

## The President

29 March 2019

Dear Members of the Conference of INGOs,

The current period is crucial for the Council of Europe and for the Conference of INGOs. Dealing with the budgetary crisis, which is above all a political crisis, is a challenge for the Organization. The Russian Federation has not paid its regular contribution to the budget of the Council of Europe since 2016. Furthermore, Turkey decided to end being a major payer and to return to its original status as an ordinary contributor to the Council of Europe. In order to cope with these budget constraints, some restrictive budgetary measures have been already implemented and even larger measures are being considered by the Secretary General and the Committee of Ministers which will impact the work and capacity of the Council of Europe regarding its activities in standard-setting, monitoring and co-operation. If some sectors of activities are interrupted due to the lack of resources, the Council of Europe will not be able to promote a holistic approach to human rights, democracy and rule of law which has applied until now.

In this year of the celebration of the 70th anniversary of the Council of Europe, I strongly encourage you, INGOs, to show your commitment to the Council of Europe.

The new Secretary General of the Council of Europe, who will be elected in June 2019 by the Parliamentary Assembly, will face a major challenge in consolidating and strengthening the Organisation's mission, resources and priorities. I hope that the Conference of INGOs will have the honour and pleasure to meet the candidates for the election of the next Secretary General at an exchange of views at our plenary meeting on 10 April 2019 from 17.00 to 18.00.

The Council of Europe reform process initiated by the Committee of Ministers during the Ministerial session in Denmark in May 2018 will continue during two successive presidencies of the Committee of Ministers: Finland and France. We will have the honor to welcome the Ambassador of France who will present the priorities of the future French Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers

On the occasion of the 70th Anniversary of the Organisation, the Republic of Poland initiated a debate in order to reflect on and to further develop the role of (I)NGOs in the Council of Europe. On the one hand, interactions with (I)NGOs should be considered as an opportunity for the Council of Europe to develop accountable policies. On the other hand, the participatory status constitutes an important possibility for INGOs to influence the high-level decision-making processes. However, there is no single vision of how these interactions should be structured and organised. The event organised by the Conference of INGOs on 27 February to mark World NGO Day opened the debate for upcoming important meetings (Warsaw Conference, April session of the Conference of INGOs and the session of the Committee of Ministers in Helsinki in

May 2019) which may bring existential decisions for the Conference of INGOs. You will find attached the conclusions and recommendations formulated after the event of 27 February.

More strongly than ever the Conference of INGOs must show its capacity to overcome these challenges, meet the Council of Europe standards and requirements, strengthen its accountability and good governance and most importantly be more effective to create a greater impact. We will have the opportunity to prove our capacity when the new Code of Conduct (sent to you on 4 March 2019) is adopted.

You will also receive information about the on-going work conducted by the Drafting Group in charge of proposals regarding the Rules of Procedure or other statutory provisions. Thank you to everyone who took part in the consultation on the regulatory framework that was launched on 26 October 2018. If you have not seen it yet, the Preliminary Report has been online since 6 February.

The agenda of the whole session is continuously updated and you can find it on the web site <https://www.coe.int/en/web/ingo/april-2019>.

In this tense climate, we should not forget that the Conference of INGOs exists because of you, our projects and experiences which connect us to each other with one purpose: to implement and protect human rights for all, exercise democracy and respect the rule of law.

The Bureau has created a blog for the Conference of INGOs to share experiences, projects or initiatives of all members. In this way you can share information with people who have subscribed to the blog. You can send your article via this link <https://www.surveymonkey.de/r/6HH9VGM>

In these difficult times, we remain hopeful and more than ever dedicated. I would like to thank you and also INGO-Service for the support which has allowed for the first time to do an open call for youth delegates. This will encourage young people and youth organisations to participate and rejuvenate the Conference and bring a new impetus to our current and future projects.

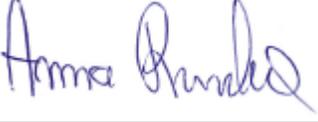
We also invite you to share a friendly moment of informal exchange during the dinner for INGOs organised by INGO-Service on Thursday, 11 April 2019 at 8 pm. In order to organise the evening, please confirm your presence before 3 April by email to [heleenja.ingo-service@orange.fr](mailto:heleenja.ingo-service@orange.fr).

The Board of INGO-Service is made up of motivated people and they will have an information stand during the session to meet you and to discuss how you can support them. INGO-Service has accepted to take on more work and support even more the activities of the Conference of INGOs and in this tense climate please do not forget to show your support and pay your annual subscription.

We have many reasons to be proud of the achievements made by the Conference of INGOs for more than 40 years. These successes and experiences give us the strength and motivation to continue bringing the voice of national and international civil society and to represent it in the Council of Europe. This cannot be achieved without the Council of Europe Civil Society Division and people devoted to reinforcing the presence of INGOs in the Council of Europe.

The members of the Standing Committee and I are full of enthusiasm and confidence and look forward to seeing you in a few weeks!

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "Anna Rurka", enclosed in a thin black rectangular border. The signature is written in a cursive style.

Anna Rurka