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

Resolution 1591 (2007)[1]

Distance voting

Parliamentary Assembly

1. For the Parliamentary Assembly, its principal missions have always lain in defending democracy, the rule of law and human rights. The right to vote is an essential freedom in every democratic system. The Assembly considers it one of the chief prerogatives of a democratic system for all citizens to have the right to vote. Safeguarding this right is an integral part of the Assembly's mission.

2. Population movements for economic, social or other reasons have been disruptive, both nationally and internationally, to the concept of national community in the Council of Europe member states. Both on its national territory and abroad, the national community nevertheless retains fundamental democratic rights in respect of its country, like the right to vote. The Assembly considers that distance voting constitutes a significant means for the persons concerned to exercise this right.

3. Moreover, the Assembly is aware that, to remedy the phenomena of alienation and abstention, some member states are also increasingly resorting to various forms of distance voting, the most traditional of which remains postal voting.

4. The Assembly therefore considers that distance voting can open up avenues for extending the right to vote and guaranteeing universal suffrage. At the same time, it acknowledges that these voting methods may present challenges in terms of security of the ballot, surveillance and control of the procedures, and results of voting.

5. Voting remains a crucial stage in any democratic process. As the principal means for populations to decide their political future, voting also serves to legitimise institutions and to ground democracy in stability and security by creating a climate of confidence between the people's representatives and citizens.

6. Voting, a major step in any process of political legitimation, can also be subject to abuse. That is why the Assembly wishes to show the greatest firmness as to the transparent and fair organisation of all voting operations, including those linked with distance voting.

7. It considers that the use and form of distance voting will develop and that all Council of Europe member states should commence an examination of this subject in order to promote access for all citizens to the new communications media.

8. Accordingly, the Assembly invites the member states to:

   8.1. introduce distance voting, if this has not already been done, and spread its use to all forms of elections (local, national and referendums);

   8.2. develop, for states which authorise it, new possibilities in distance voting to ensure easy access and convenient vote casting for the voters;

   8.3. introduce all the necessary measures to ensure the security of the postal mailing of the vote or the transfer of the electronic vote;

   8.4. ensure the security and development of votes cast in advance;

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1. Assembly debate on 2 October 2007 (31st Sitting) (see Doc. 11183, report of the Committee on Legal Affairs and Human Rights, rapporteur: Mr Pourgourides). Text adopted by the Assembly on 2 October 2007 (31st Sitting).

8.5. intensify security arrangements for voting operations in supervised places abroad (consulates and embassies);

8.6. respect the secrecy of the vote in the context of postal voting, electronic voting and voting by proxy;

8.7. preserve the anonymity of voters and prevent the outcome of the vote from being identified with the voter;

8.8. combat and punish electoral fraud of all kinds, particularly in the case of multiple votes;

8.9. regulate the conditions of voting by proxy in order to establish all possible guarantees of compliance with the voter's choice;

8.10. adapt distance voting to the most vulnerable groups, such as the elderly and people with disabilities;

8.11. allow persons in custody, in accordance with the case law of the European Court of Human Rights, the full exercise of their right to vote through distance voting.