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The promotion of active citizenship in Europe

Report¹

Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy

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Summary

This report emphasises how good practice at local levels stands to enhance the quality and reputation of democracy at national and international levels as well. It indicates participation and consultation as key features of active citizenship. And within the Council of Europe it supports measures of co-ordination with a view to achieving better results for democracy at local and national levels (a “common agenda”). It also advises better co-ordination and working systems between the Council of Europe and the European Union, and that such new or revised systems should be devised and connected to the Council of Europe's own Single Programme on local and regional democracy as this develops and becomes deployed.

The report proposes that member States, on the one hand, take steps to facilitate the exchange of experience between and amongst cities and governments with an emphasis on examples of practical ways to enhance participation, citizenship and good governance at local levels and, on the other, put in place youth councils with a view to ensuring the possibility for young people to have a say in decisions affecting them.

1. Reference to committee: Doc.12657, Reference 3814 of 3 October 2011.



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A. Draft resolution²

1. The Parliamentary Assembly notes two key developments in the relationship between State and citizen in post-war Europe, both emanating from the Council of Europe. On the one hand, the recognition of the right to individual petition before the European Court of Human Rights. This puts States and individuals on an equal footing. On the other, the 2005 Warsaw Summit Declaration which enables the reinvigoration of democracy both nationally and internationally through its strengthening at local and grass-roots levels.
2. The promotion of active citizenship and the deployment of city diplomacy (when two different places work together to address similar issues of mutual concern) as one of the means of achieving it are consistent with the Council of Europe's own continuing resolve to enhance democracy in Europe.
3. The Assembly takes note of the ongoing discussions, under the current British chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers (until May 2012), between different bodies and sectors of the Council of Europe about better co-ordination of work on local and regional democracy (the Single Programme). The objective is to improve visibility and impact. Central to this end is the promotion of active citizenship, both as a consistent theme for now and the future, and as a reminder that the aim of any more efficient and improved delivery is in any case to better serve the citizen.
4. Against this background, the Assembly calls on:
 - 4.1. the current and successive chairmanships of the Committee of Ministers to build upon the ideas agreed upon during the recent Ukrainian chairmanship for an "agenda in common" to encourage collaboration between the various actors as part of their initiative to "reinforce local democracy", and to take steps to advance this end and its means;
 - 4.2. the member States of the Council of Europe to:
 - 4.2.1. take steps to facilitate the exchange of experience between and amongst cities and governments, with an emphasis on examples of practical ways to enhance participation, citizenship and good governance at local levels;
 - 4.2.2. put in place, in so far as possible, statutory or informal youth councils in connection with their local and national decision-making bodies, with a view to ensuring the possibility for young people to have a say in decisions affecting them.
5. Regarding the promotion of active citizenship, the Assembly notes two types of worthwhile expedients: those which function externally and those which function internally. The Assembly supports city diplomacy as part of the former, and participatory budgeting, corporate responsibility and citizen engagement as part of the latter. In this respect, the Assembly invites the governments of the member States to:
 - 5.1. help restore confidence in democracy by encouraging the examination and exchange of best practice, particularly at local level;
 - 5.2. reduce dependency on public services by increasing local initiatives and control.
6. In line with Article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty, the Assembly:
 - 6.1. urges the European Union to realise the ambition of citizen involvement in decision-making within the European Union;
 - 6.2. asks the European Union to broaden the focus of the 2013 "European Year of Citizens" to include issues of active citizenship, so far absent from its focus, which is restricted to the subject of freedom of movement.
7. While Council of Europe chairmanships seek to expedite the Single Programme on local and regional democracy within the Council of Europe, the Assembly calls on the European Union and the Council of Europe together to enhance co-operation in their joint handling of measures in that field. This is to avoid duplication and to achieve greater efficiency, thus strengthening local democracy in Europe to the best advantage of European citizens.

2. Draft resolution adopted unanimously by the committee on 14 March 2012.

B. Explanatory memorandum by the Earl of Dundee, rapporteur

1. Introduction

1. This report is the latest development within a consistent endeavour by the Council of Europe to improve the quality of democracy in Europe (see section 7 below).
2. It emphasises how good practice at local levels stands to enhance the quality and reputation of democracy at national and international levels as well.
3. The report also recognises that, both inside and outside Europe, respect for representative democracy and its institutions has diminished. One measure of this is the low turnout in national elections. Moreover, the turnout for the recent European Parliament elections was only 43%. Within Council of Europe member States, demonstrations have also occurred, including in Russia, Germany, Greece and Spain. Such alienation from, and dissatisfaction with, modern democracy have also become exacerbated by the current economic downturn, although they were not initially caused by it.
4. This report describes what can assist the conduct of public and national affairs within Council of Europe member States, in particular by people. It indicates participation and consultation as key features of active citizenship. And within the Council of Europe it supports measures of co-ordination, as proposed by successive Council of Europe chairmanships, to achieve better results for democracy at local and national levels.
5. The report thus approves the resolve of successive Council of Europe chairmanships to evolve and implement a common agenda covering the Council of Europe's local and regional democracy function (see section 9 below).
6. To reinforce local democracy, the report also advises better co-ordination and working systems between the Council of Europe and the European Union, and that such new or revised systems should be devised and connected to the Council of Europe's own Single Programme as this develops and becomes deployed.

2. Active citizenship: participation and consultation

2.1. Definitions

7. Active citizenship has been interpreted in several ways. The European Union designated 2011 as "The European Year of Active Citizenship through Voluntary Activity", commonly referred to as European Year of Volunteering or EYV11. The United Nations too celebrated the tenth anniversary of the UN Year of Volunteering. Also in 2011, the Parliamentary Assembly adopted Resolution 1778 (2011) on promoting volunteering in Europe, in which it invited member States, *inter alia*, to "promote an energetic policy in favour of voluntary service and be involved during the European Year of Volunteers in 2011 in campaigns to raise awareness about voluntary service, in close co-operation with the European Union".
8. These various approaches have caused confusion between volunteering and active citizenship. The two concepts should thus be clarified. Voluntary service beyond family and friends is exemplary citizenship. At the same time, it may have nothing to do with public affairs. For that reason, it is not "active citizenship", although a distinct component of it. Conversely, "active citizenship", if it addresses public affairs, may have little to do with voluntary service. Therefore, it can be described as the involvement of citizens in the life of local communities, in terms of their ideas, actions and decision making. The latter aspects reflect their practice of democracy at local and national levels. Consequently, three core attributes of "active citizenship" may be inferred: respect, responsibility and participation (in the sense of meaningful activity).
9. Participation is defined as the different ways in which people become involved in society. In a recent report, the National Council for Voluntary Organisations (NCVO) in the United Kingdom comments: "It is about more than just giving to charity, voting at elections or volunteering." Thereby is stressed the diversity of people's contributions within society and communities. Individually, political efforts, charity work or volunteering are insufficient to provide a definition. Instead they are all useful components within such diversity of contribution.

10. Democratic citizenship is a skill that is relevant to everyone. It includes knowledge of how a country and society work, how and why government functions as it does, where to find information and how to vote. It also covers skills needed to live well in a family and community, how to resolve disputes in a friendly and fair way, and how to negotiate and identify common ground. Democratic citizens should learn such ground rules of society and develop the corresponding personal responsibilities.

11. The NCVO notes a variety of motives for participation ranging from altruism to enlightened and direct self-interest. Participation may be individual or collective and its occurrence frequent or occasional. There are many stories of how life enhancing it can be, but there are also some about its negative effects.³

12. The NCVO report observes that such participation is one of the three main pillars of the current United Kingdom Government's notion for improved local democracy: "National and local governments have grappled for decades with the challenges of how to encourage people to be more active citizens. Their reasons have varied over time, from improving public services to reducing public spending or enhancing democracy. Recent policy developments around localism, the Big Society, outsourcing public services, encouraging charitable giving and the role of the voluntary sector have made questions about participation more topical than ever."⁴

13. While governments and others uphold participation, many also consider that healthy democracies should strive to be transparent, informing and engaging civil society and citizens in active dialogue. This view is incorporated in Article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty, which also provides for citizens' petitions.

14. The democracy index of the Economist Intelligence Unit⁵ measures the efficacy of world democracies by five criteria: electoral process and pluralism, civil liberties, government functioning, participation and political culture.

2.2. Businesses and active citizenship

15. In recent years, there has been an increase in the involvement of businesses in their localities. Employees help the community, and their business invests in its well-being. Some countries provide tax incentives. For many, the notion and practice of corporate responsibility is quite new.

16. Today, roughly one in three large companies is engaged in some way. Private sector enterprises collaborate with local non-governmental organisations (NGOs). Many Council of Europe member States are urging the private sector to regenerate communities and to evolve their own funding systems. Some might either raise money through companies, promote pro bono work or encourage direct investment.⁶

17. The Mécénat des Compétences in France allows companies that permit employees to work with NGOs to deduct the value of that time from their taxable profits.

18. CoGe in Italy requires banks and foundations to donate part of their profits to the charity sector. The management committee, which includes members of banking foundations, associations and institutions, monitors region by region the collected funds and allocates them to charities linked to Italian volunteering organisations.⁷

19. Working with businesses enables charities and community groups to benefit from the specialist skills of company employees or customers. For example, as part of the partnership between the B&Q company and UK Youth (a national youth development strategy), B&Q staff are helping to teach young people DIY (do it yourself) skills, which they will then use to revamp youth centres across the country.⁸

3. "Pathways through participation", NCVO, London, 2010.

4. Ibid.

5. "Participation, Trends, Facts and Figures", NCVO, March, 2011.

6. "White Paper on Giving", Cabinet office, HMG, London, 2011.

7. "Volonteuropa Post Conference Report", Genoa, 2008.

8. "White Paper on Giving", Cabinet office, HMG, London, 2011.

3. Why active citizenship is important

3.1. Necessary supplements to representative democracy: the case for better interaction between citizens and authorities as a daily life process

20. The Parliamentary Assembly has identified that there is a crisis of democracy. This is outlined in Resolution 1746 (2010) democracy in Europe: crisis and perspectives, in the following terms:

“The Assembly considers that the current crisis in representation requires that, apart from the traditional forms of mandate and delegation, with which fewer and fewer citizens are satisfied, the political relationship between society and the authorities must also be approached in a different manner. Thus, without putting into question representative democracy, the Assembly underlines that representation can no longer be the only expression of democracy; the latter has also to be developed beyond representation....”

21. Resolution 1746 (2010) therefore indicates that more sustained forms of interaction between citizens and the authorities should be established. It interprets democracy “not just as a system or the sum of individual rights, but as a form of society which requires rules for social justice and redistribution and implies not only delegating and taking decisions, but also discussing and living together in dignity, respect and solidarity. It is work in progress which is put to the test on a daily basis”.

22. Hence European consensus on participatory democracy. Within Council of Europe member States, this is also perceived as a daily life process, now urgently called for, yet hitherto not necessarily subsumed by traditional and representative democracy.

3.2. Volunteering and society: a European consensus

23. The recent report of the United Nations on the State of the world's volunteerism assesses the role of volunteering in society and its current achievements in solving problems and building common purposes. It emphasises that volunteering helps develop active citizenship, democracy and social inclusion.

24. Increasingly, governments support volunteerism as a form of civic engagement, not only to enhance delivery of services but also to promote common values. A number of influences account for the current consensus on volunteering, including the International Year of Volunteering, instituted in 2001.

4. Active citizenship in Europe

4.1. Associations and active citizenship

25. Associations are not only service providers, they also contribute to the promotion of human rights. In this respect, at the Warsaw Summit, the heads of State and government instructed the Council of Europe: “through its various mechanisms and institutions – to play a dynamic role in protecting the right of individuals and promoting the invaluable engagement of non-governmental organisations to actively defend human rights”.

26. As service providers, associations facilitate local economies, as they also enhance the culture and well-being of local communities. Freedom of association is first and foremost incorporated in the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5) and the European Union Charter of Fundamental Rights, but its relevance and usefulness to 21st-century Europe are also emphasised in Article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty.

4.2. Membership levels of organisations in Europe

27. Most countries encourage participation and calculate membership numbers of charities, associations providing advocacy and early warning, trade unions, religious groups and political parties. Across Europe, numbers are high, if one takes into account a collective figure for membership of a wide range of associations.

28. There is considerable variation in trade union membership numbers across Europe. The average level is 23%. However, from country to country, there is much divergence. The larger European Union States show quite low membership figures: Germany: 20%; France: 18%; Spain: 16%; and Poland: 15%.

29. The same variation applies to central and eastern Europe. Most States are below the European average of 23%, such as Poland mentioned above (15%). However, union membership in Slovenia is 41% of employees, while that for Romania is estimated to be not less than 34%.⁹

30. As regards membership of associations/charities, there are anomalous variations within European Union States: in Finland, the ratio is 20 associations per 1 000 people. However, in Luxembourg, Malta, Latvia and Romania there is less than one association per 1 000 people.¹⁰

31. In spite of such anomalous variations, membership numbers are high for Europe as a whole. In Sweden, 90% of the population belong to associations (sports, cultural, environmental, religious or consumer organisations), 77% in the United Kingdom, 70% in the Netherlands, 65% in Germany, 54% in France, yet only 36% in Russia. However, such figures do not distinguish between active and nominal members. Nevertheless, that for active membership in the United Kingdom is 62%.¹¹

4.3. Political parties: the decline in membership numbers in Europe

32. The 2006 Power Inquiry¹² – an independent report led by the Joseph Rowntree charitable foundation which examined democracy in the United Kingdom – noted that the decline in party membership did not only affect the United Kingdom. Two separate studies discovered a significant drop in party membership numbers across at least 13 European democracies. This had been a steady process since the 1950s. Another study also concluded that, within established democracies during the same period, there had been a parallel decline in the number of those who identified with a political party at all.

33. Most academic inquiries adduce similar evidence. Mair and Ingrid van Biezen, in a paper published in 2001, note that “... in each of the long-established European democracies, without exception, the absolute numbers of members have now fallen, and sometimes quite considerably. What we see here, in other words, is concrete and consistent evidence of widespread disengagement from party politics”.

34. Be that as it may, the Power Inquiry reported a counter balance, nevertheless. This is that disaffection with politics has not always corresponded to a lack of political interest or activity. Instead, engagement has taken different forms. The Make Poverty History movement, for example, has enthused individuals in a way which the ballot box no longer does.

5. Examples of citizen engagement in local decision making

5.1. Committees which consult and prompt team work

35. Besançon is a town of over 134 300 inhabitants in eastern France. It has a well-known committee, the Conseil des Sages, which primarily looks after the interests of senior citizens. Another one addresses the concerns of young people. Collectively, they are required to give feedback on unintended consequences of and propose possible improvements to policy. Transport, town planning and environmental issues are handled by the committee, which encourages the inhabitants to form a team. The aim is to enhance the quality of town life, to deter anti-social behaviour in open spaces and to help decide the design and location of new constructions. Such team-work carries favour with all, while at the same time serving to decrease the isolation of the older people.

5.2. Voluntary services and community spirit

36. In Germany and Austria, fire protection services are chiefly run by volunteers. They work alongside other volunteer organisations like Technisches Hilfswerk, voluntary ambulance services and emergency medical or rescue services. In most rural fire departments, the staff consists only of volunteers. The latter are usually on-call 24/7 even though they are otherwise employed. In German towns it is a matter of pride to belong to the firefighting force. To some extent, the same system prevails in rural parts of the United Kingdom.

9. www.fedee.com/tradeunions.html.

10. See *Guide de la liberté associative dans le monde 183 législations analysées*, co-ordinated by Michel Doucin, Haut Conseil de la Coopération internationale, La Documentation française, Paris, April 2007.

11. Ibid.

12. Power Inquiry, “Power to the people – The report of power, an independent inquiry into Britain's democracy”, March 2006, p. 51.

5.3. The role of NGOs in post-conflict rehabilitation and active citizenship

37. Founded in Dubrovnik, Croatia, in 1993, the NGO Desa was set up to help women refugees during the war. In the wake of fighting and ethnic intolerance, its first purpose was to restore confidence and normality to all those badly affected. However, since then it has assisted economic regeneration as well; it also played a useful part in deliberations on Croatia's future access to the European Union at the 7th meeting of the National Forum which took place in Pozega. The latter initiative has encouraged the development of rural areas and their commercial opportunities.

5.4. Participatory budgeting and “Big Society” awards in the United Kingdom

38. The practice of participatory budgeting began in Brazil in 1989. After the fall of the dictatorship, it was not just taken up as an expression of democracy, it was also perceived to be a far more efficient way to run towns and cities. This was by delivering public services through use of the knowledge, skills, ideas and experience of local people. It was brought to England in 2000 by Church Action on Poverty, and has been successfully implemented in over 100 local authorities. As in Brazil, a higher quality of public services is sought by inviting those affected to participate in making many more choices and decisions.

39. Grant schemes have proved to be both popular and effective. They are quite easy to organise. The locality is allocated a small amount from a given public service budget. The village, neighbourhood or ward can then fund local priorities.

40. Consultations to identify local priorities lead to choices for spending from the public budget on one item in preference to another. Thus, whether on undergrounding cables or improved lighting; village hall or play park improvements; mental health support or a hospital car service. Such consultation introduces the public to the type of difficult decisions which often have to be made. From responses, local councillors then learn what their constituents consider as priorities, where they think problems lie, and how these should be solved. And it connects local people much more to their communities and to each other. The following are some examples:

- Dulverton Town Council, in Somerset – consulting local people on choices for the spending of local budgets: four volunteer action groups were appointed to work out the best way to take forward plans for the library, the recycling centre, the youth club, and the car parks. That devolvement has attracted media attention and there has been television coverage on this new approach towards local initiatives.
- Liverpool City Council – prioritising public spending at neighbourhood level: in 2010/11, Liverpool City Council devolved spending decisions (£410 000) to its 30 city wards. This was the budget for green spaces and highways. Over those wards, 1 500 stakeholders joined this scheme.

41. “Big Society” awards have recognised a number of initiatives. A recent example is Food Cycle, a project which brings together young volunteers, surplus food and free kitchen space. The project started in 2008 and has now extended to 14 hubs across the country, serving homeless people, refugees, the elderly, and those on low income.

5.5. Youth councils

42. Resolution 1826 (2011) on expansion of democracy by lowering the voting age to 16, adopted by the Assembly on 23 June 2011, states that the longer young people have to wait to participate in political life, the less engaged they are when they are adults. This applies to decisions both at local and national levels. Encouraging youth participation and involvement in political decision making is therefore a crucial element to active citizenship. Fostering young active citizens can result in a stronger sense of belonging to a community and bring about better quality decisions. In a recent study by Finnish Youth Cooperation – Allianssi¹³ on young people's views on the functioning of democracy, 73% replied that citizens should be given broader possibilities to take initiatives in politics. In the same survey, only 52.4% felt that local decision-making worked well or rather well.

43. Youth involvement can take many shapes and forms and there are various examples of best practice in the Council of Europe member States. Different bodies operate at European, national, regional and local levels. For example, in Finland there are nearly 200 local youth councils. The members of these informal

13. The survey “The democracy barometer” took place from 6 to 23 February 2012 and includes 1 146 replies by young people aged 16 to 29.

groups are voted through elections in schools and their main task is to act as lobbyists for youth issues in their own municipalities. Some 1 800 local youth and children's councils exist in France. Latvia has put in place an Internet portal where young people can put forward initiatives.

44. Many member States of the Council of Europe regularly organise “Youth Parliaments”. In Finland, to quote only an example, a “Youth Parliament” is organised every two years and gathers together 199 young people aged 13-18 at the Finnish Parliament. During one full day these future decision makers are introduced to parliamentary work, hold a plenary session, vote, get acquainted with committee work and discuss with the speaker and a number of MPs. Another example is that of the Greek Youth Parliament which allows for the participation not only of youth from within the country, but also countries with large Greek communities such as Germany and Australia.

45. One example at the European level is the European Youth Parliament. It brings together over 20 000 young people at more than 100 regional, national and international events through 35 national organisations every year. Its aim is to raise awareness of European issues, encourage active European citizenship and motivate students to become engaged in European politics. It provides a forum in which young people of Europe can express their own opinions, without reverting to role play.

46. For its part, our Assembly is co-organising this year in Strasbourg, from 5 to 7 October 2012, a Youth Assembly bringing together 170 young people (aged 16 to 22). This will be our Assembly's contribution to the 2012 Strasbourg World Forum for Democracy.

5.6. Other initiatives in Europe

47. A great many projects are up and running, but have received little publicity. A recent research report by the Third Sector Research Council found that hundreds of thousands of groups exist under the radar.¹⁴

48. One such example are mobile technologies. These encourage citizens to take part in democracy. They also enable governments to inform citizens. Another example is the INSPIRE directive in Europe. This uses state-of-the-art Web-based mapping and visualisation programmes. While illustrating future potential, the latter thus also presents an opportunity for government and public administration to meet their own standards in promoting local democracy.

6. Economic and social councils

6.1. Call for new structures

49. Research carried out by Community Server Volunteers (CSV) in 2010¹⁵ on consultation and civil dialogue in the European Union found that there had not been much progress. This was in spite of declared intentions both in the Lisbon Treaty and in European Union States themselves. As a result, there is now a case for devising new ways to achieve proper action on what has been agreed.

50. “Crowd sourcing”, for example, has already proved its worth. It gathers opinions from large numbers of people, and has been employed by academic and professional enquiries. Yet in spite of its success it is still not much considered or used. This may reflect an unfortunate corollary; namely, that the system in place (government and public administration) for promoting local democracy is itself not yet as alert as it should be to a variety of useful ground expedients and opportunities.

14. The researchers mapped self-organised activity within two very small geographical areas of England and identified 58 community groups operating in and around just 11 streets. They found that a diverse range of services and activities are undertaken by groups beneath the official radar. They tend to be based around a particular topic of interest or operate for a particular “target community”, such as a faith or ethnic community, elderly or disabled people. Report author Andri Soteri-Proctor said the findings could have implications for policy making: “Making this sector more visible to policy-makers and the wider public can help increase understanding about their role, capacity and contribution within the wider third sector and society at large”. See Angus McCabe, Dr Jenny Phillimore and Lucy Mayblin, “Below the radar’ activities and organisations in the third sector: a summary review of the literature”, Third Sector Research Centre, Working Paper 29, January 2010.

15. “Volonteurope reports on effective consultation with citizens in the EU, March 2010.

6.2. Open, transparent and regular dialogue

51. Article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty urges such a dialogue. The intention is to bring Europe's governing bodies and civil society together in that way. So-called democratic deficits would thus be reduced, to be replaced by more active citizenship.

52. Such open dialogue has also been incorporated in the European Union's Education and Training 2020 policy debate and funds have been allocated to pilot demonstrations of the use of digital geospatial technologies.

6.3. Absence of proper plans for local consultation

53. Even though the assurances made in the Lisbon Treaty provide "citizens and representative associations" with the "opportunity to make known and publicly exchange their views", there has been insufficient resolve to follow up these intentions, leading some to remark that "effective consultation" is not yet being properly explored or employed.

54. The above-mentioned 2010 report surveyed 21 of the 27 European Union member States and found effective consultation present in only five of them. There had been no consultation at all in nine, while moderately effective efforts had been made in the remaining seven.

55. At one extreme, there is the committed approach adopted by Wales. Under the Third Sector Partnership Scheme, there is: "a statutory duty on the Welsh legislature to enter into legally binding partnership with the voluntary sector". Yet elsewhere, as already observed above, there have been varying degrees of commitment.

6.4. Bodies which encourage the solution of problems through dialogue

56. The Economic and Social Councils (ESCs) and similar institutions derive in part from the United Nations. They are nevertheless well represented in Europe.

57. The above institutions facilitate dialogue between employers, employees and government. Their membership therefore comprises representatives of employers' associations, trade unions, governments and other relevant branches of civil society.

58. Expert advice, opinions, studies and reports on economic and social matters are thus offered to governments and parliaments. Therefore, if required, ESCs broker communication between governments, trade unions, employers, employees and other relevant parties. They have a good record for achieving positive results.

59. With separate national traditions and procedures, different States require different handling. In this respect, ESCs have again proved to be adaptable and successful.

6.5. Absence in the United Kingdom of institutions to assist citizens' initiatives

60. There is no Economic and Social Council in the United Kingdom. Nor is there any other body which promotes dialogue with citizens. However, citizens' initiatives are now frequently debated in the two chambers of the United Kingdom Parliament. One of its select committees has recently recommended a procedural amendment to the current rules for e-petitions (citizens' petitions). This is to raise from 100 000 to a much higher figure the number of signatories necessary to trigger a petition. The recommendation follows the scheme's first twelve months which have produced too many petitions for the adjudicators to handle. This response does, however, prove the success and popularity of the scheme.

7. Relevance to the work carried out by the Council of Europe

61. Active citizenship strengthens political and social life throughout Council of Europe member States.

62. It also advances aims within the Council of Europe's competence, such as community solidarity and family issues.

63. The Council of Europe supports participatory democracy. Between 2007 and 2010, several reports on that theme were presented to the Parliamentary Assembly. They include those by Mr Andreas Gross (Switzerland, SOC) of the Committee on Political Affairs and Democracy. They have drawn attention to the rights and responsibilities of citizens to participate and have suggested measures to ensure they are able to do so. To quote some examples:

- In Resolution 1746 (2010) on democracy in Europe: crisis and perspectives, the Assembly recognises the crisis in democracy and its exacerbation by the current economic downturn. Thus it calls for new approaches to reinvigorate traditional democracy, including the expedient of participative democracy.
- Resolution 1778 (2010) on volunteering in Europe connects better democracy to active citizenship. And, regarding the latter, it notes current opportunities for more choices and decisions to be made at grass-roots level.

64. The European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) has also addressed the theme of participatory democracy.

65. The latter has also been advanced by Recommendation 307 (2011) on citizen participation at local and regional level adopted by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

66. Moreover, an additional protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) has been prepared to provide the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (opened for signature in Utrecht on 16-17 November 2009).

67. One question raised by the Assembly in its above-mentioned Resolution 1746 (2010) was whether this right of local participation should extend nationally and whether it also constitutes a fundamental political freedom. The Assembly thus proposed a new protocol to the European Convention of Human Rights (ETS No. 5) to guarantee the right to participate in public affairs at all levels, whether local, regional or national.

68. Another question has been how participatory democracy can reinvigorate the democracies of Europe in the light of the 2005 Warsaw Declaration.

69. The Warsaw Declaration (2005) advocates a change in the relationship between State and citizen, observes that such is anyway reflected by an increase in citizens' participation, and thus implies, conversely, that in the 21st century increased local democracy serves to strengthen democracy at national and international levels as well.

70. The Warsaw Declaration also produced the Conference of International Non-governmental Organisations (INGOs) of the Council of Europe. There are more than 400 INGOs enjoying participatory status with the Council of Europe. Within the latter they constitute the pillar of civil society. INGOs offer expert advice to citizens and governments.

71. The INGO Conference of the Council of Europe has produced a Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-making Process. This helps people to contribute to decisions at local and national levels. The code illustrates too how NGOs are useful in this respect: "NGOs form a crucial component of participation in an open, democratic society through engaging large numbers of individuals". The INGO Conference is also about to publish practical guidelines on intercultural dialogue.

72. Work on participatory democracy is also carried out in other sectors of the Council of Europe. An institution particularly worth noting in the intergovernmental sector is the European Committee on Local and Regional Democracy (CDLR), in charge of preparing decisions by the Committee of Ministers in this area. It has also prepared the above-mentioned additional protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of local authorities. Another key facilitator is the Centre of Expertise on Innovation and Local Government Reform, which provides field assistance to local authorities.

73. There is also a strong connection between participatory democracy and the Council of Europe's work on education for democratic citizenship and human rights.

74. Council of Europe work on citizenship education is under way in many member States.

75. The Council of Europe is also working with and for young people, encouraging them to be actively involved in strengthening civil society in Europe and to defend the values of human rights, cultural diversity and social cohesion. The Council of Europe's commitment to fostering greater youth participation can be demonstrated through its system of co-management: representatives from youth NGOs participate in

committees with government officials who together then work out the priorities for the youth sector and make recommendations for future budgets and programmes. These proposals are then adopted by the Committee of Ministers.¹⁶

8. Working links between Council of Europe cities and localities

8.1. Consensus on participatory democracy

76. Within the Council of Europe affiliation, an increasing number of cities and localities support participatory democracy. In this, they are encouraged by their own national governments. At the same time, the essence and success of local initiatives are that they should be independent of government. That is recognised both by national localities and national governments themselves. There is also consensus on building up good practice. Localities do this through experiment and by noting what works well elsewhere. A town or city may wish to compare what it is doing with other similar projects in the same country. Equally, it may also compare its performance with that of similar towns or cities abroad.

8.2. Working links between European and non-European cities and “city diplomacy”

77. Sometimes these links are initiated in order to facilitate trade and the exchange of intellectual and technical information. Such connections are both inside and outside Europe. Thus they may apply between two European cities as well as between a given European city and another one outside Europe. Frequently, a given European city has links with several others in different European States in addition to yet others beyond Europe. Different localities also compare notes and work together over their respective handling of health, education and social matters for example. Often three or more partners combine their efforts in this way. Such synergies have proved to benefit citizens and local democracy.

78. The city diplomacy model is also useful for advancing local and regional democracy outside Europe, such as in Tunisia and Morocco.

79. The fact that working structures of city diplomacy promote active citizenship is a simple logical inference. For if two different cities or centres, each espousing the aim of active citizenship, work together to achieve mutual objectives, then the expedient of city diplomacy will have assisted active citizenship, since in the first place active citizenship was one of their shared objectives.

8.3. City diplomacy and the Council of Europe

80. If within the Council of Europe affiliation participatory democracy thus further progresses through the synergies and working structures of city diplomacy, then democracy at national and international levels will benefit as well. As also intimated by the Warsaw Declaration, this is so since an improved practice of democracy by citizens at local levels also enhances the quality and reputation of democracy at national and international levels.

81. The independence of local initiatives to encourage active citizenship is supported by national governments within the Council of Europe. Therefore, if city diplomacy has proved to be an effective means towards this end, then it follows that national governments will wish to support it as well.

82. Within the Council of Europe, incentives can also be provided by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities. Congress Recommendation 234 (2008) on city diplomacy emphasises how inter-city co-operation produces good results when specific programmes are addressed. It also distinguishes city diplomacy from town twinning. The latter developed after the Second World War. It served to establish goodwill between European towns and cities. Subsequently, however, and particularly in recent years, the practice of city diplomacy has taken over. Unlike town twinning, city diplomacy addresses specific issues and programmes. As already indicated, its concept is to attain mutual objectives through working together on shared problems and issues. To further encourage its use and methods, the Congress plans to prepare a charter for city diplomacy.

83. The local democracy agencies (LDAs), set up by the Congress in the 1990s, pioneered help to municipalities devastated by war in the former Yugoslavia. This was done through partnership arrangements with towns and regions in western Europe. Initially focused upon the crisis, agenda items then came to include democratic reforms, building up civil society and promoting citizen participation.

16. www.coe.int/t/dg4/youth/Coe_youth/CoE_and_young_people_en.asp.

8.4. City diplomacy and the European Union

84. The European Union is also already in a position to provide incentives to advance city diplomacy in order to enhance the quality of democracy in Europe. European Union funding programmes usually already require local authorities to work with partners from other countries. Established links and the prospect of focused city structures offer an excellent opportunity in this respect. This, in turn, can boost civic pride, self-esteem and confidence.¹⁷

9. Relevance to the proposed Single Programme: assistance of Council of Europe chairmanships to local and regional democracy

9.1. The concept and its aspects

85. Local and regional democracy is one of the shared priorities of the Ukrainian, United Kingdom and Albanian Council of Europe chairmanships. Under the Ukrainian chairmanship, the European ministers responsible for local and regional government met in November 2011 in Kiev. The conference unanimously adopted a declaration which highlights the importance of future pan-European work on local and regional democracy.

86. The current resolve is thus to start to review progress on reforms undertaken, as indicated, during the term of office of these successive chairmanships. To do so, the current United Kingdom chairmanship has proposed the further development of an agenda in common covering the Council of Europe's local and regional democracy function. Thereby the expression and analysis of ad hoc priorities would remain unrestricted. As also would the communication of ideas and useful suggestions from grass roots to decision-making. However, the contributions of existing actors would become aggregated and streamlined into a single coherent programme of work, agreed by the Committee of Ministers after consultation with the Congress, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Conference of INGOs.

87. The effectiveness of such a coherent approach would depend on the co-ordination and administrative arrangements surrounding it. However, it is equally acknowledged that the latter might be structured in different ways in order to make use of the expertise of each of the actors and their respective secretariats.

88. Four specific aspects need to be addressed: the activities which such a Single Programme might cover; the right kind of management architecture; requisite budgetary and administrative arrangements; and the ways and means to encourage and check that each individual actor is performing efficiently.

9.2. The additional case for co-ordination of work on local democracy between respective institutions of the European Union and the Council of Europe: a pan-European approach

89. Such co-ordination would also much enhance efficiency of delivery, while reducing duplication and dissipation of effort. This advantage would follow from better co-ordination of work between the Parliamentary Assembly and the European Parliament, between the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and the European Union's Committee of the Regions, and between the directorates of the Secretariat General of the Council of Europe and those of the European Commission. Improved work co-ordination on local and regional democracy between the respective institutions and committees of the European Union and the Council of Europe will clearly best serve the interests of the European citizen.

90. The Council of Europe Committee of Ministers represents 47 States, including all 27 European Union member States, in addition to 20 more non-European Union member States. The Committee of Ministers is therefore better able to adopt a pan-European approach of co-ordination on matters of local and regional democracy than any other relevant body within the European Union. At least this is the opinion of your rapporteur.

10. Conclusions

91. Regarding an improved relationship between State and citizen in Europe, your rapporteur notes two key developments in post-war Europe, both emanating from the Council of Europe. On the one hand, the recognition of the right to individual petition before the European Court of Human Rights. This puts States and

17. Extract from "Take your partners", report of the Local Government International Bureau on town twinning and international partnerships, London, 2007.

individuals on an equal footing. On the other, the 2005 Warsaw Summit Declaration, which states that “[e]ffective democracy and good governance at all levels are essential for preventing conflicts, promoting stability, facilitating economic and social progress, and hence for creating sustainable communities where people want to live and work, now and in the future”. This enables the reinvigoration of democracy both nationally and internationally through its strengthening at local and grass-roots levels.

92. The aim of promoting active citizenship and the deployment of city diplomacy as one of the means of achieving it are consistent with the Council of Europe’s own continuing resolve to enhance democracy in Europe.

93. Under the current UK chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers (until May 2012), discussions are ongoing between different bodies and sectors of the Council of Europe about a better co-ordination of work on local and regional democracy. The objective is to improve visibility and impact. Central to this end is the promotion of active citizenship, both as a consistent theme for now and the future, and as a reminder that the point of any more efficient and improved delivery is in any case to better serve the citizen.

94. Against this background, I would suggest that the United Kingdom take steps to advance both end and means, as described above, during its chairmanship of the Council of Europe in 2012 and that this work be continued by subsequent chairmanships. As part of its initiative to “reinforce local democracy”, the United Kingdom should build upon the ideas proposed by the then Deputy Prime Minister of Spain, Mr Manuel Chaves (and agreed by the Conference of Ministers responsible for Local and Regional Government in their meeting in Kiev in November 2011), for an agenda in common to encourage collaboration between the various actors in this sphere. Toolkits, fieldwork programmes and the practical support of the Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform will also be important enablers. In this way, steps should be taken to facilitate the exchange of experience between and amongst cities and governments with an emphasis on examples of practical ways to enhance participation, citizenship and good governance at the local level.

95. Regarding the promotion of active citizenship, two types of worthwhile expedients are identifiable: those which function externally and those which function internally. If city diplomacy (when two different places work together to address similar issues of mutual concern) represents the former, examples of the latter include participatory budgeting, corporate responsibility and citizen engagement.

96. The Assembly could ask the governments of the member States to help restore confidence in democracy by encouraging the examination and exchange of best practice, not least at local level. It could also invite them to reduce dependency on public services as a result of an increase in local initiatives and control.

97. In association with Article 11 of the Lisbon Treaty, the Assembly could urge the European Union to realise the ambition of citizen involvement in decision making within the European Union. It could also ask the European Union to broaden the focus of the 2013 “European Year of Citizens” to include issues of active citizenship, so far absent from its focus, which is restricted to the subject of freedom of movement.¹⁸ Finally, while Council of Europe chairmanships are seeking to expedite a common agenda within the Council of Europe, the Assembly calls on the European Union and the Council of Europe together to co-operate much more in their joint handling of measures. This is to avoid duplication and to achieve greater efficiency, thus strengthening local democracy in Europe to the best advantage of European citizens

18. See <http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=IP/11/959&format=HTML>.