

**OSCE Human Dimension Implementation Meeting****WARSAW, 2-13 OCTOBER 2006****WORKING SESSION 10 "DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS"*****ACTIVITIES OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE  
DEMOCRACY DEPARTMENT***

***The Council of Europe's Democracy Department is part of the General Directorate of Political Affairs. Its activities cover the Schools of Political Studies, the Forum for the Future of Democracy, the project on Good Governance in the Information Society, the Council of Europe's relations with NGOs and Civil Society Initiatives. 1. Schools of Political Studies of the Council of Europe***

The first "School of Political Studies" of the Council of Europe was founded in Moscow in 1992, to train the new generation of political, economic, social and cultural leaders. It is not an academic study course as such, but a series of seminars and annual conferences on such themes as European integration, democracy, human rights, the rule of law and globalisation. The annual programme includes national activities and a closing session at the Council of Europe's headquarters in Strasbourg.

At present 11 schools are operating in Russia, Ukraine, Georgia, Armenia, Moldova, Romania, Bulgaria, Serbia, Kosovo/UNMIK, "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" and Croatia. New schools are in the process of constitution in Albania, Azerbaijan, and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Each school is run by a director appointed by a board, responsible for selecting 40 candidates each year and preparing the study programmes, and for the financial and administrative management of the school. The schools of political studies of the Council of Europe are national NGOs in their respective countries.

**Networks**

The schools of political studies operate in regional networks and organise regional activities, particularly in the Balkans and the Caucasus.

The schools' directors meet several times in the year to co-ordinate their activities and exchange experiences and good practices.

Alumni associations have been set up in the participating countries and help to maintain and develop professional and social ties.

**A priority for the Council of Europe**

At the Organisation's Third Summit, in Warsaw on 16 and 17 May 2005, the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe's 46 member states acknowledged

the role of the schools in strengthening democracy in Europe by including the programme in the Organisation's priorities for the years to come.

The schools' study programme is piloted by the Directorate General of Political Affairs, which encourages synergies between the schools and the Council of Europe's activities in the countries involved in the programme.

## **Funding**

In addition to a basic financial contribution from the Council of Europe, the schools of political studies are financed by contributions from member and/or observer States, the European Union and international foundations and NGOs.

## **The Summer University for Democracy**

Since their foundation, each of the schools of political studies has attended closing seminars in Strasbourg which focus mainly on learning about the European institutions. In 2005, 8 seminars at the Council of Europe were attended by about 400 participants. The seminar programmes are prepared by the Directorate General of Political Affairs, in close collaboration with partners in the European Public Administration Centre (PEAP) set in place by the French Government, namely the ENA, the Robert Schuman University, the Institut d'Etudes Politiques, the Centre des études européennes de Strasbourg, the Euro Institut, the City of Strasbourg, the Conseil général du Bas-Rhin and the Conseil Régional d'Alsace.

In 2006, in order to increase the visibility of the programme and forge stronger ties between participants from the different schools, the closing seminars for all the schools were merged into a single grand event, the Summer University for Democracy, from 10 to 14 July.

This event, supported by the partners in the PEAP, who helped with the preparations, drew around 500 participants from 15 countries at the *Palais de l'Europe*. The programme included plenary sessions, workshops and study visits. Public figures representing the French, European and international authorities and experts from the Council of Europe and the PEAP took the floor at the Summer University for Democracy and helped lead the proceedings.

## **Presentation of the programme**

The main item on the agenda of the first Summer University for Democracy was a joint discussion on how to address "Challenges to democracy in present-day Europe". The emphasis was on themes that are common to West European democracies and emerging democracies, which, despite a diversity of practices and a wide variety of political and geopolitical contexts, are all confronted with the same problems, for example participation, integration, security and public integrity.

The aim was to identify the specific features of the European approach to these issues so as to foster a feeling of belonging to the European entity and to consider the joint responses devised by the various European organisations, the models and practices proposed, and the different types of joint action.

The programme included contributions from the fields of political science and law.

Three main themes had been chosen to guide the discussions on the various aspects of the functioning of pluralist, democratic and free European societies: Democracy in operation, European strategy(ies), and Aspects of public governance.

Three major conferences were held on these subjects for the students from the various schools. The discussions continued in the workshops which were run by each school and the focus was on an interactive approach and topical issues. The programme also included thematic visits in connection with the workshops chosen by the participants.

## **2. The Forum for the Future of Democracy**

At the Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe held in Warsaw from 16 to 17 May 2005, the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe decided to establish, within the existing structures of the Organisation as a whole, a Council of Europe Forum for the Future of Democracy to strengthen democracy, political freedoms and citizens' participation. The Forum is open to all member states and civil society, represented by policymakers, officials, practitioners or academics. It shall enable the exchange of ideas, information and examples of best practices, as well as discussions on possible future action. The Forum acts in close co-operation with the Venice Commission and other relevant Council of Europe bodies with a view to enhancing, through its reflection and proposals, the Organisation's work in the field of democracy.

The Forum process should support the development of proposals that address the different challenges to democracy in Europe. Each Forum meeting will deal with one main theme. At the launch meeting of the Forum held in Warsaw from 3 to 4 November 2005 the main theme was citizen participation and at the next Forum meeting, to be held from 18 to 19 October 2006 in Moscow, the main theme will be the role of political parties in building democracy. Within the main theme of the forthcoming Forum meeting in Moscow, workshops will be held to firstly discuss the role and responsibilities of political parties in finding democratic solutions to contemporary challenges; secondly, the interaction between political parties and other actors in the democratic process; and thirdly, how to build and strengthen democratic institutions. In the coming years the Forum will be hosted by Sweden, Spain, Ukraine and Armenia, in that order.

## **3. Good Governance in the Information Society**

### **Ad Hoc Committee on E-Democracy**

On 24 May 2006 the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers decided to establish an ad hoc committee on e-democracy. The committee will examine developments on e-democracy/e-participation at European and international level, including government-to-citizen and citizen-to-citizen communication and interaction, with a view to identifying political, social, ethical, legislative and technological issues and their interdependence, as well as examples of emerging good practice which could be of interest to member states, and to elaborating definitions of key terms in this field. The committee, to which one expert has been invited from each member state, will meet for the first time from 18 to 19 September 2006.

### **Recommendation on E-voting**

The Council of Europe will host a meeting from 23 to 24 November 2006 at which experts from member states will review the Council of Europe 2004 recommendation

(2004)11 of the Committee of Ministers to member states on legal, operational and technical standards for e-voting. The meeting will take stock of e-voting developments in member states since 2004 when the recommendation was adopted.

### **Recommendation on E-Governance**

In addition to the above recommendation the Council of Europe has also adopted a recommendation on electronic governance (“e-governance”) (Rec(2004)15) of the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers to member states.

The Council of Europe is continuously following developments regarding e-governance and e-government, inter alia by taking part in the follow-up meetings to the World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS) and in particular the WSIS action line C7 on e-government.

## **4. Relations with NGOs and Civil Society Initiatives**

The Council of Europe’s work benefits extensively from contacts and co-operation with the dynamic elements of society, as represented by NGOs. One of the main challenges currently facing the Organisation is to strengthen NGOs and civil society in the new member states and to develop participatory democracy on a pan-European basis. The Council of Europe’s co-operation programmes rely on partner NGOs and focus on democratic reform.

### **Relations with International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs)**

#### *The Conference of INGOs of the Council of Europe*

The Conference is made up of INGOs with participatory status at the Council of Europe. It meets once a year to decide on general lines of action. Through this status, the Council of Europe includes INGOs in intergovernmental activities and encourages dialogue of members of parliament and local and regional authorities with associations on major social issues. A first “consultative” status was created in 1952 and this was upgraded to “participatory” status in 2003, thus recognising the significance of INGOs in Council of Europe policy making. This status is governed by Committee of Ministers’ Resolution (2003)8. INGOs wishing to obtain such status must be particularly representative in their field(s); they must share the Council’s objectives and contribute actively to its work. To date, approximately 370 INGOs hold such status.

#### *INGO Liaison Committee*

A Liaison Committee elected by the INGO Conference, meets regularly, promoting permanent dialogue and co-operation between the Council’s Secretariat and the INGOs. It maintains close contact with the Council’s political bodies – the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the Commissioner for Human Rights.

#### *INGO Groupings*

INGOs with participatory status have set up ten thematic Groupings which meet three times a year during the sessions of the Parliamentary Assembly (Human Rights, Gender Equality, European Social Charter and Social Policies, Extreme Poverty and Social Cohesion, Education and Culture, Civil Society and Democracy in Europe, Health, Countryside and Environment, Towns, North-South Dialogue and Solidarity). The Groupings maintain a regular dialogue with Council of Europe representatives,

receiving first hand information on the Council's activities and contributing their collective know-how to their implementation.

#### *Different forms of co-operation*

Co-operation with INGOs takes many forms, from simple consultation to full-scale co-operation on specific projects. INGO experts may participate in various projects as consultants; they may contribute to the work of intergovernmental committees on an institutionalized or ad-hoc basis, prepare memoranda for the Secretary General, make oral or written statements to the committees of the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and address seminars and other meetings organised by the Council of Europe.

INGOs enjoying participatory status also disseminate information about the Council of Europe's aims and activities among their constituencies.

### **Relations with national Non-Governmental Organisations**

In November 2003, the participatory status for international NGOs was supplemented by a partnership between the Council of Europe and national NGOs (Resolution (2003)9) reflecting their vital role in strengthening a democratic and open society in all member states, and their active and constructive contribution to the Council of Europe's work programme.

### **Civil Society Initiatives**

Support for Civil Society Initiatives focuses on reinforcing the role of NGOs in a pluralist democracy, by increasing dialogue and co-operation on policy making between NGOs and public authorities and strengthening democratic accountability and transparency by involving civil society in political processes. These activities are carried out in co-operation with local NGO partners or the Council of Europe's Information Centres or Offices on the spot. Training seminars have been held in all new member and applicant states since 1990. They address questions such as the role of NGOs in a democratic state and in democratic transition or the reconstruction of civil society after a war. These Civil Society Initiatives focus *inter alia* on interaction between NGOs and (local) authorities and on inter-community and inter-religious dialogue. Current geographic priorities include South-East Europe, Moldova, Belarus, Cyprus and the South Caucasus.

***For more information please contact [jos.lemmers@coe.int](mailto:jos.lemmers@coe.int)***