

Madam Chairman,
Ladies and gentleman,

I am for the first time in Russia, for the first time in Moscow, and it is very pleasant to compare reality with the thoughts I had of it from books, TV, and discussions with people coming from here.

Speaking of democratic culture is not easy because democracy is the government of everybody, for everybody, by everybody (Theodore Parker, 1850) and everyone knows that trainers in seminars on leadership always say: everyone is thinking “I feel good, I feel all right, but all the others are so-so” “, and the democratic soup is not easy to taste good, and keep all the flavor for everybody, in these conditions.

But, maybe, it is easier to speak of what is done by the International nongovernmental organizations of the Council of Europe, because this institution is particularly suited to the blooming of democratic culture.

I shall successively speak of:

- The role of the Council of Europe
- The place of INGO in it
- The work of the committee

I chair: Culture, Science, and Education

I. Council of Europe

“The aim of the council of Europe is to achieve a greater unity between its members...” art.1 of the C.E.

Following the Second World War, and the thoughts of people like Winston Churchill, the Council of Europe was founded in 1949. The Council of Europe seeks to develop throughout Europe common and democratic principles based on the European Convention on Human Rights and other reference texts on the protection of individuals.

Member States

The Council of Europe has a genuine pan-European dimension:

- 47 member countries
- 1 applicant country: Belarus; Belarus ' special guest status has been suspended due to its lack of respect for human rights and democratic principles.

The aims are

- to protect human rights, pluralist democracy and the rule of law;
- to promote awareness and encourage the development of Europe's cultural identity and diversity
- to find common solutions to the challenges facing European society: such as discrimination against minorities, xenophobia, intolerance, bioethics and cloning, terrorism, trafficking in human beings, organized crime and corruption, cybercrime, violence against children;

- to consolidate democratic stability in Europe by backing political, legislative and constitutional reform.

The current Council of Europe's political mandate was defined by the third Summit of Heads of State and Government, held in Warsaw in May 2005.

How it works

The main component parts of the Council of Europe are:

- the **Committee of Ministers**, the Organization's decision-making body, composed of the 47 Foreign Ministers or their Strasbourg-based deputies (ambassadors/permanent representatives);
- the Parliamentary Assembly, driving force for European co-operation, grouping 636 members (318 representatives and 318 substitutes) from the 47 national parliaments;
- the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, the voice of Europe's regions and municipalities, composed of a Chamber of Local Authorities and a Chamber of Regions;
- the I.N.G.O (400) with representative statute.
- the 1800-strong secretariat recruited from member states, headed by a Secretary General, elected by the Parliamentary Assembly;

Official languages

English and French are the Council of Europe's two official languages. German, Italian and Russian are also working languages.

II. Place of International Nongovernmental Organizations in the Council of Europe

Independent non-governmental organizations are a vital component of European society, guaranteeing freedom of expression and association, both of which are fundamental to democracy.

Recognizing their influence, the Council of Europe provides international NGOs (INGOs) with the opportunity to acquire participatory status.

The participative status gives INGO a weight they do not have in any other international institution.

Independent non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are a vital component of European society, guaranteeing freedom of expression and association both of which are fundamental to democracy.

The Council of Europe recognized their influence as early as 1952 when it gave international NGOs the opportunity to acquire consultative status. This Resolution has been replaced by Resolution (2003)8 on participatory status which was adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 19 November 2003.

A link with the public

The Council initiated dialogue with NGOs to meet a three-fold need:

- to know the views and aspirations of European citizens;
- to provide direct representation for them;
- to publicize its own activities through these associations. More than 400 now hold participatory status.

In order to obtain participatory status an NGO must fulfill the following criteria:

- it must share the Council of Europe's aims and contribute to its work;
- it must be international and representative, both geographically and in its sphere of activity, with permanent headquarters, a structured organization and a secretary general.

Active participation

The Council of Europe co-operates with NGOs in all bodies of its organizational structure. Co-operation takes many forms, from simple consultation to full-scale collaboration on specific projects.

A wide-ranging field of action

NGOs enjoying participatory status have set up specialist committees within their own organizational structure. These committees deal with the following areas:

- Human Rights Committee,
- Culture, Science and Education Committee,
- Civil Society and Democracy Committee,
- Social Cohesion and Eradication of Poverty Committee,
- Sustainable Territorial Development Committee,
- Gender Equality Transversal Group,
- Europe and Global Challenges Transversal Group.

Practical involvement

NGOs have been involved in the preparation and drawing up of many of the Council of Europe's conventions and charters, including the following:

- the European Convention on the Legal Status of Migrant Workers;
- the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture;
- the European Cultural Convention;

- the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages;
- the European Convention on the Recognition of the Legal Personality of International Non-Governmental Organizations; an international instrument to facilitate NGO activities at international level.

NGOs have a very important role to play in promoting the signature and ratification of the European Convention on the recognition of the legal personality of international non-governmental organizations (ETS No. 124).

This convention is to date the only international normative instrument in force relating to NGOs, and is vital to regulate the operation of NGOs all over Europe, especially in those European countries where often an effective legal framework is lacking.

On this subject, particularly important in Russia, the INGOs are working on the very concrete object of defining what is the statute of an NGO that should be authorized in every European country, and voted for a recommendation pushing for a better open-mindedness of certain countries on registration of local NGO (annex 1).

Council of Europe's participative NGOs are also reacting on actuality subjects like the Geneva Conference (Durban 2) on racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance, to prevent the same issue as in Durban 1 (annex 2).

There are significant examples of co-operation.

Useful advice

NGOs can provide useful advice or even legal representation for individuals or groups of individuals who wish to bring complaints before the European Court of Human Rights. In certain circumstances, NGOs can be invited to provide information to the Court who contributes to the analysis of issues raised. Under the European Convention on Human Rights as amended by Protocol 11, Article 36(2) explicitly provides for third party interventions from "any person concerned who is not the applicant" at the invitation of the President of the Court.

As far as NGOs and the European Social Charter are concerned, the Protocol providing for a system of collective complaints came into force on 1 July 1998 in ratifying states. This procedure entitles international NGOs enjoying participatory status and included in a special list, amongst other organizations, to lodge collective complaints with the European Committee of Social Rights alleging violations of the Charter.

NGOs regularly send information about conditions of detention and imprisonment to the European Committee for the Prevention of Torture (CPT), especially in connection with visits it undertakes.

Furthermore, NGOs take an active part in major conferences, colloquies and seminars organized by the Council of Europe, contributing in their respective fields of excellence.

Mobilizing public opinion

The Council of Europe's essential mission is to promote human rights and fundamental freedoms and NGOs fulfill an invaluable role in this respect by advising citizens on their rights, relaying information and, above all, making sure that basic commitments are respected.

Constructive role in democratic development

Since 1990, the Council of Europe has multiplied its contacts with NGOs in central and Eastern Europe, where they are crucial to the building of a democratic society based on human rights and the rule of law.

The Council of Europe and NGOs enjoying participatory status continue to organize activities in the framework of the Assistance Program on issues of concern to NGOs, for example, the setting up of a legal and fiscal framework, media, minorities, human rights, etc.

III. Culture, Science, Education Committee:

It is easy to understand that the work of our INGO Committee on these subjects is so large that we have to choose specific themes, and find the way to comprehend them, and to get concrete results that are useful.

Around 180 organizations are members of our Committee.

We have 4 full sessions during the year. This year, we chose to work more specifically on these points:

- Access for all to digital media, their contents and their use
- Education of democratic citizenship, and human rights
- Education and health
- Multi-perspective education of history
- Teacher's profession in the 21st Century
- Higher education organization in Europe
- Inclusive dimension in education
- Intercultural dialog
- Identity of Europe
- Religious dimension within the intercultural dialog
- Science, society and ethics (Nina Belyaeva is in charge)
- Human rights universality

Groups of interested NGOs work between two sessions on the subjects which are finalized during the sessions.

Subjects are chosen to fit the needs of the council of Europe authorities, the demands of different NGOs, and of our own thinking during the plenary sessions.

But with the 4th "Pillar" of the Council of Europe, we participate in different structures of it.

I would mention in particular our participation in the steering committees of the Council of Europe with all the representatives of the 47 nations members of the Council.

As it concerns our committee, I represent it on three steering committees:

- Education
- Higher education and research
- Culture

For example the council of Europe is one of the main leader organizations in unifying higher education in Europe if not the main one. The way it works, by persuasion, recommendations, and consensus is very efficient, probably more than the obligations of the European Union, and the reactions of "subsidiarity" put forward by the different states.

Concerning higher education, many important European conventions were signed and ratified by most of the countries:

- European convention on equivalency of diplomas (1953)
- European convention on academic recognition of university qualifications (1956)
- Lisbon convention on recognition of qualifications in higher education in Europe (1997). This last one is the cornerstone of a European higher education area.
- ...

The Council of Europe has done a lot in rationalizing:

- language learning
- and learning on :
 - Human rights
 - Democracy
 - Citizenship

It has shown also its efficiency in the different work groupings of the Bologna Process. For example, it is in charge of the quality insurance grouping.

All together, the Council of Europe is a place where NGOs like to participate. It is a unique organization in the world where money is not the first driving force, where you feel humanity at its best, but still in close contact with the reality of our world, and don't forget that Human rights, democracy and citizenship are beautiful but delicate flowers. As a Russian proverb says:
A tamed wolf always dreams of the forest.

Thank you.

Dr Edouard JAGODNIK
Chair
Committee of Culture, Science, Education INGOs
Council of Europe