STATEMENT FROM ANNA RURKA, PRESIDENT OF THE CONFERENCE OF INGOs

Council of Europe celebrates the World NGO Day

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Today, the Conference of INGOs celebrated World NGO Day for the first time at the Council of Europe with a debate on "Why do we need NGOs? - (I)NGO contribution to the work and to the mandate of the Council of Europe". The event gathered a variety of stakeholders, including representatives of Civil Society, Permanent representations of Council of Europe Members States, prominent Human Rights activists, students and members of the Secretariat of the Council of Europe. We were particularly delighted to welcome Marcis Liors Skadmanis, founder of the international calendar day for Non-governmental organizations, 'World NGO Day'.

INGOs enjoying participatory status with the Council of Europe are partners of the Council of Europe bodies and institutions with regard to standard setting, monitoring and implementation of activities. However, most of them agree that there is room for improvement to make this contribution less sectorial and more visible.

In certain national contexts, some NGOs and their leaders bear a heavy toll, often endangering their lives and their freedom, in order to defend human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The Council must defend them and defend the space in which they operate. This is a culmination for the the implementation of the standards promoted by the Council of Europe.

The Conference of INGOs, as a collective body, serves as a protective space for NGOs, guardian of the democratic role that NGOs play in the Member states and the Council of Europe. This democratic role and participation of NGOs in the Council of Europe should not be taken for granted. NGOs must be appreciated and valued as an incubator of the democratic innovation, adaptable to internal and external conditions and challenges.

An invitation to build a common vision, with some recommendations to enhance civic space at the Council of Europe and in Member States, will be addressed to the Committee of Minister shortly.