and an online calendar would be important information tools for NGOs wishing to cooperate with the Council of Europe.

With regard to AI, the Secretary General highlighted the Ad Hoc Committee on Artificial Intelligence (AI) (CAHAI) and its task to look at the feasibility of a legally binding document. The Council had published the “European Ethical Charter on the use of AI in the judicial systems and their environment”.

Regarding the environment she mentioned the case law of the ECtHR: many decisions are based on existing treaties and conventions. The Landscape Convention was a good tool but, it was now necessary to go further. The 9th World Forum of Democracy asked the question “Can Democracy save the Environment” and the Council of Europe Development Bank had prioritised investments on green tech and environmental protection.

5. Pompidou Group (Co-operation Group to Combat Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking in Drugs)
 - Exchange of views with Denis Huber, Executive Secretary
 - The draft Recommendation and contribution of the Conference of INGOs to the Statutory revision process of the Pompidou Group

Denis Huber presented the Council of Europe Pompidou Group and the revision of its statutory resolution. Denis Huber proposed some minor changes to the draft recommendation. A short discussion followed, and 3 delegates proposed three reformulations encouraging the Pompidou Group to assess repressive and alternative policies, to take the needs of women into account and to examine and assess the use of drugs, in particular cannabis, for medical purposes.

Vote: The recommendation was adopted unanimously with the proposed changes

6. Reports of the meetings of 30 and 31 October 2019 ([CONF/PLE\(2019\)SYN3](#) and [CONF/PLE\(2019\)SYN4](#)) – The reports were unanimously adopted
8. 2019 Annual Activity Report of the Conference - [The Activity report](#) was unanimously adopted
9. Overview of the special digital June Session of the Conference of INGOs - Anna Rurka gave an overview of the Session.
10. Draft Declaration of the Conference of INGOs on the role of civil society in safeguarding human rights, democracy and the rule of law, introduced by Anna Rurka
The vote on the declaration was postponed.

The Session was closed at 13:03