

It is my great pleasure to address the plenary meeting of the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe.

First, let me thank Mr. Gerhard Ermischer and the team for this comprehensive report on civil participation in the decision-making process in Denmark.

We highly appreciated your visit to Copenhagen in May. We found the discussions with the delegation inspiring.

We note the overall conclusion in the draft report that Denmark continues to provide a strong and broadly enabling environment for civil society, including access to a diversified funding environment. We also note the delegation's finding that there is a high level of compliance with the principles set out in relevant Council of Europe standards.

The report generally describes the relationship between public authorities and civil society as characterised - historically - by a high degree of mutual trust and institutional cooperation. Public authorities frequently rely on civil society organisations as partners in policy design, service delivery and community development.

It also states that civil society organisations themselves have generally enjoyed broad political legitimacy across the ideological spectrum. Public funding has traditionally been regarded as a mechanism to strengthen civil society rather than to control it.

It is also noted that municipalities have played an important role in supporting voluntary organisations through grants, access to premises and local partnerships.

The Danish Government sees as a genuine description of the role and standing of civil society in Denmark not only as a historical account but also of the situation today.

The report pinpoints a number emerging pressures while acknowledging that such pressures are not evidence of a general deterioration of civic space, and that the overall civic environment in Denmark is favourable.

This does not mean that there are no issues to consider. The Danish Government will continue its efforts to simplify rules and remove unnecessary bureaucracy for voluntary associations, allowing volunteers to focus on the meaningful work they do.

I would like to comment on one overall observation in the report. It is stated that the relationship between public authorities and civil society in Denmark to a large extent is built on mutual trust and finding consensual solutions, while relying less on a system of checks and balances. The report describes this as a potential vulnerability, because the system does not have inbuilt safeguards, if the trust erodes.

I would add some context to this assessment. The Danish model should not be understood as relying on trust instead of safeguards. Rather, a high degree of mutual trust and cooperation operates alongside legal and institutional checks. Further, this high-trust environment can also strengthen democratic resilience. Against this background, additional safeguards may be useful, but they should be carefully calibrated so as not to unnecessarily weaken or question the trust, flexibility and autonomy that are themselves important characteristics of the Danish model.

Finally, let me again thank the delegation for your visit and the comprehensive report. I hope that discussions will continue on this basis and contribute to strengthen the civic space.