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*Gouvernement de l'Arménie
Ministère des affaires étrangères*



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Forum for the Future of Democracy

Yerevan, 19-21 October 2010

Perspectives 2020 **Democracy in Europe -** **Principles and Challenges**

CONCLUSIONS

The Yerevan Forum debated the core principles as well as the state of democratic governance in the face of contemporary political and societal changes in Council of Europe member states. In particular, it examined how policies are developed within the respective institutional frameworks, through the prism of the principles of democratic governance. From the expert and lively discussions in plenary and working group sessions, the General Rapporteur, Davit Harutyunyan, has drawn draft conclusions.

These are published on the Forum website (www.coe.int/democracy) for comments by all interested parties and will contribute to the Council of Europe's agenda-setting for future work in the field of democracy.

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A. Building a pan-European platform of norms and standards for democratic governance

1. Democracy is never a finished product. It needs to develop constantly to meet new challenges and thereby ensure long-term democratic security. It is within this evolving process that the core principles of democracy need to be upheld through ongoing peer review of democratic performance.
2. The right to participate in the conduct of public affairs should be considered as a human right and a fundamental political freedom. Modern democracy should offer a form of society which guarantees living and discussing together in dignity, mutual respect and solidarity, thereby consolidating democratic practices.
3. Everyone has the right to hold opinions, to receive and impart information and ideas without interference by public authority and regardless of borders. Free and independent media enables people to make the kind of informed decisions which are essential to the functioning of a pluralist democracy.
4. All Council of Europe member states should be expected to assume a common corps of commitments and obligations. The inequality between member states as to their commitments and obligations should be addressed.
5. The widening gap between accepted commitments by Council of Europe member states and their implementation in practice should be addressed through active support policies, co-operation and monitoring. In order to be effective, monitoring should also encompass domestic mechanisms as well as include the active participation of civil society.
6. The Council of Europe should practise what it preaches and develop inclusive processes in its standard-setting and policy development.

B. Addressing societal challenges, fragmentation and radicalisation through good democratic governance

7. Traditional representative democracy is increasingly complemented by other forms of interaction between people and with authorities, heralding new ways of democratic (self-)governance at all levels. To ensure that democratic principles are respected and democratic security is strengthened at all times, there is a need for research in this field, including by collecting and analysing best practices.
8. As a consequence of globalisation and the resulting international mobility and migration, the traditional link of the citizen with the nation state is weakening. This challenges the member states of the Council of Europe to explore new and more inclusive forms of engagement with non-citizens. All people should be involved in the conduct of public affairs at local, regional, national and European levels.
9. Democratic processes can be abused by movements and ideologies which undermine and may ultimately destroy the democratic system framed by human rights and the rule of law. The current rise in extremism and radicalism fuelled by racism and xenophobic discourse bears witness to this. Democracy requires specific mechanisms and spaces for inclusive participation, failing which stability and security are threatened and a breeding ground for disenchantment and radicalisation develops.
10. Information and communication technologies allow people to connect and debate locally as well as across borders. This is facilitated by a variety of ever-evolving e-tools and social networks which offer great potential for public participation. Inclusive participation requires universal access to digital skills and quality infrastructure.
11. Democratic culture is needed to bring democratic institutions to life. Consequently, citizenship and human rights education, formal and non-formal, plays a fundamental role as a lifelong apprenticeship in democratic practice and culture. The school is a crucial playing ground for sensitisation and participation in democracy and must, through its ethos and practice, prepare the future actors of the democratic process.

C. Confirming the Council of Europe as the Forum for discussing democratic security and democratic governance in Europe

12. More and more people live in an increasingly interconnected world, stretching beyond the boundaries of traditional democratic structures. This generates civil movements and political dynamics for which existing governance structures are poorly equipped, thereby increasing the sense of instability. This situation calls for an in-depth reflexion on new relationships between stakeholders.
13. As a further consequence of globalisation, a growing body of decisions - which engage the future of the people - are taken by state and non-state actors. Appropriate consultation and participation of those concerned and of their democratically elected representatives needs to be considered.
14. An increasing number of issues can only be dealt with efficiently at an international or supranational level. Although this raises the question of their accountability to national representative institutions, it nonetheless offers new opportunities for civic participation at transnational level.
15. Unsustainable economic and environmental practices pose a challenge to democratic governance and stability. The scale and inter-connectedness of these issues require resolute and top-down and bottom-up solutions at all levels of governance, respectful of democratic principles.
16. Excessive concentration of the media in the hands of a few carries the risk of depriving citizens of access to the diversity of views and opinions which enable them to make the responsible choices vital to democracy. Media has a social and political responsibility in a democratic society and cannot be driven solely by market forces.
17. The increasing capture of public space and responsibilities by the private sector leaves less and less space for democratic interaction between citizens and their government. As a direct consequence, the democratic fabric of society is weakened, thereby contributing to civil disengagement and instability.