

Press Release

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5th Forum for the Future of Democracy

Increasing the legitimacy of electoral processes to foster greater public confidence

Kyiv, 23.10.2009 – “In a genuine democracy, the citizen is sovereign and the voter decides” – that was the main message of the 2009 Forum for the Future of Democracy, which ended in Kyiv today. The Forum highlighted the need to get the public more involved in election processes, to increase voter turnout and to ensure at all stages that procedures were entirely democratic.

In the light of the public crisis of confidence in political institutions, the general rapporteurs stressed how important it was “to reinvigorate democratic practices by credible and inclusive decision-making processes that strengthen political culture”. Being faced with their own major crisis and a challenge to their traditional role, political parties would have to take similar steps. Although there was no single ideal electoral system, the Council of Europe’s aim was to make its space the largest “free and fair” election zone by uniting its member countries around a set of shared democratic principles.

The rapporteurs also pointed out that representativeness could be enhanced by making elections more open, for example by fostering increased participation by women in politics through measures including gender quotas for candidates. Legal and practical steps should also be taken to ensure that national minorities were represented.

Attention was also drawn to the role and the responsibilities of the media and the fact that everyone should have equal access to information through the traditional media or the new electronic media, notwithstanding the current risk of a digital divide. The media were called on to guarantee equitable access for all political parties and to keep up professional standards.

On the subject of monitoring and follow-up, the rapporteurs pointed out that election observation was one of the keys to inspiring trust in an electoral system. The rights of national and international observers should be safeguarded and their responsibilities should be clearly defined. In this connection, the participants welcomed the preparation of a PACE report on the idea of an internationally recognised status of election observer.

They also called for the effective implementation of the Code of Good Practice on Civil Participation, which identified principles and mechanisms for the active participation of non-governmental organisations in decision-making processes.

Some 400 parliamentarians, senior government officials, local and regional representatives, NGO members, academics and experts met in Kyiv from 21 to 23 October to discuss the theme “Electoral Systems: strengthening democracy in the 21st century”. Their goal was to pinpoint ways of making electoral processes more democratic in the light of the respective roles of the authorities, civil society and the media.

The 2010 session of the Forum will be held in Yerevan (Armenia) and will focus on the theme “The Council of Europe Consensus on the Principles of Democracy”.

The Forum conclusions are available on www.coe.int/democracy.

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