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End of term address

Dear INGO representatives at the Council of Europe, Dear colleague,

At the start of this plenary meeting, during which the Conference of INGOs will elect its President and Bureau, please allow me to take stock of some of our achievements.

Together, we have reinforced the role and the visibility of the Conference of INGOs thanks to multiparty partnerships with intergovernmental organisations and dialogue with the member States, as well as the strengthening of the role of civil society as an essential democratic stakeholder fostering the separation of powers and political pluralism. These objectives have resulted in political actions and concrete co-operation.

Firstly, thanks to willingness on both sides, we have engaged in genuine dialogue and **exchanges of views have been held between the President of the Conference of INGOs and the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe**. In addition, **the political debate on the situation of NGOs in the member states** held at each plenary meeting of the Conference of INGOs has brought together the INGOs and the Ambassadors to address a shared concern, namely **an environment that is favourable for the functioning of NGOs**.

To ensure that our actions meet the challenges and needs of civil society in a relevant and consistent manner, I initiated **the visits to member States by the Conference of INGOs**, which are geared to ensuring the **involvement of NGOs in the public authorities' decision-making processes**. This is an opportunity for the Conference to address the concerns expressed by national NGOs and the public authorities, and to feed the open and democratic debate taking place during our session at the Council of Europe. Thanks to a strong partnership-based network, I am regularly informed of threats to the right of freedom of association, a message that I pass on to the bodies concerned within the Conference of INGOs.

The already existing collaboration with intergovernmental institutions has been enhanced by a partnership with the Fundamental Rights Agency (FRA) of the European Union. The participation of the President of the Conference, as an observer, has been enshrined in the mandate of the civil society panel which advises the FRA. This collaboration enables the Conference of INGOs to make its actions known and to better coordinate its strategic objectives.

I wish to express my appreciation for the receptiveness and support that the Secretary General of the Council of Europe has shown to us when we have met with him and during the exchanges of views he has had with the Conference of INGOs. This is also the case with the Deputy Secretary General who supports us and has accepted a number of our invitations.

The new developments have strengthened **the political recognition of the Conference of INGOs** within and outside the Council of Europe. It is worth noting that after a long period of absence, the Conference of INGOs has regained its place in the Council of Europe's activity report, to which it again contributes on a par with the other bodies of the Organisation.

All the component entities of the Conference of INGOs have played a part in achieving these results by taking action in accordance with the priorities and strategic objectives adopted by the Conference of INGOs in its 2015-2018 Action Plan. The development of our activities in the context of the Action Plan is a concrete example of the manner in which we have sought to build **synergy**. Synergy means **more cross-cutting actions and more high level specific expertise, which has been established through the thematic committees**. Since 2015 the Conference has chosen to focus specifically on equality, youth participation and migration, including North-South relations. Regarding migration, the roadmap adopted has led the Standing Committee to issue terms of reference for a task force in order to make us more responsive and to propose reasoned analyses to the bodies of the Conference of INGOs and to the Conference itself.

The Bureau has reactivated the Conference of INGOs' presence in the social media, starting from almost nothing (in 2015 it had 143 followers on its Twitter account, and today there are almost 1400). The mandate of the experts appointed to the Expert Council on NGO Law was renewed in April 2015 and, since then, the Council has produced four country studies on national legislation in Hungary, Turkey, Cyprus and Romania and three thematic studies on political activities, the development of standards and the case law of the European Court of Human Rights. The Council has also undertaken to secure the release of Intigam Aliyev, who was appointed to the Council by the Bureau.

The Conference has also boosted its representation within the steering committees, the committee of the parties and the intergovernmental committees. Co-ordination between our representatives has been initiated and should be further strengthened. The Conference is currently represented on some 25 committees and drafting groups, not to mention the fact that Jean-Marie Heydt, Honorary President and representative of the Conference of INGOS, has held two consecutive terms of office as President of the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe.

The Conference of INGOs has pursued its commitment to vulnerable groups. The International Day for the Eradication of Poverty has for three consecutive years provided an opportunity for men, women, children and young people living in adverse circumstances to speak out here at the Council of Europe and talk about their daily experiences. In this connection, I would like to take this opportunity to thank the team in charge of this event and the INGOs which have shown their determination to ensure that these persons have a say in their destinies. Through them, the commitment of the Conference to promoting social rights continues and, in view of the current tendency to downplay the importance of economic and social rights to some extent, the Conference of INGOs must overhaul its approach in order to strengthen the impact of all its actions.

The rights of persons with disabilities and the contribution made to the two strategies of the Council of Europe in this regard, the commitment to women victims of violence, child and adult migrants, the elderly, education and intercultural and interreligious dialogue as a means of combating extremism and radicalisation, active citizenship, including digital citizenship, and the democratic participation of young and older people, have given rise to important

contributions to the work of the Council of Europe in the last three years and we have all worked to ensure that building an inclusive society is a flagship theme for the Council of Europe.

The Conference has strengthened its statutory instruments and its governance. We have worked together to **welcome new INGOs under good conditions** and to **broaden the representativeness of the Conference of INGOs**. This will contribute to the impact of the participation mechanism within the Council of Europe. I am pleased to say that, under the aegis of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, the Conference of INGOs contributed to the revision of Resolution (2003)8 on participatory status. The new resolution adopted by the Committee of Ministers has strengthened the role of the Conference of INGOs as a body of the Council of Europe representing the INGOs having participatory status. The revision of the resolution has also clarified the criteria which make it possible to grant or withdraw the status.

During my mandate I have pursued three aims: a substantial political contribution, relevance and visibility. I think that we can be satisfied with our work, even if the current context means that we have to step up our efforts. In this regard, I would like to thank you all for your commitment to the Conference of INGOs.

On a more personal level, in 2015 you put your faith in me, for which I would like to thank you. Over the last three years I have sought to implement the objectives which I announced when I was elected and to deal with the challenges which have arisen in the course of my mandate. Being human, I have undoubtedly made some mistakes for which I wish to apologise. Meeting you is what has had the most effect on me in the last three years, as these meetings have been inspiring, both simple and extraordinary at the same time; they have been meetings with great humanists.

It is very clear that the political aspect, albeit very important, is not enough if respect for rights does not change people's quality of life. Finally, it does not matter in which capacity I speak, be it as President of the Conference of INGOs, a teacher-researcher or a social worker, the aim remains the same: strengthening people's and civil society organisations' ability to act.

Thank you for these three years and the experiences we have shared.

Anna Rurka