

OSCE 2010 Review Conference

Warsaw, 30 September to 8 October 2010

Working Session 1: Democratic Institutions

NGOs and civil society: promoters of democracy and active citizenship

Action by the Council of Europe and its Conference of INGOs

The Council of Europe has always considered that independent non-governmental organisations are a vital component of European society, guaranteeing freedom of expression and association both of which are fundamental to democracy.

Recognising their influence, the Council of Europe is unique in providing INGOs with the opportunity to acquire participatory status. Through this status INGOs, known as the Conference of INGOs, are now actively contributing to the decision-making process at the Council of Europe and to the implementation of its programmes, thus ensuring their relevance to the expectations of Europeans. Giving substance to participatory democracy is one of the priorities of the Conference of INGOs. This priority is reflected in the following initiatives of the Conference of INGOs:

The **Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process** is the result of a recommendation in 2007 by the Sigtuna/Stockholm Session of the Forum for the Future of Democracy to the Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe. It was officially launched at the Kyiv session of the Forum in October 2009.

Through the Code of Good Practice, the Conference of INGOs aims at contributing to the creation of an enabling environment for NGOs by defining at European level a set of general principles, guidelines, tools and mechanisms for civil participation in the political decision-making process at local, regional and national level.

The Code is based on actual experiences from NGOs sharing their good practices and methods for engaging with public authorities.

It offers tools that may be applied at any stage and that provide cross-cutting support to the process of participation. These elements are then combined to form a *matrix* of civil participation that provides a visual presentation of the inter-related nature of the process and guidance for decision makers and NGO activists for further enhancing civil participation.

The Code of Good Practice is available in English, French, German and Russian and is currently being translated into other languages. It is already being used by NGOs and public authorities alike.

Further information: http://www.coe.int/t/ngo/code_good_prac_en.asp

Expert Council on NGO Law

In January 2008, the Conference of INGOS established the Expert Council on NGO Law. The Council examines the legal and regulatory framework for NGOs as well as the administrative and judicial practices which affect NGOs. It provides advice on how to bring national law and practice into line with Council of Europe standards and European good practice. It has carried out three thematic studies on the conditions for the establishment of NGOs, on the internal governance of NGOs. Its report in 2010 will be on sanctions and liability in respect of NGOs. Through its Expert Council, the Conference of INGOS monitors the implementation of Committee of Ministers' Recommendation (2007)14 to member states on the legal status of NGOs in Europe.

Further information: http://www.coe.int/t/ngo/code_good_prac_en.asp

Civil Society Initiatives and Programmes with partner NGOs

Civil society empowerment remains one of the priorities of the Council of Europe for promoting democratic development and good governance in its members states. Civil society initiatives and co-operation programmes aim at strengthening the role of civil society in a pluralist democracy, in particular to improving relations between NGOs and public authorities.

Tailor-made programmes have been carried out in specific Eastern European countries throughout 2010.

Further information: http://www.coe.int/t/ngo/civ_soc_initiatives_en.asp