



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

The Council of Europe's Parliamentary Winter Session was held in Strasbourg on 22 - 26 January 2018, as were meetings of the INGO Conference, its Commissions and Working Groups.

In addition, this session saw the INGO Conference chairmanship and deputy chairs renewed and chose the new working groups for the next three years.

Some news flashes on each of the events in Strasbourg in January 2018:

### The INGO Conference

#### 1. Two **important exchanges of views** took place with:

##### ➤ **The Democratic Governance and Anti-Discrimination Director:**

- She insists on the importance and place of civil society in the context of democracy and life in the States,
- Notes the growing difficulties that NGOs face in their expression and participation, particularly in Central and Eastern Europe countries, but not only there,
- Emphasizes the importance of education in citizenship, the media, combating hate speech, ...

##### ➤ The newly elected **Human Rights Commissioner:**

- She confirms and reinforces the belief that bridges must be built between governments and civil society.
- Reaffirms that freedom of expression is in crisis in Europe.
- Undertakes to tackle the migration as soon as she takes office (Spring 2018).
- Plans to enhance the fight against discrimination of women and young people.
- Wishes to continue the links between the Council of Europe, the European Union and the UN.

#### 2. **Voting and passing activity reports**

- The **2017 INGO Conference Activity Report** was passed. It contains all the recommendations and resolutions.  
<https://rm.coe.int/conf-ple-2017-rapact-fr/168077d648>
- The **2017 Gender Equality Expert's Activity Report** was passed.  
<https://rm.coe.int/rapport-activite-experte-egalite-2017-fr/168077df03>
- Voting on the draft resolution **to use the term "Human Rights"** instead of "Rights of Man".

#### 3. **Other actions**

- **Civil society in the countries of the European Union:** the problems encountered by civil society are increasing in number from the legislative (registration for example) and financial (frozen accounts, third-country funding issues) point of view. The NGOs' security space is reduced (denigration, harassment, aggression, ...).
- **Report on visits by the Chair:**

- **Estonia:** the hyper digitization of society poses a problem in respect of privacy and the generation divide.
- **Serbia:** the NGOs' situation is worrying, particularly as regards journalists' safety, freedom of expression, the link between migrants, justice and the rule of law.
- **Legal Opinion on the NGO situation:**
  - **Romania:** too many draft laws leave aside human rights standards for NGOs.
  - **Turkey:** freedom of association is a major issue. Respect for the rule of law leaves a lot to be desired.

#### 4. Elections

- Chairperson: **Anna Rurka** - European Committee of Specialized Action for the Child and the Family in their Milieu (EUROCEF). Second term. Supported by MIAMSI.
- Deputy Chair:
  - ✓ **Robert Betgougnan** : European Association of Schools for Social Workers (EASSW)
  - ✓ **Anne Kraus** : CISV International Children's International Summer Villages
  - ✓ **Christoph Spreng** : International Association of Initiatives and Change
  - ✓ **Anne Nègre** (gender equality): European Group of Women University Graduates (GEFDU)
- Rapporteurs :
  - ✓ **Rares Augustin Craiut** : European Confederation of Youth Clubs
  - ✓ **Richard Pirolt** : Comenius Association
  - ✓ **Katarzyna Sokolowska** : Association of European Student States General (AEGEE-Europe)

#### Human Rights Commission:

1. **Bioethics and Human Rights Committee** Activity Report. The topics are: right to die with dignity, PMA and GPA, the elderly, selective abortion.
2. **Human Rights Steering Committee** Activity Report. Five thematic groups: female genital mutilation and forced marriage, social rights, migration, freedom of expression and finally civil society and national human rights institutions.

#### **The commission's new working groups:**

##### ***Protective Mechanisms for Human Rights Defenders Group*** :

For this group, it means to defend human rights defenders who are in danger, particularly in Eastern European countries.

##### ***Civil Society Monitoring Tools Group*** :

This working group checks that European countries respect the rules that allow civil society to express themselves, particularly regarding the right of association.

##### ***Digital Rights and the Digital Future Group*** :

The digitization of society poses serious rights issues and also in "living together". These are all aspects that will be worked on in the years to come.

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

The issue of the individual's dignity is at the core of this group's concerns, in the context of social rights (see Council of Europe charter).

### Culture and Education Commission:

- The commission took the time to present the new working groups:

***The right to lifelong education Group*** : for an inclusive society to be built, it must be a learning society. This working group will be mainly focused on adult education, including vis-à-vis people in fragile situations (prisoners, unemployed, migrants, ...).

***Intercultural cities Group***: this is about designing policies to better manage people's cultural diversity, in all facets of people's lives, including beliefs and religions. The issue of the relationship between the host country culture and that of people in a migration situation will also be addressed.

***Europe of heritage and creation, cultural routes in Europe Group***: Culture as an element of development. Digitization of culture: strengths and weaknesses, risks.

### Democracy Commission:

The commission dealt with a few topics (before presenting the new working groups) :

1. **Civil society participation in political decisions** including the incentive to implement the 12 principles for proper collaboration with civil society.  
<https://www.coe.int/fr/web/good-governance/12-principles-and-elope?desktop=false>
2. **Biomedicine** and its positive consequences as well as abuses.
3. **Good governance** in Europe: see the World Forum for Democracy and populism:  
<https://www.coe.int/fr/web/world-forum-democracy/wfd-2017-reports>

#### **The new commission's working groups:**

***Protection of the human being and dignity Group*** : All aspects of protection will be a priori honoured, from protection of the elderly to migratory phenomena.

***Corruption group***: the international and national axes will be taken into account. A Forum on this issue is already planned for 2019

***Social Cohesion and Risks Group***: Reducing social divides will be at the core of reflection in this group's work.

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### Cross-cutting working groups:

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#### ***Social and Territorial Cohesion Group*** :

In this group, vulnerable people will be taken into account for all risks (natural, industrial, climate, terrorism, exclusions of all kinds)

#### ***Freedom of Association Group***:

MIAMSI is not a member.

#### ***Digital Education Group*** :

This is to tackle this issue as much in terms of protecting young people and citizens as seeking autonomy or taking a critical look at digital media e.g. social media, ....

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### Migration watch unit:

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A Migration watch unit has been set up and MIAMSI was asked to join the coordinating body.

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**The Christian INGO Group:**

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The various Christian INGOs accredited to the Council of Europe met to share their actions and projects and also to exchange views on INGO Conference projects and related elections.

Feedback on the meeting of the World Forum of Catholic-inspired INGOs that took place in December 2017 was also the subject of exchanges of views and projects particularly in the field of Education.

**Pope Francis's encouragement was recalled on this occasion:**

*"I express my deep appreciation for your efforts to bring the light of the Gospel to the different peripheries of our world, defend human dignity, promote the integral development of peoples, and meet the material and spiritual needs of so many members of our human family."*

*"I encourage you to work even more in a spirit of communion and collaboration with other Catholic NGOs as well as with the representatives of the Holy See, as a sign of the Church's commitment to building an ever fairer and more united world."*

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