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The future of the Council of Europe in the light of its sixty years of experience

Reply to Recommendation¹: Recommendation 1886 (2009)
Committee of Ministers

1. The Committee of Ministers has examined Parliamentary Assembly [Recommendation 1886 \(2009\)](#) on “The future of the Council of Europe in the light of its sixty years of experience” which it has brought to the attention of the member states’ governments. It has also communicated it to the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe for information.

2. The Committee of Ministers considers that the recommendation and its associated report are particularly timely in the light of the reform process underway implementing the objective set at the Third Summit of the Council of Europe to enhance the political relevance, impact and effectiveness of the Organisation. The success of the endeavours to reform the Organisation and strengthen its political profile will depend on the participation of all parts of the Council of Europe. In this context, the Committee of Ministers welcomes “the Assembly’s desire to set itself clear priorities revolving around the Organisation’s essential values while retaining a broad remit so as to better respond to the expectations and the new needs of European citizens”.² An enhanced focus by the Assembly on the core issues of the Council of Europe will certainly improve synergy and complementarities between the two organs, which in turn will foster more effective progress in the pursuit of our common goals and result in a higher impact in member states.

3. With regard to the ideas or proposals contained under paragraph 3 of the recommendation, these will be duly taken into account in the reform process. In this context, it is worth noting a number of recent developments which have taken place since the adoption of the recommendation by the Assembly. As regards relations with the European Union, the Committee of Ministers adopted a number of decisions³ at its 120th Session (11 May 2010). In particular, the Ministers welcomed the substantial progress in the co-operation based on the Memorandum of Understanding and emphasised the importance of ongoing and forward looking co-operation. The Ministers also noted that the entry into force of the Lisbon Treaty and the Charter of Fundamental Rights on 1 December 2009 has created new opportunities to enhance further the values-based partnership between the Council of Europe and the European Union, with a view to achieving a strong and coherent system of human rights protection in Europe; it welcomed the commitment of the European Union to accede to the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR), confirmed its own commitment to this process, facilitated by the entry into force on 1 June 2010 of Protocol No. 14 to the ECHR, and called for the early completion of negotiations and a rapid accession.

4. Furthermore, as a follow-up to the 120th Session of the Committee of Ministers (May 2010), the Ministers’ Deputies have been asked to develop proposals for a partnership between the Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Local and Regional Government and the Committee of Ministers. At the same time, the Ministers’ Deputies are also reviewing the organisation of Council of Europe Conferences of Specialised Ministers. With regards to Council of Europe conventions, as part of the priorities for 2011, a

1. adopted at the 1090th meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies (7 July 2010)

2. Parliamentary Assembly [Resolution 1734 \(2010\)](#) on “Expenditure of the Parliamentary Assembly for the financial year 2011”.

3. cf. the Ministers’ decisions contained in CM(2010)PV add1, item 5.



stock take of the situation will be conducted through a critical review of their relevance. This will provide the basis for decisions on follow-up, including measures to increase the visibility and the number of parties to relevant conventions. Finally, as regards budgetary strategy, the Committee of Ministers would emphasise that the budgetary discussions and decisions cannot be disconnected from the overall budgetary situation in member states. As a first step to alleviate the pressure on the Ordinary Budget, it has agreed to introduce additional flexibility for the setting up of partial agreements and a review of the question of the principle of acceptance of voluntary contributions by entities outside member or observer states is currently underway within the Rapporteur Group on Programme, Budget and Administration (GR-PBA). It will also consider the advisability of a possible move towards a biennial budgetary process from 2012.

5. With regard to the proposals contained in paragraph 4 calling for greater prominence to be given to the various activities of the Council of Europe in the field of democracy, the Committee of Ministers notes that the Forum for the Future of Democracy, in which the Assembly plays an active role, is currently going through a reform process which aims at enabling the forum to offer a robust contribution to the reinforcement of the democracy pillar. In this context, it is worth noting the consensus amongst the stakeholders to provide the forum with a new mission statement and revised guidelines for its operations that would allow it to address issues of democracy in an innovative and holistic manner with a wider involvement of all sectors of the society. The Committee of Ministers also notes the developments that are taking place in parallel at the level of the Summer University of Democracy as well as the Assembly's annual debate. The summer university, which gathers annually the participants of the sixteen Schools of Political Studies network, could have the potential to develop into a much larger, international event in the spirit of the idea put forward in the recommendation.

6. With regard to ongoing dialogue and co-operation between the two organs, a number of developments have also taken place since the adoption of the recommendation in October 2009. The Committee of Ministers would refer in particular to the proposals that have already been agreed between the Assembly and the Committee of Ministers in October 2009 with a view to enhancing dialogue and co-operation between the two statutory organs.⁴ It also recalls that the Secretary General has presented his report at the June 2010 Joint Committee on the measures identified. The recommendations provided useful input into that report.

7. In this context, the Committee of Ministers would, in particular, refer to the informal meetings that have taken place between the Bureau of the Committee of Ministers and the Presidential Committee of the Assembly which have greatly contributed to enhancing the interaction between the two bodies, fostering better understanding and allowing informal dialogue to take place in a frank and constructive atmosphere. In a similar vein, exchanges of views on specific subjects of common interest are held with the competent Assembly Rapporteur on an ad hoc basis either in the Ministers' Deputies' meetings or in the relevant Rapporteur Groups and vice versa. The joint efforts of the Assembly and of the Committee of Ministers have led to the adoption, ahead of schedule, of the joint interpretative statement on rules and procedures for the future elections of the Secretary General, which is clear proof that the Assembly and the Committee of Ministers have become genuinely closer and that working relations have improved.

8. The Committee of Ministers' Working party on Institutional Reforms (GT-REF.INST) also held an exchange of views with Mr Jean-Claude Mignon, Rapporteur for the Political Affairs Committee. This allowed for a direct and frank debate on the recommendation in question, and was considered a further welcome development in strengthening working relations between the two bodies. The Committee of Ministers regards the recommendation and its present reply, as part of a positive on-going process.

4. Link to the proposals: [CM\(2009\)142](#).