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COUNCIL OF EUROPE
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Electronic democracy

Reply to Recommendation[1]: Recommendation 1860 (2009)
Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers has closely examined Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1860 (2009) on "Electronic democracy".

2. It welcomes the interest of the Parliamentary Assembly in e-democracy as a whole. It acknowledges the potential contribution that e-tools and advances in the field of information and communication technologies (ICTs) can make to promoting democracy and the rule of law. In particular, they can strengthen the involvement and participation of citizens in national, regional and local public life and decision-making processes and encourage citizen initiatives. Public administration and services can also be improved by making them more accessible, responsive, user oriented, transparent, efficient and cost-effective, thus contributing to the economic, social and cultural vitality of society. With regard to the parliamentary dimension of e-democracy, the Committee of Ministers agrees with the Assembly that, as it stated in Resolution 1653 (2009), ICTs have come to play an essential role in supporting the work of legislative assemblies and in providing elected representatives with unprecedented means of engaging in dialogue with their constituencies. It encourages the Assembly to promote such developments in its work.

3. The Committee of Ministers notes that Recommendation 1860 (2009) of the Parliamentary Assembly forms part of a growing *acquis* of the Council of Europe in this field. Instruments include the recommendations of the Committee of Ministers to member states on e-voting (Rec(2004)11), on e-governance (Rec(2004)15), and on measures to promote the public service value of the Internet (CM/Rec(2007)16). In addition, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe has adopted Recommendation 248 (2008) on "E-tools: a response to the needs of local authorities" and Recommendation 249 (2008) on "Electronic democracy and deliberative consultation on urban projects". The Committee of Ministers recently complemented these standards by adopting Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)1 on electronic democracy (e-democracy) on 18 February 2009. This recommendation underlines the potential contribution of ICTs to democracy and society, whilst fully respecting human rights and fundamental freedoms, the need to narrow the digital divide by means of an inclusive and non-discriminatory approach and the importance of empowering people through support for education and training.

4. The Committee of Ministers welcomes the fact that work on e-democracy by the different organs of the Council of Europe has been a commendable example of extensive and mutually beneficial transversal co-operation over a sustained period of time. In particular it notes that the Parliamentary Assembly has participated actively as an observer in the meetings of the Ad hoc Committee on e-democracy (CAHDE).

5. The Committee of Ministers would also highlight the 4th Forum for the Future of Democracy (Madrid, 15-17 October 2008) on "E-democracy: who dares?", which was a unique occasion for presenting and discussing the different tools devised by the Council of Europe in this field and in which members of the Parliamentary Assembly actively participated. The Committee of Ministers encourages the implementation of the proposals made in the conclusions which emerged from the Forum.

1. adopted at the 1069th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (4 November 2009)

6. With regard to the detail included in the recommendation, the Committee of Ministers would inform the Parliamentary Assembly that at its 1049thmeeting on 18 February 2009, it took note of proposals by the CAHDE to the Committee of Ministers on further conceptual and possibly standard-setting work in the field of e-democracy which might include the regulatory dimension of e-democracy, initiatives from the bottom upwards and the way in which e-consultations can facilitate the increasing practice of public consultations. It has also taken note that the Secretariat will be organising biennial meetings for reviewing the application of Recommendation CM/Rec(2009)1 on e-democracy. Any proposal for future intergovernmental structures in the field of e-governance will be duly examined by the Committee of Ministers.

7. Furthermore, the Committee of Ministers is aware that the Secretariat has prepared a portable exhibition on the scope and potential of e-democracy as a means for enhancing the involvement of citizens in political life. Since September, this exhibition has been shown at several events on issues related to democracy at the Council of Europe and elsewhere and should be displayed during a forthcoming session of the Parliamentary Assembly.