The Congress CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES
Le Congrès

COUNCIL OF EUROPE
1949.2019
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

**37th Session of the Congress, Strasbourg, 29 October 2019**

Speech by Thomas Andersson, (Sweden, ILDG) , Rapporteur

*Check against delivery - Seul le prononcé fait foi*

**Revised Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process**

Mr President,
Madame President of the Conference of INGOs,
Dear Colleagues,

One of the major concerns of modern democracies is the alienation of citizens from politics, and it is part of our responsibilties in the Congress as elected representatives to keep our citizens engaged.

Civil society participation constitutes an essential component of the democratic process. It provides citizens with an alternative path, alongside those provided by political parties and lobbies, for channeling their views and interests in the decision-making process.

With this in mind, I would like to present to you today our Resolution and invite you to approve the ”Revised Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-making Process”.

**I would like to take a minute to remind of the history behind this document**. Back in 2009, the Conference of INGOs adopted the Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-making Process.

This first code laid out the rationale, the framework and the means for enhanced civil participation. It was endorsed and encouraged by the Congress from the very beginning, as we have always been aware of the relevance of citizen participation in public life as a means to ensure the democratic supervision of public authority.

However, it became apparent after a certain time that the Code was not developing its full potential at the local and regional levels as expected.

This is why, the former rapporteur on the Code, Raymond SVENSSON proposed a resolution in 2015, a decade after its adoption. He asked the Conference to adapt the Code so that it would be more relevant to local authorities by reflecting the evolving ways of social interaction and technological development. I would ike to take a moment to honour his admirable work and initiative.

The Conference of INGOs kindly acceded to our request, and after several exchanges, we have elaborated the Revised Code that you now hold in your hands.

**Now a few words on the content**: The Code aims to define a set of general principles, guidelines, tools and mechanisms for civil participation in the political decision-making process.

It is based on practical experiences from NGOs across Europe, and the sharing of their good practices and valid methods to engage with public authorities.

An additional objective of the Code of Good Practice is to be a relevant and effective tool for NGOs in their dialogue with parliaments, governments and public authorities.

The code states that the conditions for substantial participation are transparency, accessibility, non-discrimination, inclusiveness and accountability. And it targets participation at all levels, from simply being informed to consultation, to dialogue and finally to partnership.

Here are some of the **main changes and additions** that we have made in the new code:

- We have taken into account new documents of the Council of Europe concerning participation in democratic processes, such as the Guidelines for civil participation in political decision making, or the 12 Principles of Good Governance.

- Secondly, we considered the incredibly rapid development of the internet, which provides very useful new options of participation available to the public from, for example, e-Governance to social media.

  However we must be aware that there are risks involved in simply replacing traditional channels with new technologies. Without an inclusive approach and policy, we risk excluding groups with no access to new technologies or those who are not well acquainted with them. Also, we

risk having purely formal or fake participation which, instead of helping, can damage the democratic process.

- We paid particular attention to the need to ensure the right of participation for the most vulnerable groups in society. In this context, I would like to refer here to a document that the Committee of Ministers adopted in 2017 which addresses inclusiveness specifically: The ”Guidelines for civil participation in political decision making” which has inspired our approach.

- We have likewise taken account of ad hoc groups of citizens demanding participation. New forms of non-organized civil participation, community-driven citizen participation and grassroots movements need to be explored. Indeed, they often have a local aspect which has gone out of focus in recent years.

- We noted that participatory process must be efficient and effective. This process demands an evaluation and follow-up of the results, and the new Code aims at addressing this monitoring process more clearly.

- Finally, one additional objective of the Code of Good Practice is to be a relevant and effective tool for NGOs, from the local to international level, in their dialogue with parliaments, governments and public authorities.

- This is why we propose to support the Code with a Toolkit with concrete examples, including good practice but also less successful examples of participation.

- The Toolkit aims to be an interactive and action-oriented instrument, so that NGOs and public authorities across Europe can effectively utilize it.

To conclude: These are the main changes that we have made to the original Code, and we will continue to cooperate with the Conference of INGOs to keep it updated to respond to the demands of new technologies.

Dear collegues, I kindly invite you to adopt this resolution and approve the Revised Code.

Thank you for your attention.