**The report on the activity of INGO Conference of the Council of Europe**

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IFSW Europe is the member of INGO Conference for many years now and always had a representative of IFSW Europe in this body. The last three years Fernanda Rodrigues represents it in INGO Conference. It happened that for 5 year now the elected position of vice – president of INGO Conference is held by Antonina Dashkina ( who is also a president of Russia Union of social workers and social pedagogues).

In this report we will tell what main activities were made by INGO Conference. This organization within the Council of Europe brings together 350 INGOs with participatory status and its strength is based on the expertise of each INGO and of the national NGOs which contribute to this work. The Conference works to strengthen citizens' access to rights where the economy of exclusion and injustice are a form of violence against civil society and in particular the most vulnerable groups.

The main aim of the activities is to honour INGOs commitment to ensuring that human rights, and consequently also social and cultural rights, are applied in member states’ legislation and in their daily practices. With a view to achieving this objective, the Conference works together with the other bodies of the Council of Europe and governmental and intergovernmental institutions.

These activities contribute to:

* emancipating civil society and reinforcing its participation in decision-making processes.
* building a society that knows how to use its freedoms and turn them into social bonds and respect for the state and its institutions.

This activity report provides an analytical and non-exhaustive account of the thematic activities carried out by the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe from January to December 2016. It takes into account of the strategic priorities set out in the Action Plan adopted by the INGO Conference in June 2015, across the three areas covered by the Council of Europe: human rights, democracy and rule of law. Mention is also made of the activities conducted in certain member states, and the INGO Conference’s co-operation with other Council of Europe institutions or pillars as well as international partner institutions.

**1. Rule of law**

1.1. Structured interaction between the Conference of INGOs and other Council of Europe institutions – a contribution to the rule of law and democracy within the Council of Europe

Two highlights of the winter session which ushered in 2016 were an exchange of views with the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and another with the Committee of Ministers, in the person of Ambassador Astrid Helle, Permanent Representative of Norway to the Council of Europe and Chair of the Rapporteur Group on Democracy (GR-DEM). Since June 2015, the Committee of Ministers (the Ambassadors and the representatives of the diplomatic delegations) has been invited to the plenary meeting of the Conference to talk to the INGOs

1.2. The right to freedom of association and participation in Council of Europe member states The Expert Council on NGO Law, which is an expert, political body of the INGO Conference, played a prominent role in the event entitled “Only a matter for politicians? Civil society, money and political activities” hosted by the INGO Conference in June. This gathering of national and international NGOs, donors, institutions and prominent figures from the Council of Europe as well as the international partner institutions (OSCE, EU) was a major event on the right to freedom of association, as demonstrated by the report published in English, French and Russian. The joint visit to Moscow by the President of the Conference and Claudia Luciani, Director of Democratic Governance in DG II, provided an opportunity to discuss various possible courses of action with NGOs affected by the legislative restrictions imposed by the Russian government.

The visits carried out this year by the President of the Conference to Council of Europe member states focused on freedom of association through the lens of NGO participation in the decision-making process. In each instance, the delegation consisted of one member of the Expert Council on NGO Law, a representative from one of the INGOs belonging to the Conference and a member of the secretariat of the Civil Society Division. In 2016, the delegation travelled to Poland (June), Romania (September), Germany (October), and Hungary (November).The first three reports were presented at the 2017 winter session, and the report on Hungary will be presented in June 2017.

The situation as regards NGOs in Turkey is a matter of concern for the Council of Europe and, more specifically, the Conference of INGOs. In order to discuss what should be done, around twenty NGOs based in Turkey were invited to Strasbourg for a 2-day meeting (1 and 2 December). As well as affording an opportunity to find out about one another’s needs and methods of operation, the meeting provided a framework for fresh discussions with the Turkish authorities and NGOs on the state of civil society in Turkey and the country’s future co-operation with the INGO Conference.

**2. Human rights**

The Council of Europe’s activities in the field of human rights are informed by the work of the INGO Conference in a variety of ways. Besides the thematic approach used at meetings of the Human Rights Committee, the Conference also plays a special part in the work carried out by the Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH). This year the steering committee has widened the thematic scope of its work, with the result that the INGO Conference has had to assign several of its experts to contribute to various newly created drafting groups: human rights and migration (CDDH-MIG), civil society and national human rights institutions (CDDH-INST), freedom of expression and links with other human rights (CDDH-EXP), female genital mutilation and forced marriage (CDDH-MF) and social rights (CDDH-SOC).

2.1. Protection of human rights defenders

Human rights defenders in eastern Europe continue to face considerable challenges. Through its committees and Expert Council on NGO Law, the INGO Conference is making active efforts to continue its support. This year our attention focused more especially on the ongoing support for Intigam Aliyev, member of the Expert Council, who is still banned from leaving Azerbaijan territory and facing hefty fines. Following a request from the President to the Public Prosecutor and the Minister of Justice of the Republic of Azerbaijan, supported by other prominent figures from the Council of Europe, Mr Aliyev was allowed to travel to Strasbourg to give his opening address at the event on freedom of association and the plight of NGOs whose activities are regarded by the authorities as political, and on how being designated or labelled a “foreign agent” affects the foreign funding received by NGOs. We are sorry to say that on his return, Mr Aliyev found himself the subject of expedited enforcement proceedings and was unable to travel to Strasbourg for the meeting of the Expert Council in October.

2.2. Commitment to the indivisibility of human rights The INGO Conference takes every opportunity to reiterate the importance of the indivisibility of human rights and the detrimental effects arising from any hierarchy between civil, social, economic and cultural rights. Upholding rights requires special vigilance in detecting new threats. Of particular relevance in this context is the Oviedo Convention which focuses on the challenges presented by emerging technologies and biotechnologies. Not wishing to ignore this area of human rights, therefore, Ms Lwoff from the Council of Europe’s Intergovernmental Bioethics Committee had sought to sensitise the INGO Conference’s Human Rights Committee to these challenges. She thanked the INGO Conference for its contribution to the work of the Bioethics Committee (DH-BIO) through the active participation of Michel Aguilar, Chair of the Human Rights Committee, in the working group “Digital technology and human rights” and in the event hosted by the Democracy, Social Cohesion and Global Challenges Committee on social and medical care for elderly persons in Europe.

The indivisibility of human rights being one of its guiding principles, the Conference is actively involved in promoting social rights alongside the Social Charter Division of the Council of Europe. This year, the INGOs decided to co-ordinate their action and to work harder to secure ratifications of the protocol on the collective complaints procedure. To this end, a call for action was issued. As underlined by the Special Rapporteur for the Turin process, Michele Nicoletti, in his general report on the Turin Conference, enhancing the collective complaints procedure, which leads to sustained and independent dialogue between NGOs and the authorities, makes for a much more dynamic, democratic, transparent and open monitoring of the implementation of social rights.

The Human Rights Committee’s new working group on children’s rights is to prepare the INGO Conference’s contribution to the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2016-2021). This contribution will be based on the compendium of good practice (according to the rules laid down in the said Strategy), and will seek to critically assess, from the perspective of project developers, the barriers that make it difficult for them to innovate. The group’s two co-ordinators represent the Conference of INGOs on the Ad Hoc Committee for the Rights of the Child and its working groups (CAHENF).

International Day for the Eradication of Poverty organised at the Council of Europe on 17 October 2016 by the Conference of INGOs, with the support of INGO-Service, brought together representatives of states, people working on the ground and young people from Greece, Poland and France to look at poverty among the young. Foreign youngsters living in care presented videos which they had made with their care providers, and were able to learn about and discuss the recommendations made by the Committee of Ministers to Council of Europe member states regarding access to rights for vulnerable youngsters. Local councillors from Greece, together with NGOs and young people themselves, described the various steps taken to counter the negative impact of the austerity measures imposed on them, practices that are often overlooked by policy makers. It is hoped that by publishing the proceedings of the roundtable, these practices will become available to a wider audience.

**3. Democracy**

3.1. Building inclusive societies

Inclusive societies are founded on equal rights and equality before the law. They have been defined by the Council of Europe, in accordance with the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development of 1995 in Copenhagen, which stressed that “the aim of social integration is to create "a society for all", in which every individual, each with rights and responsibilities, has an active role to play.” They are societies where individuals maintain their own identities while accepting each other’s differences, “united by a set of shared, democratic values”. That means respecting cultural and religious diversity, social justice and the specific needs of vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.

In 2016, the Conference of INGOs organised several events to showcase specific initiatives and highlight the potential benefits of inclusive practices for project developers and target groups in Council of Europe member states. The conclusions reached at the end of event also raised some queries which remain to be addressed on the ground, in the work with the communities concerned.

Firstly, on 23 June 2016, the Democracy, Social Cohesion and Global Challenges Committee staged an event entitled Ageing and Health: a challenge to public health and social cohesion. This gathering attracted a wide range of actors with an interest in issues such as preventing ageism, elder abuse, adapting care and services and social inclusion. These themes are referred to both in Committee of Ministers Recommendation CM/Rec2014(2) and in the report being prepared by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe entitled: “Guaranteeing the rights of the elderly, their full support, a European social commitment". The event gave rise to the adoption by the NGO Conference of the Recommendation to member states of the Council of Europe on health care and socio-medical conditions and respect of human rights of older persons in Europe.

The INGO Conference was actively involved in framing the new Council of Europe Disability Strategy (2017-2023) adopted on 30 November 2016 under the heading “Human rights: a reality for all”. Protection against exploitation, violence and abuse is essential in order to promote access to community living. The aim, however, is to go a step further. Future activities of the INGO Conference will focus on recognition of the legal personality of people with disabilities, in line with Article 12 of the UN Convention. The INGO Conference is to present a paper on this subject at the seminar to launch the Strategy under the Cypriot Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers.

3.2 INGO Conference’s contribution to the Council of Europe Action Plan against violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism (2015-2017)

The European Convention on Human Rights forms the basis of any action proposed and/or conducted by the Council of Europe. The fight against violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism is also predicated on respect for human rights, democracy and the rule of law. There are several strands to the Council of Europe Action Plan to combat violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism. They include: 1) transversal initiatives on “Building inclusive societies”, 2) developing the necessary competences for a culture of democracy and intercultural dialogue, 3) freedom of expression on the internet and the “No hate speech” campaign, 4) the Council of Europe Annual Exchange on the Religious Dimension of Intercultural Dialogue as a forum for discussion on issues relating to preventing radicalisation.

3.3. Freedom of speech on the internet, the “No Hate Speech” campaign and media literacy

The growth of digital technology is a force for emancipation as much as a threat and an instrument of exclusion and discrimination. In order to examine the impact of digital technology on young people, the Education and Culture Committee’s working group “education in digital media” is trying to identify the challenges currently facing formal and non-formal education to promote active citizenship. Social media have provided fertile ground for hate speech. The working group, whose aim is to support the fight against hate speech, is working with the Council of Europe’s "No Hate Speech" movement. Gilles Bloch who co-ordinates the working group, together with Anne Kraus, member of the Conference Bureau, helped launch the campaign in their respective countries, France and Luxembourg.

3.4. INGO Conference’s contribution to the World Forum for Democracy

For years, the INGO Conference has been actively involved in the steering committee for the World Forum for Democracy, as well as the event itself. In 2016, the focus was on education and democracy, with members of the Standing Committee and INGOs from the Conference leading two workshops: Lab 8 - "Digital education for democracy", which considered how digital resources and applications can be productively used in citizens education, and Lab 16 "Learning respect", which assessed initiatives that focus on intercultural learning initiatives which foster understanding and respect and prevent radicalisation.

**List of working groups in the INGO Conference**

1.Working groups of the Human Rights Committee

Disability; Extreme Poverty and Human Rights, Human Rights, co-development, Migrations; Fight against hate speech, Childrens’ Rights, Human Rights and Digital Technology, Human Rights defenders

2. Working groups of the Education and Culture Committee

The teacher in interaction with his environment: a shared responsibility for the European values, Education for the digital media - a challenge in formal and non-formal education for democratic citizenship and participation, Teaching history: an education to an active democratic citizenship, The transformation of cultures and the living together in a heterogenic and digital society to an inclusive society

3. Working groups of the Democracy, Social Cohesion and Global Challenges Committee

Gender Perspectives in political and democratic processes, Climate change and human Rights, Europe Mediterranean, Social Cohesion and Shared Territories, European Citizenship, Inclusive Societies

**The main events in 2017 which IFSW Europe should consider**

**June** – 40 years anniversary of INGO Conference of the CoE

The Conference of INGOs is a political body but it is also an institution that has developed in a dynamic fashion, supporting INGOs and organising their work within the Council of Europe. Forty years have passed since the INGO Liaison Committee was set up in 1976. In 1977, it organised the first gathering of INGOs at the Council of Europe in the form of a plenary conference. This year, following a suggestion from Claude-Laurent Genty, Chair of the Liaison Committee, the honorary presidents were eager to pay tribute to the work of the INGOs and bear witness to the long process which led in 2005 to the plenary conference being renamed the “Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe” and officially recognised as one of the four pillars of the Council of Europe alongside the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. As well as being of historical and political interest, their testimony is a valuable source of information for INGOs joining the Conference.

**10 October** – the Day “Europe against the death penalty”

**17 October** – World Day of eradication of poverty

**Promotion of European Social Charter**

General Secretary of the Council of Europe is highlighting the essential role of social rights in European Construction and in particular, the recognition of the European Social Charter as the “Social Constitution of Europe”

It is for IFSW Europe have in mind that the promotion of the European Social Charter and its Complaints mechanism as fundamental instrument for the effective safeguarding of all social rights in Europe.