Parliamentary Assembly
Assemblée parlementaire
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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The situation in Tunisia

Reply[1] to Recommendation 1972 (2011)
Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers concurs with the Assembly concerning the importance for the entire Mediterranean and Middle East region of the transition to democracy embarked on in Tunisia. It welcomes the fact that the election of the Tunisian Constituent National Assembly on 23 October 2011 was free and democratic, thereby setting a example for the entire region, as noted by the mission of the Parliamentary Assembly which observed the election.

2. The Committee of Ministers points out that, as early as February 2011, its then Turkish Chairman and the Secretary General visited Tunisia to discuss with the new Tunisian authorities the ways in which the Council of Europe could assist this transition process. Following the Committee of Ministers' decision, at its 121st Session in Istanbul on 11 May 2011, to establish a new policy regarding the relations with neighbouring regions, these contacts were actively pursued, at both the political and the technical levels, so as to devise with the Tunisian authorities an action plan laying the foundations for strengthened co-operation. A first contact mission to Tunisia was organised by the Secretariat from 10 to 12 October 2011 to discuss the possible scope of such an action plan. It is hoped that this action plan can be adopted by the Committee before the end of the year, provided the progress of the discussions with the Tunisian authorities so permits.

3. The Committee of Ministers welcomes the fact that assistance activities were organised by the Venice Commission for the election of the members of the Constituent Assembly on 23 October. With regard to the Forum for the Future of Democracy, at their 1114th meeting (25 May 2011), the Ministers' Deputies encouraged the stakeholders in the Forum to consider the advisability of inviting representatives from countries on the southern and eastern rims of the Mediterranean basin in their respective spheres of competence. The Committee of Ministers expresses its satisfaction that a delegation from Tunisia participated in the session of the Forum held in Cyprus on 13 and 14 October on the theme "The interdependence of democracy and social cohesion". Concerning the Summer University for Democracy, the Committee of Ministers notes that Mr Rafâa Ben Achour, Minister Delegate to the Prime Minister of Tunisia, gave an opening lecture at the most recent session in June 2011 and that a group of representatives of Tunisian non-governmental organisations took part in this event. It very much hopes that Tunisia will be represented at the Strasbourg World Forum for Democracy to be held in October 2012.

4. Like the Parliamentary Assembly, the Committee of Ministers considers that Tunisia's accession to certain Council of Europe conventions would be a particularly interesting course of action in the context of the rapprochement with this country, provided the Tunisian authorities make the request, the conventions in question are open to accession by non-member states and the Committee of Ministers considers that accession to any specific convention is appropriate. This question has been raised during the many contacts that have taken place with the Tunisian authorities at both the political and the technical levels. The same applies to Tunisia's possible accession to partial agreements such as that on the North-South Centre.

5. Concerning the issue of the potential large-scale arrival of irregular migrants, asylum seekers and refugees on Europe's southern shores, the Ministers' Deputies held an in-depth discussion on this subject as early as 15 March 2011. Subsequently, at their 1116th meeting (15-16 June 2011), they took note of a

1. adopted at the 1127th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (23 November 2011)

proposal by the Secretary General concerning a framework for Council of Europe work on migration issues, which formed the basis for the Secretary General's proposals for a transversal programme in this area in the draft Council of Europe Programme and Budget 2012-2013. They also took note of the Secretary General's proposals for possible Council of Europe action in 2011 and called on member states to provide voluntary contributions so that the Secretary General could implement the activities proposed. Lastly, on 15 September 2011, a working meeting involving the Council of Europe Development Bank was organised to present to interested member states the assistance the Council of Europe, and in particular the Bank, could provide in the event of a mass influx of asylum seekers and migrants from the southern rim of the Mediterranean and the Middle East.

6. Finally, concerning the Assembly's proposal to create a special status with the Council of Europe for the countries of the southern and eastern Mediterranean, the Committee of Ministers considers that, in view of the potential implications, this proposal must be examined in-depth before a position can be adopted. The Assembly will be informed in due time of the Committee's conclusions on this matter. The Committee of Ministers would like to take this opportunity to indicate that it intends to interact closely with the Parliamentary Assembly on questions concerning the Council of Europe contribution to the democratic transition in the countries of the Mediterranean basin.