



Strasbourg 20 janvier 2021

Dear representatives of INGOs

At its December meetings, the Conference of INGOs took a big step forward. I am very pleased and reassured that we are now better equipped to face the future. The Conference is ready to make a difference in the lives of Europeans, alongside local and national NGOs and civil society experts, based on Council of Europe standards.

This letter aims to draw your attention to new provisions and practices, as well as to inform you of the next steps between now and our next session in April.

**1. Code of Conduct of the Conference of INGOs** link : [168093b8bd \(coe.int\)](#)

With the adoption of the new Rules, the Conference of INGOs has completed the implementation of the Code of Conduct (adopted in 2019).

The new Rules formalised the creation and functioning of the Appeals Committee. This was the last element that we needed in order to make the implementation of the Code effective.

**The Secretariat is in the process of setting up a public online register where any gifts or similar benefits received as a participant will have to be declared (art.16) as well as a register of interests to declare any conflict of interest if it could not be avoided prior to the activity (art.10) conducted within the Conference of INGOs.**

This [Code of Conduct](#) is not a showcase. It dictates the rules that must be respected by all of us, so that our "living together" within the Conference of INGOs goes as smoothly as possible. It calls on participants in the Conference of INGOs to refrain from "actions which may unjustifiably damage the reputation or integrity of the Conference, of a participant or of the Council of Europe" (art. 6), not to use the position of participants within the Conference of INGOs to serve its own interests (Art. 13), not to disseminate inaccurate information or to use the logo or any official symbol of the Council of Europe, including the Conference of INGOs, without the prior authorisation of the Secretariat (Art. 15 ).

It is also important to recall that in order for the Conference of INGOs to be a true expression of participatory and citizen democracy, participants must not follow "any instructions from any governmental or intergovernmental body in the manner in which they contribute to the activities of the Conference of INGOs" (art 11).

It is my duty to inform INGOs of these rules and to invite you to reread our Code of Conduct carefully. I also invite any organisation and any person concerned about the use of the Code

to address their questions to the Verification and Dispute Committee, which is the body responsible for overseeing the enforcement of this tool.

## **2. The Spring Session of the Conference of INGOs**

As we decided together, the Spring Session will take place the week of 26 April 2021. The plenary meetings of the Conference of INGOs will take place on 27 and 28 April. This will be the last session of the current Standing Committee and we will be pleased to present the results of this mandate to you. In order to do this assessment, the Standing Committee is working on a tool to evaluation the Action Plan 2018-2021, which will shortly be sent to all the entities that have contributed to this Plan. The representatives of the Conference of INGOs to steering committees, committees of the parties and PACE committees have also been asked to provide analytical feedback on the contributions made.

<b>Elections for the posts of President, Vice-Presidents and elected members of the Standing Committee</b>
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Given the current evolution of the pandemic and the vaccination campaign, it is difficult to imagine that we will be able to welcome all members to the Council of Europe in April. The elections will therefore be held using the digital tools made available by the Council of Europe.

**The call for candidatures for all posts on the Standing Committee will be sent to you by the Secretariat on 26 January 2021.** As from that date, INGOs will be able to propose their candidates, by transmitting the requested documents, no later than 60 days before the opening of the session (Rule 109), i.e. **no later than 26 February 2021.**

You will also receive precise information on the rules to be observed during the election campaign.

I invite you to read the Rules of Procedure already now to find out about the framework that governs these elections.

Each new leadership should lead to a renewal of ideas, energy and even more commitment. This is also a great opportunity for the Conference of INGOs to choose dedicated people for its collective work, people with a concrete vision of the progress to be made and who we will want to follow in the interest of our organisation.

After 6 years of service to the Conference of INGOs as its President, I can say that the role played and the trust of the INGOs have been a powerful driving force in bringing about a real change for civil society in the member States and in the Council of Europe. The elected position is not about a title but about a service for the rights and freedoms of individuals and civil society organisations. It requires a considerable investment, but the joy that follows achievements outweighs the difficulties. It is an experience worth living!

I therefore encourage many of you to apply and to take up responsibilities within the Standing Committee, in order to live a human and institutional adventure.

Let us choose good barometers for the future, to guide us and to make the Conference of INGOs grow!

## Committee proposals

By setting up committees under the terms defined in the Rules of Procedure, the Conference of INGOs joins the principle adopted by the Committee of Ministers at their meeting in Helsinki and which is valid for the whole Council of Europe, which is the strengthening of a results-oriented culture. The approach that will be favoured in the future is to have "task force" type groups, allowing for greater responsiveness and flexibility in the functioning of the organs.

From April onwards and after the election of the members of the Standing Committee, it is clear that the new team will need some time to propose a three-year Strategic Plan to the General Assembly (art.13). However, it also seems obvious that between the Spring and Autumn (October) sessions, the Conference needs to be active.

The current Standing Committee has therefore decided to open the call for committees now. Of course, not all the committees desired by the Conference of INGOs need to be established as early as April, but it is important that some of them start work.

**INGOS that wish to propose a committee will find all the necessary information in the appendix to this letter. It is also necessary to reread the chapter of the Rules relating to "Committees", in order to take into account the conditions and criteria that will guide the General Assembly in the vote.**

One of the criteria set out in the Rules of Procedure is the relevance of the proposed issue to the three-year Strategic Plan adopted by the General Assembly and to the work in progress or to be undertaken by Council of Europe bodies (art. 62).

In order to give you some guidance that might facilitate your proposals, it is first of all necessary to look at the work carried out in the intergovernmental steering committees and their drafting groups, in the committees of the parties and in the PACE committees. Take a look at the working agendas of the main bodies which can be found in the footnotes below<sup>1</sup>. The list does not cover all the bodies that exist within the Council of Europe and this could perhaps evolve with the new team.

The Secretary General wishes to propose to the Committee of Ministers a longer strategic framework (4 years) rather than the one currently in place and which is linked to the 2-year

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<sup>1</sup> [Comité directeur pour les droits de l'homme \(CDDH\) \(coe.int\)](#) (CDDH)  
[Comité européen sur la démocratie et la gouvernance \(CDDG\) \(coe.int\)](#) (CDDG)  
[Committee on Bioethics \(DH-BIO\) \(coe.int\)](#) (DH-BIO)  
[Commission pour l'égalité de genre \(coe.int\)](#) (GEC)  
[Conseil de l'Europe Comité européen de coopération juridique \(coe.int\)](#) (CDCJ)  
[Comité directeur sur les médias et la société de l'information \(CDMSI\) \(coe.int\)](#)  
[Comité directeur pour les politiques et pratiques éducatives \(CDPPE\) \(coe.int\)](#)  
[Comité directeur européen pour la jeunesse \(coe.int\)](#)  
[Comité directeur de la culture, du patrimoine et du paysage \(CDCPP\) - Page d'accueil \(coe.int\)](#)  
[CAHAJ - Comité ad hoc sur l'intelligence artificielle \(coe.int\)](#)  
[Comité pour les droits de l'enfant \(coe.int\)](#)  
[Comité directeur sur l'anti-discrimination, la diversité et l'inclusion \(CDADI\)](#)  
[GREVIO \(coe.int\)](#)  
[GRETA \(coe.int\)](#)  
[European Committee of Social Rights \(coe.int\)](#)  
[Commission des questions sociales, de la santé et du développement durable \(coe.int\)](#)  
[Commission des migrations, des réfugiés et des personnes déplacées \(coe.int\)](#)

budgetary exercise. This will probably be under discussion as early as next Spring, when the Committee of Ministers will start drawing up the budget for the next biennium.

If we look at the work in progress and the reports adopted by the steering committees of the Council of Europe, we can already identify a number of priorities that could be placed on the Organisation's agenda:

- The execution of the judgments of the European Court of Human Rights by member States remains a high priority for the Committee of Ministers. As you know, NGOs can contribute to the monitoring process in accordance with Rule 9<sup>2</sup> of the [Rules on the supervision of the execution of judgments and the conditions for friendly settlements](#);
- Freedom of association, freedom of expression, freedom of assembly and democratic participation;
- The protection of human rights defenders;
- The legal framework guaranteeing the use of artificial intelligence, respecting human rights, ethical principles, democratic rules and the rule of law;
- The protection of the environment from the democratic and human rights perspective;
- Education for democratic citizenship and the participation of young people in democracy;
- Poverty and social inequality. This will involve strengthening and improving the monitoring mechanism of the Revised European Social Charter<sup>3</sup> and the Protocol on Collective Complaints, in which INGOs have a key role to play;
- Protection of vulnerable groups (protection of victims of domestic violence, rights of migrants and refugees, victims of human trafficking, etc.);
- Multi-factorial discrimination based on gender, ethnic origin, religion and beliefs,

During her exchange of views with the Conference of INGOs in October 2020, the Secretary General announced that one of her priorities would be the implementation of the Helsinki decisions, which aim at better associating civil society in the work of the Council of Europe bodies. The aim would be to create several channels through which civil society could be involved in the Council of Europe's activities.

This remains a major challenge for the Conference of INGOs. It must show that its contribution is not replaceable, and even more, that it is essential, if one considers the diversity of the civil society sector and the need for follow-up to the work of the Council of Europe in the medium and long term. The Conference can achieve this by

- the quality and relevance of its work/actions,
- its ability to influence the decision-making processes in the different bodies of the Council of Europe, and
- targeted communication activities aimed at civil society groups within the Member States.

The key to success lies in connecting with the field:

- with local and national civil society groups,

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<sup>2</sup> "The Committee of Ministers shall be entitled to consider any communication from non-governmental organisations, as well as national institutions for the promotion and protection of human rights, with regard to the execution of judgments under Article 46, paragraph 2, of the Convention".

<sup>3</sup> [CDDH: Report on improving the implementation of social rights in Europe](#)


- citizens' movements,
- members of the INGOs in the member States

The Conference of INGOs must never lose sight of the fact that it must be connected to the territories and the people who live there. The visits of the President and of a delegation of the Conference to member States have proved to be a relevant way of dialoguing with civil society and state representatives, but this should not be the only way to connect.

What is important is that your members can participate in the meetings of the Conference and that the Conference gets closer to the citizens, without losing sight of its transnational character.

It is in this spirit of end and of renewal that I look forward to seeing you all again in April 2021.

I wish you all a good preparation for the session!



Anna Rurka

President of the Conference of INGO