

## Groupings Council of Europe INGO

1. Civil Society and Democracy Europe
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7. Human rights
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9. North-south dialogue and solidarity
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### 1. Civil Society and Democracy Europe

Objectives of this NGOs grouping Civil Society and Democracy in Europe

- To encourage co-operation between NGOs of western, central and eastern Europe;
- To observe developments in civil society throughout Europe, with the assistance of the Council of Europe information offices;
- To develop a better knowledge of the Council of Europe's tools, bodies and instruments, thereby making the work done by the NGOs more effective;
- To compare experience with a view to working more effectively together and forging new partnerships;
- To offer meetings and discussions on issues which NGOs have to deal with and to work on any deficiencies or opportunities (eg European Convention on the recognition of the legal personality of international non-governmental organisations (ETS 124));
- To promote dialogue with the Parliamentary Assembly on subjects of direct concern to us (ethics, promoting the role of civil society and the Congress, monitoring, taking on responsibilities in the voluntary sector, dialogue between the generations, the promotion of democracy and the rule of law);

### 2. Countryside and the Environment

European Centre for Rural and Environmental Interest (CEIRE)

The "Countryside and environment" grouping, known as the CEIRE (Centre Européen d'Intérêt Rural et Environnemental), brings together some forty international NGOs with an interest in the development of rural areas and in the environment.

#### 1) Background

The CEIRE was established as the first grouping in 1990. As the pioneer of this type of dialogue between NGOs and the Council of Europe, it quickly developed close partnerships with the Council Secretariat (NGO Nature task force during European Nature Conservation Year, etc).

It brings together some forty international NGOs with an interest in the development of rural areas and in the environment.

#### 2) Activities

Political goal

The CEIRE reiterates the importance of rural areas to the cohesion and future of the European continent. With 85% of Europe's surface area, most of its natural riches and much of its heritage, they must be recognised, alongside urban areas, as vital players in sustainable development and the process of European construction. At the same time, the grouping underlines the importance of implementing strong rural development policies based on local strategies drawn up with public participation. That is the purpose of the grouping's action and is also its political goal.

The CEIRE supports Council of Europe activity concerning the countryside, regional/spatial development and the environment, in particular:

- the European Conference of Ministers responsible for Regional Planning (CEMAT);
- the work of the Parliamentary Assembly's Committee on the Environment, Agriculture and Local and Regional Affairs;
- the work of the Committee on Sustainable Development of the Congress of Local and Regional

Authorities;

- the Pan-European Biological and Landscape Diversity Strategy, a co-operation programme managed by the Council of Europe and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) and run by a Strategy Council, on which the CEIRE has observer status.

The grouping is also active in terms of adopting motions and contributing to debates on the Council of Europe's general policies (eg, motion for the Third Summit in Warsaw) and on more specific issues relating to the future of rural areas.

### 3. Education and Culture

Ninety NGOs which hold consultative status with the Council of Europe have come together in this grouping, which exists to facilitate NGO participation in all the Council's bodies which deal with issues relating to education and culture in Europe. The person liaising with them is usually from the Directorate of Education.

The grouping has adopted a working method involving ad hoc committees corresponding to current Council projects. These committees liaise with all the grouping's NGOs. There are currently four such committees, covering the teaching of 20th century history, education for democratic citizenship, media education and culture.

A regular link with the education departments makes close co-operation possible between the NGOs, which contribute their expertise, and the Council.

Education issues are so complex that this grouping has links with other NGO groupings and other Council of Europe directorates (human rights, social cohesion, North-South, civil society in the new Europe).

NGOs participate at several levels: project groups, major conferences, seminars, texts and reports, contributing both the experience they have gained in the field and their ideas.

### 4. Extreme poverty and social cohesion

This grouping gives priority to the fight against extreme poverty and social exclusion through political and legal commitment, basing its work on the experiences and thoughts of very poor people.

This grouping comprises some fifty international non-governmental organisations (INGOs).

Its specific nature enables it to engage in a special dialogue with the [European Committee for Social Cohesion](#) (CDCS), which is devoted to promoting access to social rights for all. It has various committees of experts, covering such subjects as access to housing, participation of beneficiaries of social services (CS-US), access to employment for very marginalised and disadvantaged people (CS-MA), preventive measures for putting children into care, ageing. The grouping holds observer status here and plays a part in the work done, passing on to the committee and its subordinate groups examples of "good practice" in relation to social cohesion and the combating of exclusion while ensuring that the situation of particularly vulnerable people and groups is taken into account.

The setting up of the ad hoc group "Children-Families: street children – exploitation of children", in co-operation with the Human Rights INGO Grouping enables us to contribute to the work of the Forum for Children and Families.

Isolated activities are also organised, such as:

- contribution to the World Day to Overcome Extreme Poverty on 17 October, and the ceremony on the square in front of the Council of Europe;

- participation in the work of the group preparing the joint INGO-Parliamentarians conference at the end of 2003 on A Social Europe: Fighting against Exclusion.

Co-operation Structures in the Council of Europe

In view of its specific nature, the Grouping co-operates in particular with:

- Directorate General III: Social Policy Department, Division for the Development of Social Cohesion, European Committee for Social Cohesion (CDCS) and its expert committees

- the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe, in particular with the Committee on Social Cohesion

- Directorate General II, more specifically with regard to article 30 of the Revised European Social Charter (The right to protection against poverty and social exclusion) and
- the Integrated Projects, in particular Integrated Project II “responses to violence in everyday life in a democratic society”.

### 5. Gender Equality

The aim of this grouping is to promote equality and parity between women and men. It goes without saying that men are as welcome to join the grouping as women.

Pooling information is crucial for all NGOs interested in equal rights and opportunities for women.

The [Steering Committee for Equality between Women and Men \(CDEG\)](#) and the [Parliamentary Assembly Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men](#) are a major source of information.

The Secretaries of the CDEG and the Parliamentary Assembly Committee regularly attend meetings of the grouping. The grouping itself has observer status within the CDEG and is generally represented by the head of the grouping at CDEG meetings.

The NGOs also keep one another informed of equality-related events in the various countries they represent. This information and these events often form the basis for the grouping’s activities, as is the case with the working themes for United Nations sessions and other international organisations. The grouping also discusses examples of good practice, legal instruments, reports and any other matters relating to equality and parity.

### 6. Health

This grouping has about 40 members with an interest in public health and health promotion.

They are all international associations active in the health, social or medical spheres, and they share the Council of Europe's values where human rights are concerned.

The NGO Health grouping sets targets consistent with the activities of Council of Europe bodies, especially the Health Division.

In 2000 to 2002, three areas were developed with the intention of providing input into the recommendations drawn up by Council of Europe bodies:

- palliative care in the home;
- health and sex education;
- equity in the health sphere and access to social rights.

The grouping was involved in the work of the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee following the Parliamentary Assembly’s adoption of its report on the “Protection of the human rights and dignity of the terminally ill and the dying”. It chose the work theme “Palliative care in the home”, looking at this issue from the point of view of families’ needs. The information collected by the INGOs were heard by the European Health Committee’s expert committee on the organisation of palliative care, on which the grouping is represented.

A sub working group on “Health and education for sexuality”, composed of ten or so INGOs, drafted a recommendation for a European policy for the protection of sexual and reproduction health, which emphasized education for sexuality and the integration of this education into school teaching. The document was sent to the Social, Health and Family Affairs Committee.

The Health Grouping attentively followed the implementation of the recommendations from the Human Dignity and Social Exclusion Project’s Conference and the work led and supported by the Health Division, namely the expert committee for the Adaptation of Health Care Services to the Needs of People in Marginal Situations, the draft recommendation having been adopted by the Committee of Ministers in October 2001. The members have publicized this text.

Within the framework of the Strategy for Social Cohesion, the head of the Grouping has played an active part in the Committee set up to draft a report on access to social rights and contributed to a workshop on “Integrated social policies, but at what level? The territorial dimension of access to social rights” during the Malta Conference organised on 14 and 15 November 2002 by the Council of Europe.

## 7. Human rights

As the name implies, this grouping studies all issues concerning the respect, protection and promotion of human rights.

The heads of the grouping systematically call on Council officials to report on the Council's activities in the [human rights](#) sphere.

These bilateral relations are very precious because regular and because of the confidence that reigns.

They have, over the past years, focused mainly on the position of the human rights instruments in respect of signature and ratification, on the [World Conference against Racism](#), on the [European Social Charter](#), the reform of the Court, the work of [ECRI](#) (on racism and intolerance) and on the work of the [Commissioner for Human Rights](#) of the Council of Europe.

The NGOs, for their part, keep one another informed about their activities, consulting each other about possible joint actions. As such, they have jointly organised seminars, proposed and had adopted during grouping meetings resolutions on, for example, the situation in Kosovo, in the Chechen Republic, the exploitation of children in Europe, the status of conscientious objectors, and also freedom of association for members of the armed forces, the work of the Commissioner, and the appraisal of the working of the Court.

The grouping occasionally decides to hold meetings of select working groups over a specified or unspecified period as appropriate on such themes as “50th anniversary of the ECHR”, “vagrant children”, “psychotherapy and human rights”, “languages and human rights”, “media and human rights”, this work being undertaken under the responsibility of the grouping.

A representative of the grouping is sometimes called upon to address colloquies, seminars or information sessions, in particular those for new INGOs or new INGO representatives, as well as those for civil society representatives in the new member countries of the Council of Europe.

## 8. NGO-Towns

The sectoral grouping on "Towns" comprises around forty international organisations with an interest in towns and cities.

It was set up in 1990, at the same time as the grouping on "Countryside and environment", with which it co-operates, since several of the subjects dealt with are of interest to both.

I. The NGO-Towns Grouping held three meetings in 2004 (April, June and October), each of which was attended by around thirty participants.

Apart from its own meetings, the grouping was represented as an observer at the meetings of several other bodies and at seminars and other events organised by or involving the Council of Europe, in particular:

- Steering Committee on Local and Regional Democracy (CDLR);
- Committee of Senior Officials of the European Conference of Ministers responsible for Regional Planning (CEMAT);
- Committee on Sustainable Development of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities;
- UNESCO/UN-Habitat Forum, Barcelona;
- meetings of the European Countryside Movement in Brussels.

Outside the Council of Europe, the grouping was represented at the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), in particular the:

- Inland Transport Committee;
- Committee on Human Settlements.

II. In general terms, the grouping's work focuses on three main areas:

1) Exchanging information about Council of Europe activities of interest to the grouping.

2) Initiating debates during 2004 and 2005 on subjects chosen with the aim of contributing, under the NGOs' new participatory status, to the preparation of the Conference of European Ministers responsible for Regional Planning (CEMAT) to be held in Lisbon in 2006 and to the preparation of the 14th Conference of European Ministers responsible for Local and Regional Government on civil society and local and regional democracy.

2.1) Following wide-ranging discussions, the working group chose the theme of sustainable urban development and agreed on the approaches for looking into it more closely.

A select working group headed by Mr René TABOURET was set up for the purpose.

2.2) The group began by drawing up a survey of NGOs to be conducted in 2005, the results of which will serve as a contribution to the preparatory work for the CEMAT.

2.3) The group also drew up a draft resolution calling for the Third Summit of Heads of State and Government to include sustainable development as one of the priorities for the Council of Europe's future action again.

3) Helping to support the principle of NGO participation in the exercise of local democracy. This point is particularly important with regard to town planning. A corresponding memorandum was drafted and submitted to Ms Annelise OESCHGER.

## 9. North-south dialogue and solidarity

The activities of the North-South Grouping fall into three categories: public and media relations, solidarity education and training and North-South and South and East Mediterranean-North dialogue for a global partnership – and are reflected on the ground in the developing countries of Latin America, Africa and Asia (including, of course, the ACP zone).

North-South dialogue and solidarity

The grouping regularly disseminates information from the [European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity](#) (North-South Centre) of the Council of Europe, in Lisbon, set up through a partial agreement in 1989. The members of the partial agreement are Cyprus, Finland, France, Greece, the Holy See, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. The centre is jointly managed by an original body involving governments, of parliamentarians and local and regional authorities, as well as NGOs.

The North-South Grouping therefore speaks out for the voluntary sector and for civil society, both internationally and nationally, and in the context of decentralised solidarity (it is made up of 200 NGOs holding participatory status).

Activities: These fall into three categories:

- public and media relations;
- solidarity education and training;
- North-South and South and East Mediterranean-North dialogue for a global partnership (establishing contacts between NGOs based in these regions, exchanges, support for projects).

In particular, the grouping co-ordinated a Mediterranean campaign from 1997 to 1999, culminating in the 1st Mediterranean Conference in Strasbourg in September 1999, attended by 300 NGOs from around the Mediterranean basin.

In 2003, this was followed by the TLEMCEN FORUM on intercultural and inter-faith dialogue.

In November 2005, the grouping was the driving force behind the MESSINA FORUM on the integration of migrants in Europe.

Priorities for 2006 – 2008

1/ Close co-operation with the North-South Centre concerning Euro-Mediterranean dialogue. Africa, migration, co-development ...

2 / East and south-east European countries: Macedonia, Ukraine ...regarding uncontrolled migration, the abuse of women and children, human trafficking ...

3/ Developing real Council of Europe/European Union interaction concerning human rights and the Social Charter.

4/ Following up the MESSINA declaration and its implementation, in particular in relation to European bodies:

The European Committee on Migration

The Parliamentary Assembly Committee on Migration

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe

## 10. European Social Charter, Social Policies

This grouping attracts the attention of a large number of NGOs because it focuses on a broad range of socio-economic issues and value-oriented aspects of European society. These aspects, ie the scope and the effective implementation of social and economic rights, as well as ways and means of promoting

and strengthening social cohesion in European society, are at the heart of civil society's concerns and action.

In particular, the grouping works on specific aspects of the effective application and monitoring of the European Social Charter. It identifies new or previously neglected social needs, and proposes adequate measures to address them, and initiatives to enhance social development (follow-up to the [World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen 1995](#), and [Geneva 2000](#)).

The grouping works in co-operation with the [European Social Charter](#) Section in Directorate General II (Human Rights), and with Directorate General III (Social Cohesion) of the Council of Europe. It is represented in the European Committee for Social Cohesion and seeks dialogue with other social policy oriented commissions and committees in the framework of the Council of Europe.