

The President

Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe Reykjavik 16-17 May 2023

Text of the Intervention of the President of the Conference of INGOs

Today Ukraine is teaching us an important lesson every day: A strong Civil Society is the best protection for a democratic state. It is its vibrant Civil Society that forms the backbone of Ukraine's resistance against the Russian aggression. This lesson learned we must recognise the value of a strong and vital Civil Society in all our member States as a vital counterfoil to the fragmenting forces that - at their worst - lead to war.

Through Conference of INGOs¹ (CINGO) we enable the Council of Europe to reach and involve all parts of Civil Society in all member States. CINGO as a collective body provides an overarching view of the priorities and themes arising from the many voices of civil society. CINGO's contribution to the Council of Europe's discourse and tangible actions is rich, meaningful, and focused on shared aims. Constantly promoting the values of the Council of Europe and its bodies, we reach out to the citizens of Europe. We are your window to the Civil Society and the Citizens in Europe and beyond.

CINGO should be seen as a necessary partner to enable the Council of Europe to achieve its aims including much-needed better visibility and engagement with people in all member States. CINGO is essential to fulfilling this mission: it represents and can model participatory democracy, it triangulates legal and national positions on human rights through the lens of grassroots experiences, and it can ensure that the Council of Europe's work is focused on civil society priorities.

Therefore, I expect that after this meeting, member States will commit to strengthening the role of the Conference of INGOs in the Council of Europe and invest more in its development and work. The Conference of INGOs has linked up with many players in Civil Society across Europe to contribute to strengthen the role of the Council of Europe in response to the urgent challenges we face: the Russian aggression, the onslaught of anti-democratic and anti-liberal ideologies on our value-based societies, the aftermath of the Pandemic Crisis, the Environment Crisis and the threats of Climate Change, the need to move away from fossil energy sources, to combat inflation, rising inequality and social injustice and unrest. We are ready to do our part with even more energy and commitment.

In the same spirit we expect renewed and active commitment to the values and mission of the Council of Europe from all member States, and more commensurate funding that will enable pressing work to be done across our continent. Attention to this has been neglected for far too long. The Council of Europe is the pre-eminent body created to build a democratic and human

¹ The Conference of International NGOs brings together more than 300 INGOs with participatory status representing all areas of competence of the Council of Europe. Following the Helsinki decisions in 2019, the Conference of INGOs has engaged in its own reform process including opening our doors to civil society organisations that do not enjoy participatory status, such as think tanks, national NGOs, grass roots organisations and new forms of Civil Society Organisations. These may have less formal structures than the traditional NGOs, yet bring fresh new approaches to engaging civil society. We also co-operate with NGOs in countries with which the Council of Europe has no formal links (anymore), in Europe, the Mediterranean neighbourhood and on a global level.

rights based peaceful society in Europe after the catastrophic Second World War. It is the institution which helped the transformation process after the collapse of the Soviet Empire. And today it is the value-based pan-European institution that carries the flame of hope in a world where once again democracy, human rights and the rule of law are challenged.

We urge member States to improve the ordinary budget of the Council of Europe, to ensure that its many fruitful programmes can continue and develop. Too many valued programmes had to be closed in the past. The Court of Human Rights must be resourced to do its work in a timely fashion and implementation and monitoring of the Court judgements - as well as the many standard setting tools of the Council of Europe – need to be resourced. To increase a contribution which is barely visible in any of the member States' national budgets should not be so terribly difficult – and yet it would give real proof that member States are truly committed to the pledge they have made here in Reykjavik to uphold the principles of the Council of Europe, to strengthen this institution, and to make it fit for purpose in such a challenging environment.

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