



European Economic and Social Committee

Liaison Group - Civil Society Organisations

Minutes of the meeting

on 20 September 2018, 10.30-12.30 h, JDE 63

Participants: Pierluigi Brombo, Karen Serafini, Stephan Naumann (CESE-secretariat LG), Conny Reuter (Solidar/Co-chair of the LG), Gabriella Civico (CEV), Assya Kavrakova (ECAS), Piotr Sadowski (Volonteuropa), Philippe Seidl (AGE Platform), Vladimir Sestovic (European Civic Forum), Kélig Puyet (Social Platform), Marilena Vrana (European Foundation Centre), Carine Simon (R.E.D.), Izabela Jurczik-Arnold (EFIL), Jeremy Wates (EEB), Claude Debrulle (AEDH), Emma Achilli (Front Line Defenders), Brikena Xhomaqi (EUCIS-LLL).

Excused: Catherine Naughton (European Disability Forum (EDF)), Elisa Briga (European Federation for Intercultural Learning (EFIL)), Dirk Jarré (European Federation of Older People (EURAG)), Luk Zelderloo (European Association of Service Providers for Persons with Disabilities (EASPD)), Barbara Steenberger (International Union of Tenants (IUT)).

1. Welcome by Conny Reuter

The Liaison Group co-chair, Conny Reuter, opened the meeting by welcoming the participants and proposed to renounce the traditional presentation as the list of participants handed out to the participants included a description of the organisation of each attendee.

2. EP elections, strategy and mobilisation by the EP election team

Sara Joffre, responsible for communication and events in the EP's GD for Communication, presented the main tenets of the mobilisation campaign for the upcoming EP elections. Their target audience is the intersection between (moderately) pro-Europeans and those that do not vote for trivial reasons. To mobilise these voters, media communication in the next three months will focus on the EU's achievements in eight issue areas: human rights, migration, the Future of Europe, consumer protection, security, environment, social protection, and growth. A tool for local campaigning will be available soon

as well, "What Europe does for me", which can show European involvement either on a regional level or for specific target groups.

From January onwards, media coverage will focus on the parties choosing their Spitzenkandidaten, in April there will be a TV discussion with the respective candidates.

What will be different this year is the "groundgame", with the "This time I'm voting" campaign, which allows individuals and CSOs to take ownership of the material and modify it to express their own reasons to vote. So far, over 100 NGOs have expressed their interest to work with the EP election team, and the cooperation has already been agreed with over 30 of them. If interesting for NGOs, they can also reach a Memorandum of Understanding to communicate officially as a partner of the campaign.

In order to deepen the discussion it was proposed to organise a follow-up meeting with the interested LG member organisations.

3. Reorganisation of the Liaison Group

3.1 Evaluation of the Survey

Pierluigi Brombo presented the main findings of the survey. Some of the suggestions have already been implemented (more information about the attendees, meetings with a thematic focus, e.g.). What seemed to be crucial is a stronger link to the ongoing EESC work as the LG is the only institutional civil dialog group giving direct access to the policy cycle of the EU institutions. Another important element was informing about the newly-launched works within the EESC after every plenary session. Also, for proposals for reorganisation of the LG were discussed:

a) A steering group

The steering group would mainly be concerned with the coordination of the LG, whilst the meetings of the LG would be more focused on thematic contents so to seize the institutional links the LG provides. The proposed composition would be 7 members of the EESC, and 7 members to be chosen by the CSOs.

Conny Reuter expressed his support for the idea, as it would allow the LG meetings to focus on its primary added value: institutional access.

Assya Kavrakova (ECAS) asked about the precise tasks of the steering group, and how much time it would consume.

Izabela Jurczik-Arnold (EFIL) wondered whether and when the steering group would be joined by the other CSOs that are not delegated to it.

Conny Reuter clarified that the steering group would be focused on a coordination tasks, rather than work on content.

Jeremy Wates (EEB) agreed that generally, a steering group makes sense, but wondered about its precise composition.

Gabriella Civico (CEV) agreed that such a steering group for planning purposes is a good idea, but also wondered about the process of appointing the members.

Pierluigi Brombo clarified that a delegation principle was envisioned, similar to the process in the European Migration Forum. In terms of time, the work of the steering group should be integrated with the work of the LG, so as to not add further meetings to the calendar.

Marilena Vrana (EFC) supported the idea of such a steering group, so long as its tasks remained technical-administrative and the steering group would not "take over" the actual work of the LG. A steering group could help to promote expertise of LG member organisations.

b) Thematic meetings

Meetings should have a thematic focus to make participation more appealing and fruitful. These should have a topic which can be of interest to most of members. They could also be used to invite EESC members to showcase the knowledge-based added value of the interaction with the CSOs.

Philippe Seidl (AGE) expressed his support for thematic meetings, and applauded the template letter to the respective rapporteur to inform them about potentially interesting CSO input. He also stressed that thematic meetings should be open to all members of the CSO LG.

Izabela Jurczik-Arnold mentioned that thematic meetings seem to be a generally well-liked idea, but asked about their precise relation to the meetings of the steering group and the general meetings. She also stressed that there would be little incentive to attend a meeting that is solely concerned with an issue outside of an organisation's area of interest/expertise.

Jeremy Wates backed a thematic focus to share intelligence between member organisations. Issues should cover different sectors. He proposed to also address the big EU topics in these meetings, to arrive at a general communiqué by the members.

Vladimir Sestovic (European Civic Forum) remarked that the thematic focus could be used to harmonise or exchange positions under the patronage of the LG.

Marilena Vrana supported the idea of thematic meetings as long as there would be a slot for giving feedback on previous meetings to ensure a connection between all members.

Assya Kavrakova put forward the idea that a specific CSO may also present or showcase their work, if the thematic focus falls into their issue area, and that in such cases it would be great to invite members of the EESC to showcase the "knowledge-based added value" CSOs can provide.

Izabela Jurczik-Arnold mentioned that this would also require a more profound thematic preparation, and that it might be a good idea then to allow the members to participate also in writing.

Pierluigi Brombo thanked for the input, and clarified that even thematic meetings should maintain a short timeslot for reporting on the steering group, and that they should have a topic of general interest.

Marilena Vrana therefore proposed that the two general meetings might have a thematic focus.

c) Eliminating the "alternate member" status

The category for alternate members should be eliminated, granting all member organisations the same full status and the right to speak at general LG meetings. This would hence allow for two members per sector, and proposals for new members in sectors with so far only one member organisation are generally welcome.

Assya Kavrakova supported this proposal, but also considered that in some sectors there may not even be two European CSOs. She also stressed that the alternate member status disincentives participation. In her view it is not so important to have 2 CSOs per sector.

Pierluigi Brombo clarified that the sectors are not a rigid scheme, but are rather thought to ensure a certain balance in the representation of civil society.

Piotr Sadowski recalled how Volonteurope became an alternate member because they did not have fulfilled the full membership criteria, to which Pierluigi Brombo answered that this will be checked.

d) Enlargement to new sectors

The proposed enlargement concerns newly-relevant sectors, such as digital Europe, vocational education, professional associations and regional and territorial development, which would replace the Rural development sector, enlarging its scope. Generally, ideas for new sectors, and for new members, are welcome.

There was general debate about the precise sector definition as many LG member organisations cover more than one sector.

Jeremy Wates argued that a general "two-per-sector" rule may be weird, because some sectors are rather broad, and others very specific, which would point towards a more flexible way of organisation.

Pierluigi Brombo reiterated that they were indicative, and would never determine who is allowed to speak on a topic.

Conny Reuter wondered whether the sector definitions should be coordinated with the groups in the EESC, which currently is not the case.

Marilena Vrana expressed her concern about the manageability of the group, if extended.

Kélig Puyet (Social Platform) remarked that the discussion refers to the structure of the Liaison Group while it would be worth discussing on the purpose of membership in the LG.

Brikena Xhomaqi (LLL Platform) argued that first the problem of non-attendance should be resolved, before considering extending the group.

Concerning the non-attendance of some members, Conny Reuter argued that some LG member organisations prefer direct contact, but might then not block the space for participation of other CSOs interested in the LG. As a first step, the LG secretariat will contact the organisations which have not been present in last meetings to explore if they are still interested and ready to engage in the LG. The new profile of the LG should be acquired by summer 2019.

4. Any other business

It was agreed to send out a call for volunteers to work on the reorganisation of the LG.

The meeting of all members of the LG will take place on

29 November 2018, 10.00-12.30, JDE 70.