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Democracy in Europe: crisis and perspectives

Reply to Recommendation¹: Recommendation 1928 (2010)
Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers shares the Parliamentary Assembly's concerns about the functioning of democracy in member states, particularly because of the increasing lack of interest of part of the population in public and political affairs. At the same time, it notes certain positive developments, as evidenced by the growing public interest in issues linked to the environment or globalisation, highlighted by numerous debates and initiatives emanating from civil society. It also observes that new communication tools that have been developed in recent years offer unprecedented opportunities to inform the public about matters of general interest and promote their participation in decision making on subjects that concern them. These aspects are all conducive to encouraging the "enhanced process of participatory democracy" called for by the Assembly. The Council of Europe, in partnership with member states' governments, assemblies of local and regional authorities and civil society, can certainly help to exploit this potential. It is with this in mind that the Committee of Ministers has decided to make issues linked to democracy one of the Council of Europe's priorities for action, by making best use of and developing the expertise and tools at the Organisation's disposal.

2. Local and regional authorities make a key contribution to establishing a stable and effective democracy. The Committee of Ministers refers, in this context, to the opening for signature, at the 16th session of the Conference of Ministers responsible for Local and Regional Government (Utrecht, 16-17 November 2009), of the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS no. 207). To date, five member states have ratified the Protocol and a further nine have signed it.

3. The Committee of Ministers also notes that one of the main themes of the Utrecht ministerial conference was the impact of the economic and financial crisis on local and regional government. Further to this, as decided at Utrecht, a conference was held in Strasbourg in October 2010 under the Spanish authorities' auspices to discuss the implementation of the guidelines for policy responses. This should culminate in a number of recommendations to the next ministerial conference (Kiev, November 2011), based, *inter alia*, on an examination of the threats posed to the continuing provision of public services that are essential for maintaining social and territorial cohesion.

4. In connection with the Assembly's proposal to establish a Strasbourg Democracy Forum, the Committee of Ministers wishes to point out, as it has already indicated in its reply to Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1886 (2009) on "The future of the Council of Europe in the light of its sixty years of experience", that the Forum for the Future of Democracy, in which the Assembly plays an active role, is currently going through a reform process to enable it to contribute actively to strengthening democracy. To that end, in July 2010 the Ministers' Deputies adopted a mission statement for the forum and endorsed its revised guidelines, which will be formally adopted in the light of the results of the forum's 2010 session which took place in Yerevan in October. The Parliamentary Assembly will be closely involved, via the Steering Board, in finalising these revised guidelines. In this context, the Strasbourg Summer University for Democracy could form a central aspect of a much wider international event, along the lines described in the Assembly recommendation.

1. adopted at the 1103rd meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (19-20 January 2011)



5. In connection with the invitation in paragraph 5 of the Assembly's recommendation, the Committee of Ministers notes that the Organisation already has a number of activities, such as those concerned with combating human trafficking and organised crime or with Internet governance, that contribute to the elaboration of principles to regulate the impact of globalisation so as to ensure full respect of human rights and the rule of law. In particular, the Council of Europe has drawn up rules and standards on certain subjects of increasing importance in the context of globalisation. The Organisation must play a watchdog role that enables it, when appropriate, to recommend to member states any steps that might be necessary to safeguard the aforementioned principles in the context of globalisation. The Committee of Ministers will pay close attention to this matter.