



European Union

**Statement by H.E. Mr. Jan Grauls
Permanent Representative of Belgium to the United Nations
on behalf of the European Union**

Economic and Social Council

General Debate on

"Non Governmental Organizations"

New York

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Mr President,

I have the honour to speak on behalf of the European Union.

The Candidate Countries Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia*, the Countries of the Stabilisation and Association Process and potential candidates Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Montenegro, Serbia, and the EFTA countries Liechtenstein and Norway, members of the European Economic Area, as well as Georgia align themselves with this declaration.*

The Council is about to take action on the reports of the NGO Committee of January and May-June of this year. At this time, I take the floor on behalf of the European Union for a general statement to register some concerns which the EU has with regard to the functioning of the NGO Committee.

Mr President,

The EU considers the involvement of civil society and non-governmental organizations an essential part of the work of the United Nations in general and ECOSOC in particular. We attach great importance to their contribution towards achieving our common goals. The UN is a democratic institution built on principles of diversity, non-discrimination and frank and respectful dialogue. Non-governmental organizations, regardless of their nature, contribute to the diversity of the debate. We all stand to gain from a variety of views being expressed, and being expressed openly. Over time, these views have contributed to more informed decisions being made by us as UN Member States.

The EU is committed to the overall aspiration of ECOSOC resolution 1996/31, which is to provide consultative status to organizations whose activities fall within the realm of ECOSOC and its subsidiary bodies, and whose aims and purposes are in conformity with the spirit, purposes and principles of the UN.

The EU is however preoccupied by recent developments in the work of the Committee.

The Committee faces a considerable backlog of work, due to the increase of both new and deferred applications. With the role of NGOs from all regions expanding, their demands for consultative status will keep on growing in the future; the Committee needs therefore to be prepared to face this trend. In January of this year, the EU has proposed a number of options to reform the working methods of the Committee. We are looking forward to continue working with ECOSOC partners on this important matter.

We have also seen over the past few years more and more deviations from the guiding principles of ECOSOC resolution 1996/31 in the handling of applications before, and in recommendations made by the NGO Committee. States are increasingly opposing consultative status for organizations which have been critical of their human rights record, or whose views a particular State does not agree with. Moreover, with regard to some organizations, the NGO Committee has conspicuously failed, during several consecutive sessions, to reach a decision on whether or not status should be recommended.

Of particular concern to the EU is the resistance of some member States of the NGO Committee to the granting of status to organizations which promote and defend the rights of persons based on their sexual orientation and gender identity. Such applications have been systematically delayed in the Committee through questionable procedural maneuvers including several rounds of questioning where identical or similar questions are asked session after session to the organizations' representatives, with no end in sight.

In June of this year, the NGO Committee also adopted a no-action motion in order to avoid having to pronounce itself on the request for status of an organization having introduced its request to ECOSOC no less than 3 years ago and having answered a total of 44 questions, and this despite the express request from one member of the Committee for a recommendation. The EU is of the opinion that by voting this motion and refusing to make a recommendation to ECOSOC, whether positive or negative, the NGO Committee failed to fulfill its mandate.

The EU would like to recall that questions asked by members of the Committee to organizations having requested consultative status should be helping the body to determine whether an organization is concerned with matters falling within the competence of the Economic and Social Council and its subsidiary bodies and whether the aims and purposes of the organization are in conformity with the spirit, purposes and principles of the U.N. Charter, nothing more, nothing less. Questions are therefore not supposed to request from organizations details that are, for example, protected by privacy such as names and addresses of their members. Neither should questions be used to pass judgment on the specific views expressed by an organization. And questions are definitely not supposed to be used to prolong indefinitely the proceedings.

Mr. President,

In the view of the European Union, the cases just mentioned and others reflect a negative trend in the working of the NGO Committee, giving cause for concern that the guiding principles for granting ECOSOC consultative status are gradually being undermined. The arrangements for consultations with NGOs were not designed to forward the interests of States; on the contrary, they were designed to allow civil society actors to support and enrich the work of the UN by providing a perspective which very often differs from that of States. The EU values this, at times challenging, contribution and would therefore respectfully urge States on the NGO Committee to work together to defend and uphold the guiding principles agreed by us the Member States in resolution 1996/31.

Thank you.

** Croatia and the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia continue to be part of the Stabilisation and Association Process.*