



OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting
Warsaw, 24 September – 5 October 2012
Working Session 3: Fundamental Freedoms
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 international NGOs with the opportunity to acquire participatory status.

The Conference of International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) is the collective body of the some 370 INGOs enjoying participatory status with the Council of Europe. Through this status INGOs are 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 and this is reflected in its main initiatives and activities. Two initiatives of the Conference of INGOs are of particular relevance for an enabling environment for NGOs:

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. The Code of Good Practice defines 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 being used by NGOs and public authorities and is available in 19 languages.

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

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 studies on themes such as the conditions for the establishment of NGOs, on the internal governance of NGOs and on sanctions and liability in respect of NGOs. More recently, when the need arises, it has been preparing opinions on particular problems facing NGOs in specific countries. 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/expert_council_en.asp

