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The Interdependence of Democracy and Social Cohesion

**Strengthening representation and democratic participation
through public dialogue and civic engagement**

**CONCLUSIONS
BY THE GENERAL RAPPORTEUR**

Document prepared by the Forum Secretariat

1. Europe is passing through turbulent times of financial, social and political crises. It is evident that many people have lost faith in politics and politicians but not in democracy itself. This Forum has addressed the important interdependence of democracy and social cohesion and discussed changes that have to take place if Europe is to get through these crises in a way that is not socially and politically destructive.
2. The widespread political apathy of recent years is now being accompanied by new manifestations of civic engagement and political activity. There is a window of opportunity to take advantage of the energetic mobilisation of people from all backgrounds and different walks of life.
3. Europe's shared values of human rights, democracy and the rule of law, as well as the European social model have brought many benefits to its populations over the years. Europe is currently challenged to revisit and reinvigorate its social and democratic model - based on solidarity - and continue to offer benchmarks and innovative examples of social, economic and territorial cohesion.
4. The European model remains a source of inspiration for other world regions. Reaffirming its vitality helps Europe to continue playing a meaningful role as a global actor.
5. The location of the 2011 Session of the Forum for the Future of Democracy in Cyprus, a country at the historical crossroads of three continents, is an appropriate setting to applaud the Council of Europe's commitment to the nascent reforms in countries of the Arab Spring and to encourage the exchange of expertise and good practices in response to requests from their authorities.

Recommendations

- Build upon the recent mobilisation of people across the European continent and beyond to foster and promote constructive political engagement in democratic processes and support the use of new and alternative forms of democratic expression and participation, amplified by social networks, as a complement to representative democracy.

- Embrace diversity and tolerance as a strength of society, honouring each person's right to multiple identities and recognising this as a prerequisite and condition for a vibrant and thriving society. Anchor diversity in communities through quality education, starting from an early age, and develop appropriate tools to that effect, for example local diversity charters and new forms of partnerships. The Council of Europe's report on 'Living Together' is a starting point for a deeper debate on these issues.
- Promote awareness in public administration of people's socio-cultural specificities and needs and strengthen institutional and administrative capacity and commitment to effectively manage diversity.
- Direct social investment towards those groups of the population who are most vulnerable and promote their incorporation into structures of participation and shared social responsibility at all levels of governance. This could empower and strengthen such groups' sense of belonging and increase the resilience of society in the face of political, economic and social crises.
- Take resolute action against populist, extremist and discriminatory discourse and action, possibly by launching a Council of Europe campaign or other activities on this issue.
- Enhance collaboration and co-operation among international organisations to address the effects of the financial and social crises and promote their democratic accountability.
- Engage with politicians and political parties in order to address the democratic disconnect between them and the people they represent.
- Support the democratic transition in neighbouring regions by opening up the Council of Europe's structures and activities, taking into account the recent experiences gained from the Partnership for Democracy status of the Parliamentary Assembly and the Euro-Arab Cities Forum of the Congress.