



MENACE TO DEMOCRACY WITHIN THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

Preamble

of the Recommendation adopted

by the Conference of International NGOs of the Council of Europe on October 6, 2010.

1. The Secretary General of the Council of Europe, in agreement with the Committee of Ministers, has launched a process of in-depth reform of the Council of Europe.
2. The aim of this reform is to make the Council of Europe politically more influential and transparent by refocusing around its fundamental values: democracy, human rights, the rule of law. But also to *“orient our activities to areas in which we have real comparative advantage and do what others are not able to do”*. (Thorbjørn Jagland, statement to PACE, 25-29 January 2010).
3. The Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe, an assembly of organized civil society, is strongly in tune with the perspectives and ambitions of the Secretary General.
The Conference of INGOs is itself a real comparative advantage ! This is due, to its being rooted in all the countries of Europe, and to its representativity based on networks not only of international NGOs but also national and local federations. Thus the Conference of INGOs is a motivator for citizens to participate in the running of public affairs.
4. The Council of Europe is the sole intergovernmental organization granting participatory status to International Non-Governmental Organizations. (CM/Res(2003)8). This pioneering role makes the Council of Europe distinct from other organizations, and through the institutional “Quadrilogue” permits it to represent the diversity of European citizens.
At the moment when Europe is living through a major crisis of growing citizen disinterest in elections and democratic institutions, the Council of Europe conveys true European sensitivity, being the channel for representative and participative democracy.
5. In 2009 the Committee of Ministers declared that one of its priorities *“is to develop, with the assistance of the Conference of International Non-Governmental Organizations, interaction with civil society, whose grassroots work we salute”*. (119th Session of the Committee of Ministers, Madrid, 12 May 2009§9).
6. The Parliamentary Assembly *“noting that the work of the Conference of INGOs contains several major themes closely linked to the priorities of the Parliamentary Assembly” will “strengthen its cooperation with representative and proactive INGOs, and most particularly with the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe”*. (PA-Res1589(2007)§1,§10).
7. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Conference of INGOs have drawn up a “Memorandum on Partnership between local and regional authorities and NGOs in the member States of the Council of Europe” in order than in the decision-making process on public affairs local authorities will more readily take into account the activities of non-governmental associations. This Memorandum will help strengthen local and national NGOs, the large majority of which have no link with the Council of Europe, by involving them in turn in the work of the Council of Europe. (see also CM/Res(2003)9).
8. In December 2005 the Committee of Ministers determined that the Conference of INGOs could delegate representatives to Steering Committees and subsidiary organs, as do the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities (CM/Res(2005)47). This political recognition of the Conference of INGOs was accompanied by a gradual increase in the operational budget for the activities organized by the Conference of INGOs and by the Secretariat, with the latter being strengthened. In June 2008, the

Conference of INGOs reformed its organs and mechanisms in order to be more in harmony with the other pillars of the Council of Europe “Quadrilogue”.

9. The Conference of INGOs undertakes actions in order to strengthen civil society in the member States of the Council of Europe and in Belarus, notably :
 - **The Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the decision-making process**, recognized by the Committee of Ministers as a “reference document for the Council of Europe and a basic text enabling the development of a framework offering citizens in European countries the means to participate in the conduct of public affairs. (CM Declaration, 21.10.2009)
 - **The Expert Council on NGO Law** contributes to creating a favourable environment for the work of NGOs in Europe, and monitors the implementation of the Committee of Ministers Recommendation to member States on the legal status on non-governmental organizations in Europe (CM/Rec(2007)14).
 - **The Forum for the Future of Democracy**: Together with the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the Conference therein constitutes an expression of the democratic pluralism that is essential for the construction of a citizens’ Europe. Quadripartite governance ensures the transversality of the Forum. The Conference is a member of the Forum’s Advisory Board. (CM/Res(2003)8).
 - **Regional NGO Congresses** are intended for the countries of Central and Eastern Europe (Georgia, Lithuania, Poland, Russian Federation, Ukraine, Belarus, etc). They emphasize the role of civil society within a democracy and facilitate the exchange of experience and the laying of groundwork for regional NGO networks.
 - **The White Book**: The Conference contributed to the drawing up and implementation of the White Book on intercultural dialogue.
 - **Biodiversity Day**: An event organized in April 2010 by the Conference of INGOs and whose conclusions were co-signed by the PACE and the Congress.
 - **The North-South Centre in Lisbon** : Signature of a cooperation agreement (partnership) between the Conference of INGOs and the North-South Centre. The Conference has two seats on the Executive Committee.
 - **Ministerial Conferences** : Active participation in the work of these Conferences, also involving NGOs that are not members of the Conference of INGOs.
 - **Programme of support to civil society in Russia**. Promote the role and impact of NGOs in public life.
 - **Steering Committees** : participation in the drafting and implementation of Council of Europe Conventions.
 - **Programmes of support to civil society in Belarus**: promote the values and standards of the Council of Europe.
10. The Conference of INGOs, by virtue of its work and activities, is heavily involved in “soft security”. Being close to citizens and having multilateral partnerships, it plays a role of “facilitator” in conflict situations where security and stability are at risk in certain areas of our continent. Through its civil dialogue, its expertise, its closeness to citizens, its assistance to strengthening citizen participation in political life, and with the support of the “Quadrilogue”, the Conference is an irreplaceable actor for conflict prevention, in confronting political extremism and the impact of the financial crisis on democracy, human rights and the rule of law in Europe. *“The security and stability of Europe seem no longer to be an issue between States but within their borders”*. (Thorbjørn Jaglund, Bruxelles, 29 September 2010).
11. The Conference of INGOs contributes to the drawing up and effective implementation of Council of Europe legal instruments which ensure the protection of human rights, such as the European Convention on Human Rights, the European Social Charter, the Convention on combatting trafficking of human beings, or the future Convention on combating violence against women, and many others. Towards citizens the Conference promotes the actions of the Council of Europe both in Europe and in its relations with the rest of the world, such as the Euro-Mediterranean dialogue. Many members of the Conference of INGOs are present in other international fora : the UN, UNESCO, the EU, OSCE, the International Labour Organization and others. The Conference of INGOs is also an active and essential vehicle for the development, the promotion and the spreading of knowledge internationally about the work and activities of the Council of Europe.



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Recommandation

adopted

by the Conference of International NGOs of the Council of Europe on October 6, 2010.

- The Conference of INGOs shares the opinion of the Parliamentary Assembly “which is convinced that the success of the reforms proposed by the Secretary General must be based on genuine, substantial and ongoing dialogue not only between the two Statutory Organs but equally with the other bodies of the Organization.” (PA, Opinion 276(2010)§5).
- The Conference of INGOs deplores that the Secretary General did not present to it his reform proposals, as he did to the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, in the framework of the “Quadrilogue” but also in implementing CM/Res(2003)8, which foresees consulting the Conference of INGOs (at the time called Liaison Committee) on matters of mutual interest.
- The Conference of INGOs recognizes that the Secretary General’s reform proposals come in a period of economic and financial instability which requires governments to consider reducing budgets. In this difficult situation the Conference of INGOs could envisage a reduction in its own budget of the same order as those accepted by the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. This despite its deep conviction that its indispensable role within the Council of Europe would justify a considerable increase in its means, given their very modest level.
- The Conference of INGOs recalls that for 2010 its allocated global budget is only 0.52% of the total budget of the Council of Europe. The reform budget proposed for 2011 foresees a substantial reduction up to 80 % according to statements, solely for the Conference of INGOs: this would not save the Council of Europe, but on the other hand could sacrifice one of the members of the Quadrilogue : The Conference of INGOs.

In consequence the Conference of INGOs requests :

1. The Committee of Ministers :
 - to reconfirm the statutory recognition of the Conference of INGOs
 - to take note of its wish to be fully involved in the Council of Europe reform process and to contribute to it thanks to its expertise and its network covering the Europe of citizens.
 - to make equitable reductions in the 2011 budget of the institutions of the Council of Europe
 - to strengthen cooperation and dialogue among the pillars of the “Quadrilogue” so that the Council of Europe may continue, by its diversity and pluralism, to promote the interests of all European citizens better than any other organization.
2. The Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress :
 - To support the proposals and wishes herein expressed to the Committee of Ministers and the Secretary General in order to preserve the unique role of the “Quadrilogue” which represents full European diversity and richness within the one Organization, the Council of Europe.

The 2011 budget will be adopted by the Committee of Ministers in the week of November 22, 2010.