

This document contains general and brief information regarding the activities of the European Group (EG) of National Institutions for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (NHRIs).

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Abbreviations used in this document :

*EG : European Group of National Human Rights Institutions
ECC: European Coordinating Committee of National Human Rights Institutions
NHRIs : National Human Rights Institutions
HR: human rights*

Meetings of the European Group of National Human Rights Institutions (EG):

1. Meeting of the European Coordinating Committee (ECC) on february 2nd in Copenhagen, Denmark

The ECC held its third meeting, with the National Institutions Unit of the United Nations (UN) Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (HR) and the Office of the Commissioner for HR of the Council of Europe (CoE).

2. Ad hoc meeting of the ECC on march 23rd in Paris, France, on the issue of NI accreditation and the UN Human Rights Council

The purpose of this meeting was to contribute to the ICC debate on the reform of the accreditation procedures for NHRIs, and their participation within the UN Human Rights Council. A meeting report was circulated within the entire EG for consultation, in view of finalizing a common position during its meeting on April 11th.

3. Annual meeting of the European Group (EG) on April 11th in Geneva, Switzerland

The EG met in Geneva before the ICC annual meeting. The National Institutions Unit of the United Nations (UN) Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (HR), the Office of the Commissioner for HR of the Council of Europe (CoE), and the European Commission participated.

Work of the EG in relation with the United Nations

1. Input to the ICC debate on the accreditation procedure for NHRIs, and on their participation in the UN Human Rights Council

A concept paper, finalized on April 11th during the EG meeting, was submitted by the EG to the ICC in order to contribute to the debate regarding the reform of the accreditation procedure for NHRIs and the interpretation of accreditation criteria. It also tackled a few organizational issues concerning NHRI participation within the Human Rights Council.

2. 1st session of the United Nations Human Rights Council

A working group was created within the ICC in order to prepare for the 1st session of the UN Human Rights Council. Mr Forst and Miss Djian (CNCDH-France) were designated as focal points for the EG on this issue. They consulted the EG and submitted an input to the ICC.

The first session of the Human Rights Council was held in Geneva on June 19-30 2006. Among European NHRIs, the institutions from Germany, Denmark, France, Norway attended the meetings. A common position was drafted by the EG regarding the universal periodic review mechanism. This position was issued on June 28th in a joint statement with the institutions of the Philippines, Morocco and Mexico. The second session of the Council should take place in September 2006.

3. NHRIs and UN Treaty bodies

Mrs Frauke Seidensticker (German Institute for Human Rights) was designated as focal point of the EG on this issue. She consulted the GE and submitted an input to the ICC. Mrs Seidensticker then participated at the meeting of the chairs of UN treaty bodies on June 23rd, where she presented the ICC position on the relations between NHRIs and Treaty bodies.

4. Draft international convention on the rights of persons with disabilities

The 7th session of the United Nations Ad hoc committee in charge of drafting a Comprehensive and Integral International Convention on Protection and Promotion of the Rights and Dignity of Persons with Disabilities was held on January 16-February 3rd in New York. The EG was represented by the Irish Commission for Human rights and the Swedish Disability Ombudsman. The 8th session will be held on August 14-25.

Work of the EG in relation with the Council of Europe

1. Meeting of the Steering Committee for Human Rights of the Council of Europe (CDDH), April 4-7

The EG was represented by the French Commission (Ms. Stéphanie Djian) during the 62nd meeting of the CDDH in Strasbourg. The next meeting of the CDDH will take place on April 4-7 2006.

2. Meeting of the group of experts on human rights in the fight against terrorism (DH-S-TER), March 29-31

The EG was represented by the French Commission (Ms. Stéphanie Djian) during the second meeting of DH-S-TER in Strasbourg. The DH-S-TER decided not to draft a legal instrument on the use of diplomatic assurance in expulsion proceedings. This decision is in conformity with the EG common position of December 2005.

3. European Court of Human Rights : situation of Roma in the Czech Republic

On June 13, Mr Maurice Manning, chairman of the Irish commission, sent a letter to the President of the European Court of Human Rights, on behalf of the ECC, to support the referral to the Grand Chamber of the case *D.H. and Others v. Czech Republic* (application no. 57325/00).

Work of the EG in relation with the European Union

1. European Fundamental Rights Agency

- The EG drafted a new common position in the issue in January 13th, based on its two previous positions and in light of the new developments. This common position was sent to the European Commission, the European Parliament, the Council of the European Union, and to Member States.

- President Thoraval sent a letter in February to all members of the EG in order to draw their attention on the issue and ask them to follow closely the positions of their governments.

- On May 4th, a meeting was organized in Brussels by the EU Commission, with the Austrian Presidency, in order for the EG to be informed of the latest developments, and express its position. The NHRIs from France, Germany, Ireland, and Northern Ireland were represented.

- Mr. Forst, Secretary general of the CNCDH-France, was heard on May 4th by the Civil Liberties Committee of the European Parliament in order to state the EG position.

- On June 12-13, Mr. Thoraval participated in a seminar in Trier (Germany), organized by the Academy of European Law, during which he presented the EG position.

- On June 14th, Mr Thoraval sent a letter to the Council of the European Union, reiterating the EG positions, and expressing its concerns regarding the stalled negotiation process. This letter was also sent to the European Commission, the European Parliament, and to Member States.

2. Meeting of European NHRIs on EU matters, April 11th in Geneva

Mr. Brun, head of the « citizenship and fundamental rights unit » of the Directorate General « Liberty, Security, Justice » of the EU commission, participated during the meeting of the EG on EU matters, which was held before the EG regular annual meeting, in order to tackle common issues of concern.

3. Organisation of a European seminar regarding fundamental rights

The seminar organized with the EU commission, initially programmed for June 28, will be rescheduled at a later date.

Work of the EG in relation with the OSCE

1. OSCE Supplementary Human Dimension Meeting, Vienna, 30-31 March

Mr. Forst, Secretary General of the CNCDH-France, participated on behalf of the EG during this meeting on human rights defenders. He presented the role of NHRIs on this matter.

2. Setting up a liaison office for NHRIs within the OSCE

Discussions are in progress with Ambassador Strohal in order to set up a liaison office for NHRIs within the Office for Democratic Institutions and Human rights (ODIHR) of the OSCE.

Miscellaneous information

Appointments/careers

1. The Greek Commission was renewed and new members have been appointed for a three-year term.
2. Mr. Thomas Hammarberg took office as Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe on April 3rd. Mr Thoraval participated in his introduction ceremony on behalf of the EG.
3. M. Thomas Hunecke, focal point for Europe within the NHRI unit of the Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the United Nations left his functions at the end of June. Miss Sabina Lauber will take over.

Events and trainings

4. The Northern Ireland Human Rights Commission and the office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the United Nations organized in Belfast in June 20-22 a roundtable for NHRIs on their role on conflict and post-conflict situations.
5. A training course on the role of NHRIs in the prevention of conflict started for staff members of the European and Central Asian NHRIs, under the auspices of the office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the United Nations, the NGO Fahamu, and the United Nations Staff College.
6. A training course on the role of NHRIs in the prevention of torture started for staff members of the European and Central Asian NHRIs, under the auspices of the office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights of the United Nations and the NGO APT.
7. The 4th roundtable of the EG and the Commissioner for Human Rights of the CoE will be held in September 27-29 in Athens. It will be followed by the 6th European meeting of NHRIs.
8. The 8th ICC conference will be held in Santa Cruz, Bolivia, on October 24-27.

Pilot project on technical assistance: JOIN

The final mandate for the technical assistance pilot project for the creation, strengthening, and defense of NHRIs was adopted during the ECC meeting in Copenhagen on February 2nd, with the National Institutions Unit of the United Nations (UN) Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (HR) and the Office of the Commissioner for HR of the Council of Europe (CoE). Its implementation is yet to be defined. JOIN is available for NHRIs, governments, and civil society within the regional scope of the Council of Europe.
