

Quarterly Newsletter of the Representative to the Council of Europe

No. 17 – September-October 2009

What can you do for Europe, and what can Europe do for you?

News from the Council of Europe

SI/E becomes eligible to submit a Collective Complaint

Through an additional Protocol, which entered into force in 1998, a system of collective complaints was introduced to improve monitoring of governments' adherence to the European Social Charter. Non-governmental organisations may submit complaints concerning those matters for which they have been recognised as having particular competence. In order to do this, an organisation must first apply for eligibility. SI/E submitted an application for inclusion on the list of NGOs entitled to lodge a Collective Complaint in September and has since been accepted. The intention is to file a formal Complaint against a specific country which is failing to guarantee "the right to equal opportunities and equal treatment in matters of employment and occupation without discrimination on the grounds of sex", as laid down in Article 20 of the Revised European Social Charter. It is clear that women are not receiving equal pay for work of equal value. According to published statistics, the average difference in countries of the EU is 17.4 percent. Now that SI/E has become eligible, we will prepare our case against one of the countries that has ratified the Revised European Social Charter, in all probability in collaboration with other women's organisations. Committee on Equal Opportunities for Women and Men of the Parliamentary Assembly has expressed its support for this plan.

President Karzai signs revised Shiite law

At the initiative of SI/E, the Chair of the Gender Equality Transversal Group sent an open letter to President Hamid Karzai of Afghanistan earlier this year, protesting against proposed legislation on the Personal Status of Shia citizens passed by the Afghan parliament which contains paragraphs clearly violating women's rights. Although meant only for the Shia population, the new law paves the way for application to all Afghan women and is contrary to the country's constitution. After worldwide condemnation, President Karzai indicated that he would review the law. However, the Afghan President never responded to the letter of the Conference of INGOs. Shortly before the elections in July, a revised version of the Shiite Personal Status Law was put into effect and signed by Karzai which, among other things, allows Shiite men to starve their wives if their sexual demands are not met. International organisations will have to carefully monitor the situation to ensure that women's rights are not violated.

www.coe.int/t/e/ngo/public/CONF_TG_GEN_2009_letter_Karzai.asp#TopOfPage

Conference of the Future of the Council of Europe

The newly appointed SI/E representative to the INGO Conference, Françoise Ferey

(see below), attended the Conference on the future of the Council of Europe in Paris on 11th September 2009.

Thorbjørn Jagland elected Secretary General of the Council of Europe

At its autumn session the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe elected Thorbjørn Jagland (Norway) Secretary General for a five-year term. Born on 5th November 1950, Jagland has been President of the Norwegian Parliament (*Storting*) since 2005 and Member of Parliament for Buskerud County since 1993. He was sworn in on 1st October. The new Secretary General met the President of the European Commission, Jose Manuel Durao-Barroso, on 19th October in Brussels. On the occasion of his first official mission, he called the EU the Council of Europe's most important institutional partner.

The fight against rape of women, including marital rape

Following the PACE debate and the report of the Committee of Equal Opportunities for Women and Men, the PACE adopted Resolution 1691 (2009) on rape of women, including marital rape on 2nd October 2009:

<http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta09/ERES1691.htm>

The Assembly also adopted Recommendation 1887 (2009) on 2nd October. The Committee of Ministers are to instruct the Ad hoc Committee on Preventing and Combating Violence against Women and Domestic Violence (CAHVIO) to include in the future Council of Europe convention the severest and most widespread forms of violence against women, including rape and sexual assault. A Council of Europe campaign, possibly in conjunction with the promotion of the future Council of Europe convention, has also been recommended. To read the complete Recommendation, see:

<http://assembly.coe.int/Main.asp?link=/Documents/AdoptedText/ta09/EREC1887.htm>

Gender Equality Transversal Group of the Conference of INGOs

Muriel Grimmeissen, Co-Secretary of the Committee on Social Cohesion, addressed the GETG meeting on 29th September on how to work together with NGOs in connection with the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities' Recommendation 260 (2009) on combating domestic violence against women. One particularly important area of common work is lobbying governments.

Autumn Session of the Conference of INGOs

In addition to adopting the Code of Good Practice on Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process (see below), the Plenary Meeting of the Conference of INGOs on 1st October heard the report of the Expert Council on NGO Law on the internal governance of NGOs. However, the highlight of the meeting was the exchange of views with the President of the Parliamentary Assembly, Lluís Maria de Puig.

EU invited to join Convention against Trafficking

At an event marking the 3rd European Days against human trafficking and the EU Conference on the same subject on 19th-20th October, PACE President Lluís Maria de Puig called on Council of Europe member states that had not already done so to sign and/or ratify the Convention on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings. By co-operating with the mechanism to watch for violations of this Convention – the Group of Experts on Action against Trafficking in Human Beings, or GRETA – one

could also avoid duplication of monitoring. He also urged the EU to accede to the convention as soon as possible.

Forum 2009 for the Future of Democracy

On the occasion of the Forum for the Future of Democracy, held in Kyiv in late October, Lydie Err called for changes in electoral systems to be more favourable to women's representation in politics. Introducing measures like gender quotas can lead to more gender-balanced and thus more legitimate political and public decision-making.

The Code of Good Practice on Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process was also officially launched at the meeting in Kyiv. The main objective of the Code is to define a set of European principles and guidelines for NGO participation in decision-making processes. Prior to the launch, the Code of Good Practice had been adopted by the Conference of INGOs at its Plenary Meeting on 1st October. For more details, please see: http://www.coe.int/t/ngo/code_good_prac_en.asp

Please
note!

Françoise Ferey is new SI/E Representative to the Council of Europe

After three years of serving our organisation at the Council of Europe and the Conference of INGOs, I have handed over the position of SI/E Representative to Françoise Ferey after this year's Autumn Session. Françoise, who chaired the Extension Committee of the French Union until 30th September 2009, was appointed by SI/E President Eliane Lagasse and confirmed by the Governors at the GM in July 2009. As of 1st October 2009, I have now officially become Editor of The Link, a position which I have held provisionally since November 2008. It has been a great pleasure to represent SI/E at the Council of Europe, and I am confident that Françoise will carry on the SI/E torch with great poise and skill. Since her confirmation, Françoise and I have worked closely to ensure a smooth transition. Please give her your full support in the years to come.

Please
note!

SI/E Leaflet on SI/E in European organisations

The SI/E representatives to the organisations Council of Europe, European Women's Lobby and the OSCE have prepared a leaflet on their activities. This informative publication is available free of charge from SI/E HQ in Geneva and is useful in explaining our lobbying work.

Reported by

**Christine Cromwell-Ahrens (Club Göttingen, Germany)
SI/E Representative to the INGO Conference
of the Council of Europe (2006-2009)**

email contact: ccromwell-ahrens@cacs.de

email contact as of 1st October 2009: francoise.ferey@free.fr