



CONFERENCE OF INGOs
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SPRING SESSION 2024

ASSEMBLY II

Votes: Renewal of the Standing Committee and new Committees

As we announced in the report we sent you last month, on April 9 and 10, 2024, the II General Assembly corresponding to the Spring Session took place. The following activities were carried out: 1- votes to configure the new Permanent Commission including the presidency; 2- approval of the new work plans of the committees, as well as the renewal or changes of chairs; 3- meetings with representatives of different bodies of the CoE. On this occasion, they were the Director for Democracy (CDDEM) and the Director of the Service for the Reykjavik Process and the Environment.

1- Vote of President, Vice-Presidents and members of the Standing Committee

A total of 16 candidates were presented for 11 positions: 1 President, 2 Vice-Presidents and 8 Councilors. In the case of the Presidency there was only one candidate, the president of the previous mandate, Gerhard ERMISCHER. His candidacy was ratified almost unanimously (2 abstentions among 96 voting delegates). This strong support from the Assembly as a whole can be partly explained by the positive result of the changes introduced by the Assembly itself in the conditions and mechanisms of operation of the Assembly's working groups. This has led to a notable increase in dynamism and the achievement of observable results.

For the two positions of the vice presidency there were four candidates. A representative of the COMENIUS network (teacher trainers), Geneviève LALOY who was re-elected, and a new member, Piotr SADOWSKI, a prominent active member of the Committee for Social Rights, belonging to the "European Platform for Lifelong Learning", were elected. Both obtained support from the Assembly of around two-thirds of the voters.

Finally, the Permanent Commission had to renew all of its eight positions. For this, 11 candidates were presented. All but one were elected in the first round as they obtained between 50 and 72 votes. Required majority, 48. Following the order of the support received, these were the people elected or re-elected:

72- Ruth ALLEN, (International Federation of Social Workers) re-elected
68- Anna SEVORTIAN, (Civil Society Forum) re-elected
62- Ece CIFTCI, (European Volunteering)
61- Olga SADOWSKAYA, (World Organization against Torture) re-elected
52- Ciaran John KING, (Council of Individual Rights in Europe)
50- Simon MATTHUSSEN, (European Federation of Associations for the Right to Die with dignity) re-elected
50- Goran MILETIC, (Civil Rights Advocate) re-elected
44/62 – Jordanis CHOROZOUGLOU, (European Association of Young Lawyers)

According to President ERMISCHER himself, the combination of repetitions and changes in the new Standing Committee has made it possible to gain balance both in terms of those who ensure the continuity of the work carried out during the previous mandate and in terms of the novelties that have contributed to enriching the diversity of competences and countries of origin.

With regard to the objectives and aspirations recognized by the various candidates in the pre-voting presentation, the majority of those elected agreed on the issues most related to the very functioning of the Conference within the current framework of CoE priorities. In this sense, the most repeated themes were, working for the full achievement of the Reykjavik process, strengthening coordination between the Conference and the different bodies of the CoE or contributing to the protection of threatened NGOs in European countries such as Russia, Belarus, Georgia, Hungary or, to a lesser extent, Poland. Issues more related to the defense of vulnerable people were mentioned more occasionally.

For my part, I regretted that Harry HUMMEL (32 in the first round) was not elected because he was the only candidate to raise two issues that, in my opinion, are extremely relevant and very necessary if we are to improve the effectiveness of the work of the Conference. The first concerned how to impact the actions of the Conference at the national level. And the second, to find new solutions at the level of International Law to be able to work against threats that threaten human rights, the environment or armed conflicts, without losing sight of support for Russian or Belarusian civil society.

At the end of this day, Simon MATHUSSEN sparked a debate that, although brief, was quite intense: the risk of generalized war in Europe and the need to question whether we are correctly managing the institutions and mechanisms that we have given ourselves to maintain peace. In our case, the Conference and the Council of Europe.

Two delegates drew attention to the current circumstances, particularly in the case of the conflicts that most affected Europe. In this sense, one pointed out the absence of interlocutors and the other reminded us that the judicial institutions were already taking measures to be able to act against war crimes. One delegate denounced that we were getting used to talking about all European countries as democratic countries for the mere fact that the practice of voting had become widespread in all of them, but in reality we are still a long way from all of them respecting basic principles such as the independence of the judiciary or the practice of freedom of association or expression.

The president of the conference pointed out that the absence of war does not guarantee peace. In this regard, he stressed the importance of peace being based on law and justice and noted that not all European countries support the values and respect the principles on which democracy and the rule of law are based. In line with this reflection, he concluded by underlining the importance of the work of the conference and organized civil society, whose task is precisely to denounce and highlight the failures in the quality of democracy in each and every one of our countries.

The debate closed with the request of several delegates requesting the new Permanent Commission that, due to the importance of the issue, this debate could be taken up at another time and properly contextualized.

2- Vote for the approval of the Committees' new projects

The last day, Wednesday, April 10, was dedicated almost entirely to the presentation of the new work plans of the Committees. All the projects can be consulted at:

<http://www.coe.int/en/web/ingo/committees>

All the projects presented were approved. Only the Committee for the Defense of Social Rights left pending the presentation of its new project for the Autumn Session. For its part, the Education Committee requested an extension of one year given that the beginning of its journey took place one year after the beginning of the previous mandate. Thus, the committees that have already started the development of the new project are: Migration issues, Artificial intelligence, Children's Rights, Inclusive territories, environment and health, Interreligious dialogue, Sport for all, Women's rights.

Finally, the new Standing Committee announced that at the 2024 Fall Session it will present its new strategic plan for the next three years. In this regard, he has already advanced that he will continue to work on the implementation of the Reykjavik process and that he will try to strengthen collaboration and contacts with national or local NGOs that, although they are not recognized at the Conference, provide experience and direct data on the situation on the ground.

3- Appearance of the heads of CoE bodies

The Director for Democracy, M. Matjaz GRUDEN presented the program of the new Steering Committee (CDDEM) that was born with the express mandate of Reykjavik to work against the setback in the quality of democracy that the dubious practices, increasingly frequent, of a high proportion of CoE member countries are suffering.

He recognized the tensions and progressive deterioration among the member states for whose regeneration it is essential to implement participatory processes

with the participation of Civil Society in general and the Conference, in particular.

In this regard, he underlined the importance of the path already begun with the direct presence of some observers of the Conference collaborating in the work initiated by the new committee. In the same vein, he highlighted the importance of applying the Recommendation for Deliberative Democracy, as one of the strengths of the new program.

The second representative of the CoE was Tanja KLEINSORGE. She is responsible for the Reykjavik process in relation to the environmental issue.

In her presentation she was very open to collaboration. As he told us, they have already drafted a strategy to work in coordination in all countries. This strategy, at that time, was pending approval by the Council of Ministers. If this council did not present insurmountable difficulties, from May 2025 they would try to implement, in all countries simultaneously, the implementation plans foreseen for each case.

She insisted on the convenience of multidisciplinary teams to deal with this type of issue and welcomed the ruling of the Swiss courts of justice which, by agreeing with the collective claim of the platform of older women, were laying the foundations to support the recognition of the right to a healthy environment. He openly showed his commitment to work also from the bodies of the CoE for the recognition of this right.

The session was closed with the communication of some brief announcements and the proposal of the dates of the Autumn Session to be held on 14, 15 and 16 October. The online registration call will be sent to you promptly. Once again, we encourage you to participate.

Pobeña, August 1, 2024

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