

Standing Committee

CONF/SC(2020)SYN6

Standing Committee meeting

14 October 2020

2.30 pm - 5 pm (online meeting)

Report

Present: Anna Rurka, Gerhard Ermischer, Anne Kraus, Salomon Levy, Thierry Mathieu, Annelise Oeschger, Cyril Ritchie, Katarzyna Sokolowska, Christoph Spreng, Simon Matthijssen, Claude Vivier Le Got, Karl Donert, Anne Nègre, Rares Craiut, Robert Bergougnan, Iamvi Totsi, Mary Ann Hennessey, Jane Crozier, Ellsworth Camilleri

Absent: Luminita Petrescu (proxy G. Ermischer), Miguel Cabral, Richard Pirolt (proxy Anne Kraus)

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

Claude Vivier le Got once again called for bilingualism to be maintained with interpretation at meetings and feared that English would become the only working language within the Standing Committee.

Simon Matthijssen supports that as an organisation aiming to serve 47 nationalities - if we really want to be inclusive - more account should be taken of people who have *neither* French *nor* English as their mother tongue, which is the case for the majority of our target audience. If we are lucky, these people have acquired one of the two official languages of the Conference at just the right level of discussion. Opposite them are the "lucky ones" who have one of the two official languages of the Conference as their mother tongue. Is it too much to ask the last group to make an effort to at least acquire the other language at the level of discussion? That if everyone used their second language, everyone would have to make the same effort to be understood and people would start speaking more slowly, more clearly and checking more often whether they are understood.

He pointed out that the Standing Committee had concluded at the beginning of its mandate that English would be used as a working language if simultaneous interpretation was not provided. It was therefore wholly inappropriate to propose to change this at the end of the mandate. The principle of legitimate expectations has been seriously undermined by this proposal.

Anna Rurka explained that the Standing Committee did not have the necessary funds to provide interpretation at each of the digital meetings set up because of the Covid19. She indicated that FR and ENG interpretation is not an obligation of the Council of Europe and encouraged all members to do their best to ensure understanding and progress. She proposed to translate whenever necessary.

2. Appointment of the rapporteur of the meeting: Rares Craiut was appointed rapporteur

3. Draft agenda - for adoption: Agenda adopted by unanimity.

4. Report of the meeting of 21 September 2020 - for adoption – adopted

This point was moved to later in the meeting. Anna Rurka came back to the Report after treating point 6. She asked if there were any observations or comments and if the Standing Committee was ready to adopt it. The SC report from September was adopted unanimously.

5. Secretary General Information Documents SG/Inf(2020)8 - Follow-up to the Helsinki decisions on civil society.

Anna Rurka explains that in the context of the preparation of the exchange of views with the Secretary General during coming first part of the Autumn Session, the Secretary General has accepted to answer questions. Therefore, Anna Rurka has asked the Vice- Presidents of the Conference to formulate those questions.

6. Autumn Session (first part 15-16 October 2020) – texts for adoption

Mary-Anne Hennessey explained that during the first part of the autumn session, the Conference was not equipped with a specific voting tool. As a result, only documents providing a sense of unanimity will be able to be adopted. If we find that a document is going to generate long discussions, we'll have to postpone it to December.

- **Draft declaration on the place and role of civil society in safeguarding human rights, democracy, and the rule of law.**

The work on this document started in September and was since then reviewed and completed by members of the Standing Committee. The last version was sent to the Standing Committee on 3rd October after a long debate during the meeting on 21 September, when it was decided to shorten the text. Following this sending, Miguel Salomon, Anne Kraus., Salomon, and Cyril reacted, and the indications made were incorporated. No other messages or protests were received within the deadline. The text was revised linguistically by the Secretariat and published as a text for voting. Following the presentation of this version, there were no objections or abstentions. The text was therefore adopted with the idea of considering this declaration as a proposal of the Standing Committee¹

¹ After the meeting of the Standing Committee five members of the Standing Committee (Anne Nègre, Claude Vivier Le Got, Thierry Mathieu, Karl Donert and Iamvi Totsi) expressed their opposition to this text by sending an e-mail to Mary Ann Hennessy during the plenary meeting of the Conference at which this declaration should be voted on, invoking that it is discordant to associate a Solemn Declaration "...on the place and role of civil society in the protection of Human Rights, Democracy and the Rule of Law" with the reform of the Conference's statutes, and invoking a posteriori "technical difficulties that would have made it impossible to adopt this declaration during the meeting". However, no one raised the problem of the reference to the reform, neither at the meeting of 21 September nor at the meeting of 14 October. The question was clearly raised by the Chairperson when voting on the declaration, and no one heard or read any expression of opposition or abstention. And while there may have been some disruption of connections here and there, it cannot be said that the debates were too disrupted to adopt the declaration.

- **Draft recommendation in support for the Istanbul Convention** - proposal from the Vice-President of the Conference in charge of equality.

The text proposed today by the Standing Committee was proposed by Anne Nègre and then was the subject of a collective work of INGOs to fight against the retreat of some Member States who are trying to scrap the Convention. After several proposals made, the members of the Standing Committee thanked Anne Nègre for the draft. This recommendation was unanimously adopted by the members.

- **Draft Recommendation and contribution of the Conference of INGOs to the Statutory revision process of the Pompidou Group (Cooperation Group to Combat Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking in Drugs)** – presented by the President of the Conference and the Vice President of the Human Rights Committee.

Anna Rurka explained the context in which this draft is proposed. In September the Executive Director of the Pompidou Group invited the President of the Conference to contribute to the reform of this Council of Europe organ. The online briefing was organized with INGOs concerned by the file. Following this meeting, Miguel Cabral and Anna Rurka drafted the text which is proposed today to the Standing Committee. Through this document, the Conference of INGOs will ask the Pompidou Group to grant it a participant/ observer status in order to become closer and more integrated in the work of the Group. Anna Rurka then asked if the Standing Committee wants to endorse the document. As there are no oppositions and no abstentions, the document is adopted unanimously.

- **Draft Resolution of the WG on Lifelong Learning “Access to digital technology in Europe and the responsibility of member states”** – presented by Education and Culture Committee

Claude Vivier le Got explained that the text was consulted by INGOs through Loomio platform. The document highlights the importance to bring “Access to digital technology for all” on top of the topics list during the pandemic. After some exchanges, the Standing Committee has unanimously accepted to adopt the text.

- **Draft Recommendation “COVID 19 Pandemic 19: Call for Ethical and Human Rights Respectful Management”** presented by DSCGC Committee.

The text was sent to the Secretariat and the Standing Committee with too short notice, not allowing to transmit proposals for modification to the coordinator of the working group before the meeting.

- The English translation of the text needs to be improved.
- The text seems to respond to concerns related to the pandemic context in France and which cannot be generalized.

A remark concerning technical and translation problems that would have made it impossible to discuss the Declaration properly, this never reached such a level that it became clear that for this reason the agenda item could not be dealt with properly (...and why should this only apply to this agenda item?).

Henceforth objections of this nature will have to be raised during the meeting. This problem is solved through proxies to other members given officially before any meeting.

- Some formulations ("lack of ethics", "non-respect of rights") need to be supported with evidence and facts in the "argument" section, otherwise it may be perceived as an allegation.
- The intention to make a recommendation that follows the Council of Europe Secretary General's Toolkit, published at the beginning of the pandemic, is welcomed.

Thierry Mathieu took note of the comments of the Standing Committee and proposed to ask the working group to make the requested modifications to the text so that it could be presented during the second part of the session in December.

7. Retro-planning of work on the draft Rules of Procedure of the Conference of INGOs

Anna Rurka recalled

that the majority of the Standing Committee members agreed in September 2020 by vote to apply the [opinion of the Verification and Dispute Committee](#) regarding what should not be considered as proposal of as already discussed, that the Standing Committee needs to make a decision on the receivability of the proposals.

Among 179 proposals,

- many of them are repetitions (copy-paste). We can't have people vote two or three times on the same things; we have to combine some of them. Moreover, it takes about 10 hours to read all the proposals.
- some proposals are respecting the requested institutional format and others don't. Some contain factual or institutional mistakes. In some there are several proposals in one. In this case if the person may agree with one idea, she/he is obliged to accept also another idea mentioned, because two ideas are included in one proposal.

The members of the Standing Committee approved this procedure at the September meeting and insisted on the need to present a final document that makes sense and allows for effective voting, including a "hierarchy of what should be voted on first" to avoid a logical problem if we voted on one amendment proposal before others. Members stressed the importance of good cooperation of all members of the Standing Committee during this process.

Anna Rurka pointed out that the decisions of the Standing Committee, in case of admissibility or support, are taken by majority vote. With regard to the communication on the Standing Committee's opinion, it was agreed to inform the INGOs whether a vote was unanimous or not, in the interests of transparency.

The Standing Committee's vote will be taken by written procedure on the basis of the Excel table with 3 options (yes (admissible), no (inadmissible), abstention). The first step is to see which proposals are admissible. Then, once we have decided and voted, we will be able to formulate the Standing Committee's opinion on the proposals to be put to the vote.

Anna Rurka reminded that she had charged herself to send out an excel sheet for both votes and comments. She insisted on the necessity to respect the deadline, as the Conference Members need to have these documents with them for some time before being asked to vote. Only 10 days were left to prepare all this

Concerning the translation, Mary Ann Hennessey explained that the full set of the proposals of amendment which will be voted in the Plenary needs to be gathered in one document and presented in two languages. Translation might take some time.

Claude Vivier le Got and Anne Nègre indicated that together with Thierry Mathieu, Karl Donert and Iamvi Totsi, they do not accept the procedure decided by vote of the PC (to follow the opinion of the Verification and Disputes Committee) and would like the INGOs to be able to express themselves, to debate and to propose during the session "in the name of democracy". The five members designated above consider that the Verification and Disputes Committee does not have competence in this matter and, therefore, they would like the expression of their opposition to the vote of the Standing Committee to be indicated to the INGOs under the heading of transparency.

Anna Rurka and the other members recalled that the INGOs had been invited since the beginning of the process to express, debate and propose, and that there was no reason to question the participation of the INGOs in the drafting of the revised rules.

The five members object to the Standing Committee examining the amendments.

However, the majority of the Commission believes that it is necessary to remove duplications, the amendments that are not related to the draft submitted to the vote, and, finally, that it is necessary to have the amendments voted in a logical chronological order. There is therefore no question of exceeding its mandate or of deciding in the place of the INGOs. Mary Ann Hennessey indicated that during the plenary session, time would be limited to two minutes for the presentation of the proposed amendments by the representative of the submitting NGO on the one hand, and two minutes for the presentation of the Standing Committee's opinion on the other.

The five members of the Standing Committee also object to the opening of votes before the presentation and discussion of amendments.

INGOs will receive the proposed amendments two weeks before the vote. Each proposal to be adopted requires 2/3 of the votes. Once all votes on the proposals have been completed, there will be a vote on the amended global draft, as already discussed at the previous Standing Committee meeting.

The decision was taken earlier unanimously that Anna Rurka will send the Excel table concerning admissibility and that the deadline for this first step will be 25 October. As for the 2nd stage (vote to form the opinion of the Standing Committee), the members will have one more week.

Mary Ann Hennessey asked for the final document with proposed amendments to be translated by 6 November. The reasoning / argumentation of the INGOs and the opinion of the SC could be presented in a separate document.

It was clarified that during the plenary meetings in December, it will not be possible for INGOs to make new proposal(s) or reformulate proposals "on the spot", in order to respect the procedure established and opened by the Standing Committee. Voting will only take place on admissible proposals for amendments.

The five members insist that their opposition to the vote be indicated to the INGOs for the sake of transparency. After the meeting, the five members designated above explain that they consider that the Verification and Disputes Committee does not have competence in this

matter and therefore wish the Standing Committee not to interfere in the amendments proposed by the INGOs.

The other members of the SC have no recollection that such a clear-cut opinion was given by these five members during the meeting of 14 October.

8. World Forum for Democracy 2020 – update

Mary Ann Hennessey explained that this year the Forum will contain a series of online events which will be launched on the 18th of November online, by the French partners with, livestreamed discussions. In the afternoon, the organizers will try to have a way that people have questions to the panel, as a part of a so called “12 Months to answer 12 Questions Campaign”. Hopefully, this will be relatively interactive, and, hopefully, the situation by November 2021 will allow to have an in person 3-day meeting in Strasbourg. The bodies which are part of the Committee de Pilotage, including the Conference of INGOs will be able to propose the events.

9. Request from Licra and Emisco regarding the situation of the Uyghur people

Anna Rurka explained the request coming from the INGOs. The members of the Standing Committee expressed that they cannot see how this request falls under the remedy of the Council of Europe. It was proposed to ask LICRA and Emisco to give more evidence of the violation of rights. At the Standing Committee level, we can inform the PACE Committee on Migration and Displaced persons about the situation (with evidence) and see if this bodies wish to undertake any action.

10. Planning of the activities of the Standing Committee for the second semester of the year – contribution by the Standing Committee members

Anna Rurka invited the thematic Committees to communicate their activities plan with budget until the end of the year.

Anne Nègre mentioned she would like to organize two events: one on Woman and AI and another one on Women and disability. She will send proposals.

Christoph Spreng mentioned the upcoming Lisbon Forum and Solidarity and Governance event organised with the North South Center.

Claude Vivier Le Got mentioned that she wishes to involve in Roma Women issues, together with Anne Nègre. The Education and Culture Committee is also working on the White paper on European Cultural Identity and will be ready for January and February.

Rares Craiut presented the project of the Youth Delegates Group 2020-2021. In this framework the youth delegates prepare a series of online “civil society dialogue” meetings. The first topic being “Diversity of participation”, allowing smaller discussions groups to facilitate exchanges between the participants on the online event. From each dialogue event we want to carry over a topic to the next event. Mary Anne Hennessey expressed her wish to see how to link this initiative to the WFD monthly topics to encourage a lot of input from the youth.

Anna Rurka mentioned her future participation in the Conference on Civil society in Western Balkans organized by Germany in the framework of EU Presidency and her participation in the 130th Session of the Committee of Minister which will be held online or in Greece on the 4th of November.

11. Contribution to the Steering committees, committees of the parties, drafting groups methodology for a general and analytical synthesis.

Anna Rurka explained the necessity to make a common analyze on Conference of INGO contributions to these Committees. This work needs a methodology. We need to look at the terms of reference of the committees, the CINGO position held and its influence of the decision-making process in these committees. Anne Kraus suggested to identify transversal topics that keep coming back. It would help build up the Conference of INGOs priorities in the future and to determine how to work can be more efficient in the future.

Claude Vivier Le Got indicated that the regular work of the Education and Culture Committee with the CDPPE has enabled her re-election to the Bureau and her incorporation into the Task Force on Post-Covid Education.

Her request for INGOs to be systematically incorporated into the Education Directorate's working groups and projects was very favourably received and an INGO section was added to the presentation of the members of the working groups. She stated that the Directorate of Education consults her regularly and that she contributes through amendments or text proposals to the work of the CoE on education issues. She recalled that the Loomio platform set up by the Education Committee regularly disseminates information from the Education Directorate to INGOs. Karl Donert added that the expertise of the INGOs of the Conference is recognised by the Education Directorate of the Council of Europe.

Rares Craiut asked to start a list that collects all the subjects which are on the agenda of the committees as a starting document in preparation of this work. Anna Rurka suggested that Christoph Spreng could help collecting the info on the base of the table that our representatives can fill in.

12. OING-Service - information point

Annelise Oeschger reported about the OING-Service General Assembly. The remote meeting went well and all the documents were adopted unanimously. About 45 INGOs participated online. The budget for this year was adopted. She reiterated her appeal to SC members to set up projects in the field as funds were still available.

13. Date of the next meeting

Anna Rurka will propose a doodle to allow Standing Committee members to choose the dates for the meeting before the second part of the session.

She wholeheartedly thanked everyone for staying one hour longer than scheduled!

14. Any other business: None