



CONFERENCE OF INGOs
OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

CONFERENCE DES OING DU
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

CONF/2009/RAPACT

ACTIVITY REPORT 2009

OF THE CONFERENCE OF INGOs

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. The Conference of INGOs	3
1. Promoting the Council of Europe's fundamental values.....	3
2. Fostering civil society in Europe.....	3
3. Strengthening the political and institutional presence of the Conference of INGOs.....	5
II. Committees on specific themes	7
1. The Civil Society and Democracy Committee	7
2. The Culture, Science and Education Committee.....	8
3. The Human Rights Committee.....	9
4. The Social Cohesion and Eradication of Poverty Committee.....	10
5. The Sustainable Territorial Development Committee.....	12
III. The Transversal Groups	15
1. The Europe and Global Challenges Transversal Group.....	15
2. The Gender Equality Transversal Group.....	16
IV. The adopted texts	18

I. THE CONFERENCE OF INGOs

In 2009, the Conference of INGOs focused on three main aspects of its activities:

1. Promoting the Council of Europe's fundamental values
2. Fostering civil society in Europe
3. Strengthening the political and institutional presence of the Conference of INGOs

1. Promoting the Council of Europe's fundamental values

- a) Supporting human rights defenders
 - b) Preventing and fighting violence against women and domestic violence
 - c) Promoting dialogue and preventing conflicts
- a) Supporting human rights defenders: at the January 2009 session, the Conference of INGOs adopted a Recommendation on the protection of human rights defenders in the Russian Federation, underlining the invaluable importance of personal engagement in the defence of human rights and the rule of law and the threats under which numerous human rights defenders are working in the Russian Federation. The adopted text also calls for closer co-operation with the Commissioner for Human Rights. Following an exchange of views with the Commissioner for Human Rights in April 2009, this co-operation took the concrete shape of a joint round table on human rights defenders (Kyiv, 17-18 September 2009);
- b) Preventing and fighting violence against women: the Conference continued to contribute to the work of the ad hoc Committee on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (CAHVIO) and, in January 2009, adopted a Recommendation on the proposed Council of Europe convention in this field. This text recommends that the Committee of Ministers cover in the future convention all forms of gender-based violence wherever it takes place, and also include in the future convention an independent monitoring mechanism to keep legislation under constant review and continue to reform it in the light of new information and understanding;
- c) Promoting dialogue and preventing conflicts: bearing in mind the positive and complementary role that civil society and NGOs can play in post-conflict situations, in February 2009 the Conference of INGOs held a round table in Strasbourg that was attended by NGOs from the regions affected by the conflict that took place in Georgia in August 2008. The "Strasbourg Dialogue" provides the basis for a dynamic platform for enabling and facilitating practical exchanges and co-operation between NGOs in the region, addressing humanitarian issues and strengthening democracy and human rights.

2. Fostering civil society in Europe

- a) Preparing practical tools – Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process

Following a recommendation drawn up at the meeting of the Council of Europe Forum for the Future of Democracy in June 2007, the Conference of INGOs has begun drafting a Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process. The main aim of the Code is to identify a set of European principles and guidelines for NGOs' participation in the decision-making process at local, regional and national levels in Council of Europe member states.

Prior to its adoption, the draft Code gave rise to a series of consultations with national NGOs (in Istanbul and Strasbourg). The Conference of INGOs also consulted the

Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, who welcomed the drafting of a practical tool of this type.

The Conference of INGOs also forwarded the draft Code to the Committee of Ministers, which gave its backing to the project at its 1068th meeting on 20-21 October 2009, by adopting a declaration. This declaration acknowledges the importance of the Code, both as a Council of Europe reference text and as a basis for citizens' involvement in public affairs in European countries. The Committee of Ministers calls on "governments, parliaments, local and regional authorities in the member states to take due account of the Code of Good Practice on Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process, when developing NGO participation in the decision-making process and when drawing up and implementing e-tools, capacity-building activities, structures and framework agreements for co-operation between NGOs and public authorities."

The Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process was adopted by the Conference of INGOs on 1 October 2009 and officially presented at the Forum for the Future of Democracy in Kyiv on 21 October 2009.

The Conference of INGOs held an international conference on civil participation in Europe in Ljubljana in November 2009, in the context of the Slovenian chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers. The conference was attended by NGOs and representatives of public authorities in South-East Europe and neighbouring countries. The discussions concerned mainly the Code of Good Practice. Speakers gave concrete examples of co-operation between NGOs and governments and mentioned measures which the Conference of INGOs could take to facilitate the use of the Code in relations between NGOs and the authorities.

b) Creating an enabling environment for NGOs – Expert Council on NGO Law

The Expert Council on NGO Law, which was set up in January 2008, is an independent body answerable to the Conference of INGOs and specifically charged with monitoring the implementation of Recommendation (2007)14 of the Committee of Ministers on the legal status of NGOs in Europe. Its terms of reference include helping to create an enabling environment for NGOs throughout Europe by examining national NGO law and its implementation and promoting its compatibility with Council of Europe standards and European good practice.

In 2009, following its initial study in 2008 on conditions for setting up NGOs, the Expert Council undertook a second thematic report on internal NGO governance. The report covers issues such as the scope of self governance, supervision and intervention by public authorities, responsible conduct and transparency, management and decision-making procedures. It was presented at the October 2009 session of the Conference of INGOs and the five studies it contains (on Armenia, Ireland, Luxembourg, Moldova and "The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia") were finalised during 2009.

Also in October 2009, the European Committee on Legal Co-operation held an exchange of views with the Chair of the Expert Council on the progress made in implementing Recommendation (2007)14 in Council of Europe member states.

Members of the Expert Council also took part in international conferences on NGO legislation, such as the one held in Moscow in April 2009 by the "International Centre for Not-for-profit Law".

c) Taking action in member states:

The Conference continued to support civil society in Belarus. Representatives of civil society continued to make study visits to Belarus throughout 2009 and the Conference of INGOs took an active part in the activities set up under the aegis of the Council of

Europe's action plan in support of Belarus, for example at the meeting of the Communication Platform for Civil Society held in Vilnius in April, and at a meeting of the heads of Belarusian NGOs which took place in Strasbourg in April.

The Conference of INGOs conducted several activities in the context of its Three-Year Framework Co-operation Programme (2008-2011) on "Strengthening Civil Society and Civic Participation in the Russian Federation" in partnership with various civil society actors in Russia. The meetings in the Russian Federation mainly concerned NGO legislation (April), women's role in conflict resolution (May), the elimination of poverty (October) and freedom of association (November).

3. Strengthening the political and institutional presence of the Conference of INGOs

a) Ensuring the full implementation of the reform adopted in 2008

In 2009 the five new committees and the two new transversal groups of the Conference of INGOs identified their priorities and activities in the context of the reform adopted in October 2008. New working methods were established to bring the structures of the Conference of INGOs more into line with the remainder of the organisation and to improve co-operation with the other pillars.

b) Strengthening partnership with the other pillars of the Council of Europe and its operational directorates

The Conference of INGOs continued to strengthen its relations within the framework of the "quadrilogue" (concerted action by governments, parliamentarians, local and regional authorities and civil society within the Council of Europe). The President of the Conference of INGOs attended the 119th session of the Committee of Ministers (Madrid, May 2009). The Ministers' Deputies also held an exchange of views with the President of the Conference of INGOs on 10 June. This annual exchange of views provides the opportunity for the Ministers' Deputies to take stock of the activities and main results achieved by the Conference of INGOs.

Lluís-Maria de Puig, President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, addressed the Conference of INGOs on 1 October 2009, and made particular reference to the implementation of Resolution 1589 on co-operation with the Conference of INGOs, adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly in 2007. The fruitful co-operation between the committees of the Parliamentary Assembly and the committees and transversal groups of the Conference of INGOs continued in 2009.

Ulrich Bohner, Secretary General of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, addressed the Committee on Sustainable Territorial Development at its meeting on 30 September 2009.

As in 2008, the Conference of INGOs continued to be fully involved in Council of Europe, flagship projects such as the aforementioned Forum for the Future of Democracy, the Strategy for Innovation and Good Governance at Local Level, of which the Conference of INGOs is a member of the Stakeholders Platform, and the Second Council of Europe Exchange on the Religious Dimension of Intercultural Dialogue held in Strasbourg on 29 and 30 June 2009.

The Conference of INGOs also stepped up its relations with the Council of Europe's North-South Centre by preparing a joint co-operation agreement, which is to be submitted for adoption at its plenary meeting on 27 January 2010.

Finally, the Conference of INGOs continued to give civil society's support to the main Council of Europe intergovernmental steering committees.

c) Strengthening external partnerships

The Conference of INGOs pays special attention to establishing and maintaining dialogue with other European and international organisations, in particular the bodies representing civil society. Relations with the European Union, in particular the Fundamental Rights Platform of the Fundamental Rights Agency of which the Conference of INGOs is a member, have continued in particular on the occasion of the second meeting of the platform in Vienna on 5-6 May 2009 and should be further strengthened. In 2009, for the first time, the Conference of INGOs welcomed a delegation from the French-speaking Conference of INGOs of the *Organisation internationale de la Francophonie* for an exchange of views.

Finally, the Conference of INGOs gave its support to the action of the United Nations in favour of people with disabilities by adopting a Recommendation on 'The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities' on 29 April 2009. In this Recommendation, the Conference of INGOs calls on the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly to make sure that all member states sign and ratify this convention, which came into force on 3 May 2008, as soon as possible.

II. COMMITTEES ON SPECIFIC THEMES

Note: The elements provided below have been prepared by the Chairs of the thematic committees.

1. **The Civil Society and Democracy Committee** (Chair : Antonella Valmorbida ; Vice-Chair : Veysel Filiz)

Ongoing activities:

Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-making Process

- Regional consultations in Istanbul and Strasbourg;
- Approval of the Code by the Conference of INGOs on 1 October 2009 ;
- Development and discussion on the implementation phase (Ljubljana Conference in November 2009).

Support to the European Local Democracy Week (ELDW)

- Exchanges of information on the opportunities of the ELDW ;
- Involvement of NGOs and local authorities ;
- Participation in the preparatory meetings.

Participation in the Forum for the Future of Democracy (Kyiv, 21-23 October 2009) on "electoral systems : strengthening democracy in the 21st century"

- Elaboration and promotion of the work of the Conference of INGOs in the preparatory phase.

Support to civil society in Belarus

- Regular meetings with civil society representatives from Belarus during the sessions of the Conference of INGOs.

Participation in the 3-year (2008-2011) Framework Co-operation Programme on "strengthening civil society and civic participation in the Russian Federation"

- Participation in the meeting on NGO legislation in Moscow.

Networking with other platforms dealing with civil society and democracy

- Information on the 'Association Civisme et Démocratie' (CIDEM) and the platform of the programme 'Europe for Citizens' of the European Union ;
- Information on the Council of Europe Strategy on Innovation and Good Governance at local level, and subsequent work with the Council of Europe.

Proposed regional meetings of the Civil Society and Democracy Committee

- Organisation of possible meetings (postponed to 2010).

Work on methodologies of consultation of citizens and evaluation of the work of the committee

- Question to be followed up in 2010.

2. Committee on Culture, Science and Education (Chair: Edouard Jagodnik; Vice-Chair: Sabine Rohmann)

The Committee on Culture, Science and Education has distributed its work among three sub-committees: culture – science – education. The Committee members have chosen twelve priority themes which have been shared by the three sub-committees.

Topics being dealt with by the Sub-Committee on Culture

- Sub-Group on “intercultural dialogue”: in progress;
- Sub-Group on the “religious dimension in intercultural dialogue”: a draft glossary is being prepared;
- Sub-Group on “European Identity”: taking stock of existing work;
- Sub-Group on “the universality of human rights”: initially a joint working group of the Committee on Culture, Science and Education and the Human Rights Committee. The Forum on the Universality of Human Rights”, to be held in Oslo on 21 and 22 October 2010, is now the responsibility of the INGOs Standing Committee. It will be organised in co-operation with the *European Wergeland Centre* in Oslo and preparations have commenced.

Topics being dealt with by the Sub-Committee on Science

- Sub-Group on “science, society and ethics”. Three issues are currently being addressed: young researchers and human rights, the relationship between science and ethics and the inclusion of human rights and the importance of democracy in teaching programmes. At least one of these themes should be finalised by April 2010.

Topics being dealt with by the Sub-Committee on Education

- Sub-Group on “education for democratic citizenship and human rights”: in progress;
- Sub-Group on “multi-perspectivity in history teaching”: culmination and end of the programme in 2010. The final report will be prepared for a symposium to be held in November 2010;
- Sub-Group on “the inclusive dimension of education”: in progress;
- Sub-Group on “education and health”: in progress. Initial conclusions in the first quarter of 2010;
- Sub-Group on “higher education and research”: report on the autonomy of universities submitted to DG4 (Directorate General of Education, Culture and Heritage, Youth and Sport), Department of Higher Education. The Group still has to clarify a number of further points;
- Sub-Group on “The teaching profession in the 21st Century”: Needs will have to be analysed over the coming months with a view to preparing guidelines for discussions on the future of the teaching profession in the 21st Century. The Committee hopes that the guidelines will be available in 2011.
- Sub-Group on “access of all to digital media”: should begin its activities in January 2010. A round table will be held in autumn 2010.

Other business

- Publication of the Committee's new internal newsletter to improve communication;
- Participation by the Chair, the Vice-Chair, the former chair and different members of the Committee in various committees, conferences and events relating to the topics being dealt with by the Committee.

3. Human Rights Committee (Chair: Gabriel Nissim; Vice-Chair: Brigitte Kahn)

In 2009, members of the Human Rights Committee represented the Conference of INGOs on Council of Europe steering committees and subordinate bodies in the field of human rights: the Steering Committee for Human Rights (CDDH), Committee of Experts on Issues relating to the Protection of National Minorities (DH-MIN), Working Group on the Reform of the European Court of Human Rights (GT-S-GDR), European Committee of Social Rights (CEDS), Steering Committee on the Media and New Communication Services (CDMC).

Religions and human rights

The Committee set up a working group on "religions and human rights" to address the following issues:

- The universality of human rights and cultural and religious diversity
- Freedom of expression vs. freedom of conscience
- Women's rights and religion
- Human rights, sexuality and religions
- Religions and cultures
- Relations between States and religions, secularity.

These themes will be studied from five different angles: personal, social, political, legal and professional.

Social Charter, economic and social rights

The Committee set up a working group on the Social Charter, economic and social rights, which led it to:

- support Recommendation CONF/PLE(2009)REC7 proposed to and adopted by the Conference of INGOs on 29 April 2009, encouraging Council of Europe member states to ratify the United Nations Convention on the Rights of People with Disabilities;
- hold a joint working session on the revised European Social Charter with the Conference of INGOs' Committee on Social Cohesion and Eradication of Poverty, with the assistance of the Head of the Department of the European Social Charter and Executive Secretary of the European Committee of Social Rights.

Human rights defenders

The Human Rights Committee monitored the human rights situation in a number of European countries through the recent activities of the Observatory for the Protection of Human Rights Defenders, a joint programme of the International Federation of Human Rights Leagues (FIDH) and the World Organisation against Torture (OMCT) and through those of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights.

On 22 June 2009 it adopted Resolution CONF/HR(2009)RES1, calling on the President of Lithuania not to sign “the Law on the Protection of Minors against the Detrimental Effect of Public Information” because of its homophobic content.

Children and human rights

The Committee supported the World Appeal to a New Mobilization for Childhood launched by the International Catholic Child Bureau (BICE) to mark the 20th anniversary of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and recommended that the Conference of INGOs also support the appeal. It set up a working group on “children and human rights” and sponsored the “Build a Human Rights House for me” event in Strasbourg, which was attended by some 300 European children.

Durban Review Conference against racism and discrimination

The Committee drew up Recommendation CONF/PLE(2009)REC4 on the Durban Review Conference “to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance” for the attention of the organisers and participants in the Durban II Conference, which took place in Geneva from 20 to 24 April 2009. This Recommendation was adopted by the Conference of INGOs on 28 January 2009. The Committee subsequently oversaw the preparations, the holding and the conclusions of the Conference.

Ministerial Conference on the Media and New Communication Services

The Committee attended the preparatory Forum for the Ministerial Conference on the Media and New Communication Services, whose purpose was to prepare civil society’s contributions to the conference. It organised the participation of several NGO representatives to the ministerial conference, which was held in Reykjavik on 28 and 29 May 2009. It subsequently decided to address the subject of media education.

4. The Social Cohesion and Eradication of Poverty Committee (Chair : Irene Donadio ; Vice-Chair : Antonina Dashkina)

In 2009, the Social Cohesion and Eradication of Poverty Committee focused on a number of priority areas: participation of the most vulnerable groups in a democratic society, the Council of Europe Action Plan on social cohesion, poverty and human rights, family issues, health, gender-based violence as well as the ratification and implementation of Article 30 of the European Social Charter.

Achievements:

The voice of the Conference of INGOs has been represented in several ministerial conferences and in seminars and working groups organised by the Council of Europe. Contacts have been established and co-operation has developed with the relevant actors of the Council of Europe and the European Union.

Co-operation with the other pillars of the Council of Europe and in particular the Directorate General of Social Cohesion has allowed for:

- Co-operation with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities;
- Participation of a delegation of the Committee in the first **Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Social Cohesion** in Moscow, February 2009, in which we emphasised the importance of the ratification of the Social Charter (revised), in partnership with civil society, and of using the economic crisis as an

opportunity to mobilise support and resources for the growing needs in the social sphere;

- Participation in the Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Family Affairs in Vienna, June 2009, for which we drafted, adopted and presented a position paper on family issues. This paper has been taken into consideration for the Parliamentary Assembly report on 'Investing in family cohesion as a development factor in times of crisis' currently drafted by the Rapporteur, Mr Luca Volontè;
- On 24 June, the Standing Committee of the Conference of INGOs approved the Recommendation CONF/SOC(2009)REC1 on "Public policies supporting the wish to have children: societal, economic and personal factors" that was prepared by the Social Cohesion and Eradication of Poverty Committee ;
- Participation in the Council of Europe Steering Committee on Social Cohesion (CDCS) meeting in May and exchange of views on the Action Plan for Social Cohesion with representatives of member states;
- Participation in the European Health Committee (CDSP) in October and exchange of views with representatives of member states;
- Preparation of a position paper and a recommendation by the joint working group on 'poverty, human rights and the financial crisis' with the Human Rights Committee of the Conference of INGOs. The recommendation CONF/PLE(2009)REC8 on "Combating poverty" - which promotes an action plan on poverty and human rights, for 2011 – 2021 - was adopted by the Conference of INGOs on 1 October;
- Participation in the Council of Europe expert group on "Empowerment of people experiencing extreme poverty" ;
- Adoption of a set of Recommendations on "Health prevention policy in the member states of the Council of Europe" as a contribution to the report under preparation by the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly;
- Participation in the Council of Europe seminar "At work but poor and without a voice", Malta, September 2009, and facilitation of a session of the seminar devoted to methodologies of participation of people experiencing poverty;
- Advocacy and declaration against the discriminatory provisions on the LGBT community included in the new legislation on the "Protection of minors against detrimental effect of public information" in Lithuania;
- Study tour and participation in the third international Forum of social workers of Siberia and the Far-East: "Social work in the 21st Century: infrastructure, innovations, investment" (Republic of Altai, Russian Federation) to reflect on poverty and ethnic minorities issues.

Furthermore the regular work of the Committee entails:

- Ongoing work on the International Day to Overcome Poverty - 17 October – and preparatory work for the 2010 European Union Year for Combating Poverty and Social Exclusion : information, events, contacts with the European Union;
- Regular exchange of views with the Council of Europe Directorate General of Social Cohesion and in particular with the Directorate of Social Affairs and Health;

- Ongoing work and co-operation with the Human Rights Committee on the implementation of the Social Charter and with the Gender Equality Transversal Group, in particular as regards the proposed Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence;
- Follow-up of the advocacy work on the Guiding Principles on 'Extreme Poverty and Human Rights: the rights of the poor' elaborated by the United Nations Human Rights Council;
- Follow up of the expert group on 'Empowerment of people experiencing extreme poverty'.

5. Committee on Sustainable Territorial Development (Chair: Anne-Marie Chavanon; Vice-Chair: Georg Mäschtig)

The number of international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) with participatory status which are also members of the Committee on Sustainable Territorial Development has increased from approximately 60 to 80 since the Committee was set up in October 2008. These include associations of elected representatives, associations specialising in sustainable territorial development and NGOs with humanitarian aims. The Committee's activities took the form of four sessions held in Strasbourg, working group meetings in Paris, teleconferences, active participation in events organised by the Conference of INGOs and the other Council of Europe pillars in Bern, Eupen, Kyiv, Ljubljana, Liège, Malmö, Strasbourg, Paris and Utrecht.

The Committee's main areas of activity

In 2009 there were three main areas of activity:

Environment and health (winter and summer sessions of the Conference of INGOs)

- The Committee gave its backing to the report on "Environment and health: better prevention of environment-related health hazards", adopted by the Parliamentary Assembly on 13 March 2009 after hearing Jean Huss, Assembly rapporteur address it on this subject. It prepared and adopted a declaration - CONF/TER(2009)DEC1 - on this theme, which was approved by the Standing Committee of the Conference of INGOs;
- After hearing José Mendes Bota, member of the Parliamentary Assembly, present his report on an additional protocol to the European Convention on Human Rights on the right to a healthy environment, the Committee supported the report until Parliamentary Assembly adopted Recommendation 1885(2009) on the subject on 30 September 2009;
- The Committee addressed the issue of substandard housing, the way it is perceived in Council of Europe member states and what they have done to solve the problem. The initial results, presented in July 2009 in the form of a summary report, highlight the wide range of approaches taken in the different member states and by local and regional authorities to deal with substandard housing and the need to channel the efforts of all public and private partners into tackling this growing cause of exclusion;
- The Committee set up two working groups on the subject of the environment and health: one on water and health and the other on indoor pollution.

Governance and participation in the decision-making process (spring and autumn sessions of the Conference of INGOs)

- The Committee identified the tools and examples of good governance in the fields of sustainable development by holding two working sessions, the highlights of which were round tables addressed by high-level officials from all of the Council of Europe's main bodies (Committee of Ministers, Parliamentary Assembly, Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and the Conference of INGOS), the UN (Secretary General of the Aarhus Convention), local authorities and national and European NGOs conducting exemplary activities.
- It gave its backing to the Strategy for Innovation and Good Governance at local level - the Conference of INGOs is a member of the Stakeholders Platform - and to the Council of Europe Good Governance Quality Label..
- It also supported the Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process drawn up and adopted by the Conference of INGOs.
- It approved a text on participative democracy in the fields of sustainable development.

Biodiversity: (summer and autumn sessions of the Conference of INGOs)

- Establishment of a working group to prepare a scientific day common to the three pillars representing European citizens (Parliamentary Assembly, Congress and Conference of INGOs) during the Spring 2010 session (adoption of a text expressing common commitment, drafting of files for the public, organisation of an exhibition and an activity to coincide with the session, with the City of Strasbourg and various other partners);
- Preparation and dissemination of a biodiversity observation paper.

Climate change – Copenhagen Summit: supporting and assisting the action of the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress: support expressed at different debates relating to this event held by each of these bodies and online on the Internet site of the Committee on Sustainable Territorial Development.

Participation in the panel for the European Landscape Prize – the Secretary General of the Council of Europe appointed the Committee Chair to represent the NGOs;

Participation and contribution to the work of the other pillars

- **Parliamentary Assembly:** participation in the meetings of the Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs, held in Strasbourg and Paris, and in the colloquy held in Strasbourg, in September 2009, on the theme *Green Business*; providing expert opinions and support for a number of reports; presentation of an opinion on the Committee's report on *Climate change and biodiversity*.
- **Congress of Local and Regional Authorities:** participation in the meetings of the Sustainable Development Committee. Participation in a workshop in Eupen (Belgium) on tourism;
- **European Committee on Local and Regional democracy (CDLR):** participation in the meetings of the steering committee and sub-committees; contribution to the promotion of European Local Democracy Week; representation of the Conference of INGOs at the 16th session of the Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for

Local and Regional Government (Utrecht, November 2009) and presentation of a contribution from the Conference of INGOs;

- Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Spatial/Regional Planning (CEMAT) - participation in the meetings of the Committee of Senior Officials (CHF); Meeting of experts on the draft European Rural Heritage Charter; participation in the Conference on a comprehensive approach to balanced sustainable spatial development of the European continent in Kyiv on 11 June 2009;
- European Landscape Convention (CEP) - Steering Committee for Cultural Heritage and Landscape (CDPATEP): participation in the opening session of the 5th Conference on the European Landscape Convention, held in Strasbourg on 30 and 31 March 2009; participation in the meeting of the Senior Officials in Strasbourg on 12 and 13 May 2009;
- Bern Convention: participation in the meetings of the Standing Committee and in the 30th anniversary of the Convention in November 2009.

Participation in European Union consultations

- Consultations held by the European Commission (Green Paper on Territorial Cohesion and Green Paper TEN-T, EU trans-European transport network)

Setting up and developing an Internet site

The site <http://sustainabledevelopment.unblog.fr/> comprises eleven sections. It takes the form of a blog to ensure interactivity with members of the public and publishes the Committee's main activities and the positions on sustainable development. A "give your opinion" section also allows Committee members to express their own personal points of view or that of the NGOs they represent. There is free access to photos on the various topics addressed. Some parts, giving access to the working documents of the other Council of Europe pillars, can only be accessed with passwords.

III. TRANSVERSAL GROUPS

Note: the following information was provided by the Chairs of the transversal groups.

1. Europe and global challenges Transversal Group (Chair: Michel Julien; Vice-Chair: Anne Sforza)

Draft co-operation agreement between the Conference of INGOs and the North-South Centre

In 2009 the Transversal Group “Europe and global challenges”, which resulted from the reorganisation of the Conference of INGOs in October 2008, focused on translating a project on North-South partnership and dialogue that has been in the pipeline for several years into action by finalising a draft co-operation agreement between the Conference of INGOs and the Council of Europe North-South Centre. The agreement is to be signed by the two bodies at the plenary session of the Conference of INGOs in January 2010.

The Transversal Group took part in the Lisbon 2009 Forum, organised by the Council of Europe North-South Centre in partnership with the Alliance of Civilizations and the Aga Khan Development Network on 13 and 14 November 2009, on the theme “creating a culture of human rights through education”. The Chair of the Transversal Group regularly represents the Conference of INGOs on the Executive Council of the North-South Centre.

Global challenges

The Transversal Group also took stock of existing global challenges and the consequences of the financial crisis and energy problems for health, safety, economy, respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms. It sought to answer the question of the impact of globalisation on human rights, by referring to several charters, in particular the Inter-American Democratic Charter, the African Human Rights Charter and the Islamic Human Rights Charter.

It was also involved in the discussions conducted by the working group on poverty, human rights and the financial crisis, set up by the Committee on Social Cohesion and Eradication of Poverty, in preparation for 2010, which the European Union has proclaimed European Year against Poverty and Social Exclusion. It therefore took part in the seminar organised by the Council of Europe Directorate General of Social Cohesion in co-operation with the Maltese Foundation for Human Resources Development entitled “At work, but poor and without a voice?” (Malta, 14-15 October 2009).

Partnership with the European Migration Committee

The Transversal Group took part in the 57th meeting of the European Migration Committee (CDMG) at which it spoke of the seminar “Children in danger, Families in danger”, held under the aegis of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe (23-24 November 2009, Warsaw), the first stage of a European project (2009-2011) on social and educational innovations, support for parenting and combating exclusion. It also fitted in very neatly with the programme of the 2009 European Year of Creativity and Innovation.

Other business

In 2009, the Transversal Group also took part in the following activities:

- Executive Committee of the Centre for Study and Strategic Prospective (CEPS) (Malta, 16 October 2009);

- Expert Conference on promoting intercultural potential on the labour market held by the Platform Migrants and European Citizenship (PMC) and the Pluri-cultural Youth Council (COJEP) at the Council of Europe (21 October 2009);

2. **Gender Equality Transversal Group** (Chair : Karin Nordmeyer ; Vice-chair : Christiaan Colpaert)

The Transversal Group discussed and agreed on the following main subjects :

Ad Hoc Committee on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (CAHVIO)

The Transversal Group supported a new **Council of Europe Convention combating violence against women** which would be prepared by the Ad Hoc Committee on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence (CAHVIO). The Transversal Group prepared the Recommendation CONF/PLE(2009)REC2 on the “Proposed Council of Europe Convention to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence”, adopted by the Conference of INGOs in January 2009. The scope of the Convention must include combating and preventing both physical and psychological violence against women and children and be a legal basis for prosecuting offenders. A sub-group was set up to draft contributions.

Exchange of views with Irma Ertman, Ambassador of Finland to the Council of Europe, on the five-year (2006-2011) Council of Europe Programme “**Building a Europe for and with children**”, which was based on four themes: protection of children, prevention of violence, prosecution of criminals and participation of children, paying special attention to particularly vulnerable children.

Intervention of the International Lesbian and Gay Association (ILGA) which considered lesbian and transsexual women as a special vulnerable group among women exposed to violence.

Balanced participation in decision-making

The Transversal Group followed closely the work of the Parliamentary Assembly and the Conference of INGOs’ Committees with regard to promoting balanced participation in the decision-making process on different levels.

De facto gender equality

The Transversal Group strives for *de facto* gender equality and discussed the fact that men must be involved in this process of achieving equality. It was noted that poverty, health problems, up-bringing and a lack of education were the most crucial factors in the attitudes toward gender equality.

The wage gap

The Transversal Group learned about possibilities to lodge collective complaints in respect to article 4 of the European Social Charter (revised) concerning the right to fair remuneration.

Current situation of women in Kosovo

The involvement of women in post-conflict democratic processes needed to be speeded up and pressure on the government must be applied from the outside. Effective mechanisms to address violence against women and trafficking needed better coordination.

Exchange of views with the Secretariat of the following Council of Europe bodies :

- the Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and men of the Parliamentary Assembly,
- the Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men (CDEG),
- the Committee of Social Cohesion of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.

Participation of members of the Transversal Group in Committees

On behalf of the Conference of INGOs, the Chair of the Transversal Group spoke out in the CAHVIO, in the Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men (CDEG), in the meeting of the Committee of the Parties of the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Being and at the 29th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers of Justice (Tromso, 18-19 June) titled "Breaking the silence – united against domestic violence". Several members of the Transversal Group regularly attended the Parliamentary Assembly Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men.

Special Action taken:

- an open letter of protest was sent in April to the Afghan President Hamid Karzai to make him withdraw the recent change of family law;
- a letter was sent to the Secretary General of the Council of Europe in May to let him know about the position of the Transversal Group with regard to the post of Head of the Gender Equality Division within the Directorate General of Human Rights and Legal Affairs (DGHL).

IV. THE TEXTS ADOPTED

Recommendation on the first report of the Expert Council on NGO Law adopted by the Conference of INGOs on 28 January 2009

Recommendation on a proposed Council of Europe Convention to prevent and combat violence against women and domestic violence adopted by the Conference of INGOs on 28 January 2009

Recommendation on Instituting a "European Year on Voluntary Action" adopted by the Conference of INGOs on 28 January 2009

Recommendation on the Durban review Conference "to combat racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance" adopted by the Conference of INGOs on 28 January 2009

Recommendation on the protection of Human Rights Defencers in the Russian Federation adopted by the Conference of INGOs on 28 January 2009

Recommendation on the "Conference of INGOs : a budget to meet its mission" adopted by the Conference of INGOs on 28 January 2009

Declaration for a better prevention of environment related health hazards adopted by the Sustainable Territorial Development Committee on 27 January 2009 and approved by the Standing Committee on 29 January 2009

Recommendation on "The United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities" adopted by the Conference of INGOs on 29 April 2009

Decision approving the Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process adopted on 29 April 2009 by the Conference of INGOs

Resolution on a call on the President of Lituanie not to sign the "Law on the protection of minors against the Detrimental Effect of Public Information" because of its homophobic content adopted by the Human Rights Committee on 22 June 2009 and approved by the Standing Committee on 24 June 2009

Recommendation on public policies supporting the wish to have children : societal, economic and personal factors adopted by the Social Cohesion and Eradication of Poverty Committee and approved by the Standing Committee on 24 June 2009

Adoption of the Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process by the Conference of INGOs on 1 October 2009

Promotion and implementation Strategy of the Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process adopted by the Conference of INGOs on 1 October 2009

Recommendation on "combating poverty" adopted by the Conference of INGOs on 1 October 2009

The texts adopted by the Conference of INGOs can be consulted on the Internet site : <http://www.coe.int/NGO>