



## What's new for MIAMSI at the Council of Europe ?

The spring session of the Council of Europe Parliament was held in Strasbourg on 8 - 12 April 2019, together with meetings of the INGO Conference Commissions and Working Groups.

In addition to the usual topics you will find below, we must note some highlights of this session:

- \* the thread that focused on digital citizenship and the challenges of communication technologies,
- \* the Council of Europe position on Russia which is still prohibited from voting (invasion of Crimea)
- \* Council of Europe reform
- \* two side events :
  - LGBTI rights and freedom of religion and belief
  - Solidarity duty or dereliction: NGO action in the system of aid and assistance to migrants and refugees.

Some newflashes on the usual meetings and each of these events in Strasbourg in April 2019:

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### **The INGO Conference and commissions**

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1. Council of Europe news has led the President of the INGO Conference to refer back to the **role of civil society in the Council of Europe**. In addition to regular meetings with the other pillars of the CoE, mention was made of the importance of the Warsaw meeting (attended by MIAMSI). The Committee of Ministers had scheduled this meeting to stress the importance of working with civil society. This must be strengthened. The Conference therefore passed a recommendation in this respect:  
<https://rm.coe.int/conf-ple-2019-res1-en-future-of-the-council-of-europe-civil-society-s-168093f423>
2. **All INGOs passed the draft INGO Conference Code of Conduct.**  
This is a matter of combating excesses and corrupt situations that might appear within the Conference itself. This Code of Conduct prevents any perversion.
3. **Exchanges with applicants for the position of Council of Europe Secretary General**  
Mr Jagland, the current Secretary General, is finishing his second term and will be replaced in the autumn.  
Two applicants introduced themselves to the INGO Conference to say how they were going to reform the Institution and envisage working with Civil Society and the INGO Conference in particular.
  - Ms Maria Peccinovic Buric (Croatia)
  - Mr Didier Reyners (Belgium)
4. **Conference Recommendation to the Committee of Ministers**  
Two recommendations were approved during this session :
  - Right to decent housing for all
  - Combating student poverty

### **Human Rights Commission:**

The commission presented the situation in Azerbaijan where human rights defenders cannot move freely. Similarly, the rise of racism and anti-Semitism in France and Europe was mentioned.

The draft recommendation for decent housing for all was passed unanimously.

A large amount of time was given over to the Conference representative on the Human Rights Steering Committee. He presented work in various theme-based groups where INGOs play a part:

- Social rights
- Place of Civil Society in national and international institutions
- Migration and alternative to detention
- Freedom of expression in connection with Human Rights
- Long-term reform of the Human Rights Convention and the Court (ECHR)

Caritas Europa presented a plan for aiding detainees to enable them to keep in touch with civil society and make them responsible citizens.

Finally, a talk by the Bioethics Steering Committee made it possible to measure the issues related to internment of disabled people who have lost their power of discernment.

### ***Poverty, Discrimination and Exclusion Group :***

The Working Group addressed several points :

- A recommendation on the Housing Right,
- organizing a seminar on the Social Charter, the promotion of social rights,
- Access to education for all.

It is still organizing the October 17 day on eradicating poverty. If 2019 will have a mere commemoration on the Palais de l'Europe forecourt, 2020 should have a wider range with a lecture by an intergovernmental committee. The topic will be the **Social Charter**.

### **Education and Culture Commission :** The commission has developed two specific themes:

#### **1. "European cultural identity"**- 2nd part in connection with UNESCO. Some significant excerpts:

- **Mr. Sjur BERGAN**, The Head of the Council of Europe Education Department, emphasized the concept of democratic culture to which ethics should be added. To him, shared history is fundamental.  
Likewise multi-perspectives in forward-looking dynamics.
- **Mr. Manuel MONTOBBIO DE BALANZO**, the Spanish Ambassador and Permanent Representative at the Council of Europe (CoE), stressed the importance of the emerging "we" in the construction of each individual.  
To him, European construction is a combat against murderous identities, a social contract to open up society.
- **Mr. Marco PASQUALINI**, an expert from UNESCO's Global Citizenship Education Division. He presented the programme : "Education for Global Citizenship"  
<https://en.unesco.org/themes/gced>
- **Mr. Francesc PEDRO**, Head of the Education Policy Section at UNESCO's Lifelong Learning Policies and Systems Division.  
To him, current challenges can only be met by our collective intelligence.

#### **2. "The city of tomorrow"** some succinct excerpts:

Topic worked on by the Intercultural Cities group on "Living Together"

- **Mr. Jean-Christophe FROMANTIN**, a French politician, the Mayor of Neuilly-sur-Seine.  
Air, water, shade, space, time, silence are major struggles towards a peaceful city, a polycentric city, a city I am proud of, a harmonious city with happy citizens.
- **Mr. Carlos MORENO**, a university professor and expert on the smart, sustainable city.  
He proposes re-aculturating the economy with our values and soul :
  - Hospitality: the "life insurance" of trust
  - Culture that gives us the opportunity to be happy
  - Space that will become a major issue while leaving vast spaces fallow.

Europe, through its history and values, can propose a redistributed model rather than a hyper concentrated model.

#### ***Right to Lifelong Education Group :***

The place and status of students from migration in higher education were discussed during this session. What healthy relationship is to be implemented ?

In addition, increased poverty among students, particularly migrants, caught the working group's attention. A recommendation motion was made to the Education and Culture Committee.

The text of the recommendation: <https://rm.coe.int/conf-ple-2019-rec2-student-precarity-en/168094025c>

#### ***Intercultural Cities Group:***

During this session, the Working Group focused on the Urban/Rural divide, especially as urban dwellers move to the countryside while wanting the same benefits in communication and culture.

The other aspect brought up was intercultural instruction in schools and updating teachers' work. A collection of best practice is envisaged in this context.

#### ***Europe of Heritage and Creation Group :***

A first topic of reflection was the emergence of cultural identity through the artistic and especially pictorial dimension.

This Working Group also highlighted the problems of history teaching. An observatory should be created to prevent European values from disappearing! A meeting of Education Ministers from all European countries is contemplated in the short term.

### **Democracy Commission:**

The whole meeting of this commission was focused on information technologies !

#### **1. The impact of information technologies on national and European elections:**

Over and above difficulties related to developing algorithms that "think for us" and intox, artificial intelligence might prove an asset between two elections ... it might fill the gap between citizens and their representatives. Participatory platforms ? The use of Artificial Intelligence to improve the electoral process ? Information traceability? Secure, transparent voting by recognition techniques.

#### **2. IT risks for democracy:**

We must be responsible for our data, especially on health. Let's live digitally hidden ! Only the citizen can stop these trends !

#### **3. Electronic democracy**

This is about being able to maintain and strengthen democratic institutions in the light of new developments in electronic technologies.

An old recommendation already noted the limits and developed legal, operational and technical standards:

[https://www.coe.int/t/dgap/forum-democracy/Activities/Forum%20sessions/2008/RecCM2009\\_1\\_and\\_Accomp\\_Docs/6646-3%20ID%208289%20Rec\(2009\)1%20democratie%20electronique%20A5.pdf](https://www.coe.int/t/dgap/forum-democracy/Activities/Forum%20sessions/2008/RecCM2009_1_and_Accomp_Docs/6646-3%20ID%208289%20Rec(2009)1%20democratie%20electronique%20A5.pdf)

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### **Cross-cutting Working Group:**

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#### ***Digital Citizen Working Group :***

An initial presentation showed how the explosion in IT development is transforming societies and their ways of thinking. This has a major impact on the life of NGOs and their ways of working, and

structuring themselves. Civil Society is under pressure, it must protect itself vis-à-vis the outside but also from itself.

More broadly: what is the role of civil society organizations vis-à-vis IT? How can IT strengthen the implementation of our values ?

The Council of Europe short-term goal is to find a legal framework for regulating artificial intelligence based on charters, guidelines and best practice.

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### **Migration watchdog:**

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The Migration watch unit will be in high demand for the October 2019 session, which will focus on migration issues. Films and exhibitions on women in migration situations are on the agenda.

The issue of unaccompanied minor migrants also caught the unit's attention as did the search for an alternative to detaining migrants' children.

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### **Side event - Migrations - LGBTI Believers**

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#### **1. The Migration watch unit: *Solidarity duty or dereliction: NGO action in the system of aid and assistance to migrants and refugees.***

Several talks made it possible to position the problem of criminalizing INGOs that help people in migration situations by giving them assistance :

- The Mayor of a town on the north coast of France (Grande Synthe) who welcomes migrants who want to go to England.
- The President of Doctors of the World who emphasizes the physical and moral distress of people in migration ; governments protect borders more than people !
- An advocacy officer for Sea Watch International : she testified to the ambiguity of laws that are used by governments to ban ship captains from docking and therefore carrying out the rescue duties of which they are the guarantors.

Exchanges moderated by the MIAMSI representative, the migration watch unit coordinator.

#### **2. The CoE Human Rights Commission and the European Forum of LGBT Christian Groups organized a side event on the topic: *LGBTI Rights and Freedom of Religion and Belief.***

This was about measuring how LGBTI people could live their faith in various churches. Several talks:

- A pastor representing the World Council of Churches emphasized the need to combat the idea that religious freedom opposes LGBTI rights. We must dare to dialogue and focus on the basics of faith. Essential to address Human Rights in a universal way.
- A woman member of an international lesbian association noted the importance, even before dialogue, of recognizing the suffering of and in our religious institutions.

Exchanges with the audience highlighted positive developments at the global level, the need to respect diversity, sharing of experiences and the interest of starting to build dialogues between faiths themselves, between religions so that they are inclusive.

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### **The Christian INGO Group:**

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The various Christian INGOs accredited to the Council of Europe met to take stock of their individual commitments to the Council of Europe.

- A renewed will to be present and collectively support the actions of each one in a constructive approach,
- A look back to the manifesto on the occasion of the 70th anniversary of the Council of Europe.

- Caritas Europa presented its proposals to respect the dignity of prisoners in prisons : [www.prison-justice-network.eu](http://www.prison-justice-network.eu)

The next topic of reflection for Christian INGOs will be on dialogue :

**The Church as a forum for dialogue.**

Some references :

Paul VI : [Ecclesiam Suam](#) especially Chapter III

[Petit traité de la rencontre et du dialogue de Pierre Claverie](#)

[Cerf](#) , [Epiphanie](#) collection, (November 2004)

Daniel Guéry for the local Strasbourg team