



**Address by Gerhard Ermischer, President of the Conference of INGOs,
at the 134th session of the Committee of Ministers (Luxembourg, 13-14 May 2025)**

Two years after the Reykjavik Summit of Heads of States we see progress in the Council of Europe but also regress in many member states. Individuals and NGOs are labelled as foreign agents, traitors and enemies of the state for no other reason as standing up for the values we all should stand united around. They are prosecuted, intimidated and attacked, both verbally and physically and their funds are dwindling thanks to the policies of Mr. Trump.

We truly need a new pact for a liberal and participatory democracy, for empowering Civil Society and a robust mechanism to defend the defenders. We therefore support the new Convention on the protection of lawyers and we support the idea of a new summit. We have issued several recommendations to member states, foremost on the unwavering support of Ukraine and on the defence of our democracy and civil society.

We fully realise that we cannot do this alone – the great European institutions have to work hand in hand. This is why we invited representatives of the Fundamental Rights Agency and the Economy and Social Committee of the EU to our General Assembly in April. A strong cooperation with other intergovernmental organisations will strengthen our Convention System and the implementation of the judgements of the European Court of Human Rights.

With all these challenges we must not forget the challenges that do not go away just because we have no more time for them: the triple global crisis or the lack of social cohesion which feeds populist movements.

We therefore continue to advocate to recognise the right for a clean and healthy environment as a fundamental human right and we urge member states to sign up to the additional protocol for common complaints of the revised European Social Charter.

As the Secretary General said, we need to bring together hard and soft powers. If we only improve our military defence but loose our democracy – what is there left to defend? A true democracy is liberal, participatory and open minded. It cannot be redefined to suite authoritative and nationalistic narratives.

There is much to do and no more time to lose. To re-coin a phrase so beloved by Mr. Trump – Let's make Democracy great for everyone!