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**THE WORK OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE**  
**ON YOUNG PEOPLE AND DEMOCRATIC INSTITUTIONS**

It is a pleasure and an honour for me to speak at the meeting of ACEEEO for the second consecutive year. Last year, we worked on the subjects of media and elections as well as e-voting, subjects to which the Council of Europe and in particular the Venice Commission have also devoted attention in the last year. The Venice Commission is now studying the question of media and election campaigns, in co-operation with OSCE/ODIHR.

On 30 September 2004 the Committee of Ministers adopted a recommendation on e-voting.<sup>1</sup> The Venice Commission as well as ACEEEO were actively involved in the elaboration of this text. In particular, in March 2004 the Venice Commission adopted a report on the compatibility of remote voting and electronic voting with the standards of the Council of Europe. This report concludes “remote voting is compatible with the Council of Europe’s standards, provided that certain preventative measures are observed in the procedures for either non-supervised postal voting or electronic voting”.<sup>2</sup>

The Venice Commission and ACEEEO developed their co-operation during the last year. ACEEEO is a regular observer at the meetings of the Council for Democratic Elections. This is a body specialised in electoral matters including representatives of the Venice Commission, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe. The Venice Commission and ACEEEO were very active in the field of electoral standards, and the Venice Commission provided an opinion on the draft ACEEEO convention<sup>3</sup>. The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe formally admitted the need for European

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<sup>1</sup> Recommendation of the Committee of Ministers to member states on legal, operational and technical standard for e-voting (Rec(2004)11)

<sup>2</sup> CDL-AD(2004)012, par. 69.

<sup>3</sup> CDL-AD(2004)010.

standards in electoral matters in a Declaration on the Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters, which supports this last document.<sup>4</sup>

This is also an opportunity to underline the importance of the co-operation between the Venice Commission and Albania, especially in electoral matters. This co-operation started more or less with the creation of the Commission and it is already my eighth visit to Albania. This event allows me to greet Mr Ilirjan Celibashi, Chairman of the Central Election Commission, as well as the other members of the Central Election Commission, with whom we have already worked not only on the reform of electoral legislation but also on an electoral training workshop. I wish to thank them for the organisation of this meeting.

Let us now pass to the subject of this conference: voter turnout, in particular; of young people. I shall report on the activity of the Council of Europe in the field of participation of young people in democratic institutions.

Last November the Council of Europe (Youth Directorate) organised a seminar entitled “Young People and Democratic Institutions: from Disillusionment to Participation”. This seminar was not limited to lawyers or political scientists, so it allowed for the question to be addressed also from the point of view of sociology.

The rather weak turnout of young voters is not new – it was the rule in France at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. This means that people who do not vote when they are young will not abstain for their whole life.

The questions as to whether the differences in behaviour between people of different ages are generational or life-cycle was raised at the symposium. Generational means that those who are now young will always behave in a different way than the older generation. Life-cycle means that people, whatever their generation, change behaviour according to their age. The question is controversial, but the keynote report of the symposium stated that political participation – including voter turnout - is more influenced by life-cycle than by generational patterns, “so that the younger groups can be expected to gradually vote more often as they enter middle age... there is a broadly stable pattern of voting during the last fifty years, with only a modest erosion during the 1990s”.<sup>5</sup> This applies to old democracies, but the profile is not much different in

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<sup>4</sup> CM(2004)83final.

<sup>5</sup> Pippa Norris, *Young People & Political Activism: From the Politics of Loyalties to the Politics of Choice?*, p. 18; *contra*: intervention of Ms Miriam Lapp, Elections Office of Canada, expert for the Venice Commission, who maintains there is now a generational trend.

the Central European countries analysed in the study (Czech Republic, Poland and Slovenia).

Be it a generational or a life-cycle question, the relatively low turnout of young people may of course be addressed. It does not seem to arise from political apathy, since young people are open to less formal features of political participation like petitions or demonstrations.

All measures to promote political participation of young people are of course not of a legal nature. However, as an expert of the Venice Commission said at the seminar, legal measures are fundamental for the democratic process, which has to be settled in the Constitution or at least in ordinary legislation.<sup>6</sup> I shall now focus on such legal measures. First, not only the right to vote, but also eligibility to be elected should be open to young people. The need to register in order to vote is in most legal orders a hurdle for those who never voted, mainly young people. Automatic registration will help them vote. The modalities of voting may also increase turnout. This has been proved in Switzerland with the generalisation of postal voting: 15-20 % more voters now take part in polls. The introduction of e-voting would actually be a good means of increasing turnout, especially of the younger generation which is more familiar with computer technology. This would be in particular true with remote e-voting.

Legislation could also be revised on points directly concerning young people. For example, national youth councils could be institutionalised and have to be consulted in the preparation of legislation. Such youth councils already exist in a number of member states of the Council of Europe. In Austria or Spain, for example, they are established by law. Other means to interest young people in the political process are civic education on democracy as well as better information. In my opinion, such information should be available on the Internet in order to be efficient.

On 21 May 2003 the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe adopted a revised European Charter on the Participation Of Young People in Local And Regional Life.<sup>7</sup> (This body includes representatives of local and regional parliaments). One of the main principles of this Charter is that “all sectoral policies

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<sup>6</sup> Hedwig Kopetz, Promotion de la participation des jeunes à la vie des partis politiques et autres institutions démocratiques (aux niveaux local, national et international).

<sup>7</sup> Appendix to [Recommendation 128 \(2003\)](#).

should have a youth dimension”.<sup>8</sup> This applies to education and access to culture as well as to health, employment, gender equality or environment.<sup>9</sup> The Charter then details the instruments for youth participation, including training in youth participation, informing young people, promoting youth participation through information and communication technologies, promoting young people’s participation in the media and promoting young people’s organisations, as well as youth participation in non-governmental organisations and political parties.<sup>10</sup> The last part of the Charter<sup>11</sup> – which is the most interesting in the context of this conference – is dedicated to institutional participation of young people in local and regional affairs. It underlines the need for “a permanent representative structure such as a youth council, a youth parliament or a youth forum”.<sup>12</sup> “The roles of such a structure might include... offering the possibility for young people to make proposals to the local and regional authorities and enabling authorities to consult young people on specific issues”.<sup>13</sup> In order to be effective, such a structure should receive public funding.<sup>14</sup> The Charter applies at local and regional levels, which are in the competence of the Congress, but, as already said, youth representation should also be envisaged at national level. Participation at local level is however very important since it is much easier for the ordinary (young) citizen.

The work of the Council of Europe on youth participation underlines that political participation cannot be reduced to participation in elections (or referenda). That is why the Youth Directorate will organise early next year a seminar on new forms of participation. Voter turnout is however the most important feature of political activism. That is why it was chosen as the theme of the present conference.

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<sup>8</sup> Point 2.

<sup>9</sup> Part I.

<sup>10</sup> Part II.

<sup>11</sup> Part III.

<sup>12</sup> Par. 59.

<sup>13</sup> Par. 63.

<sup>14</sup> Part III/2.