

**“Conference of Global Election Organizations
by ACEEEO**

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“European standards in the field of e-voting”.

Presentation by

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Thank you, Mr Chairman.

The Council of Europe has a longstanding relationship of good and productive co-operation with ACEEEO. It is an honour for me to be able to address the Conference of Global Election Organisations today.

I have been asked to speak about European standards in the field of e-voting, standards as they have been developed by the Council of Europe.

I do not have to introduce the Council of Europe to you in any great detail, you have already heard about it from two distinguished speakers yesterday, Lord Russell-Johnston of the Parliamentary Assembly and my colleague Sergei Kuznetzow, from the Secretariat of the Venice Commission and finally, Ms Tr ajkovska, member of the Venice Commission, this morning.

Let me just say by way of introduction that the Council of Europe has now 46 member States, thus covering virtually the entire continent of Europe. It stands for the protection and development of Human Rights, democracy and the rule of law in the whole of Europe.

It is against this background that the Council of Europe has in recent years explored the question of how Information and Communication Technologies can facilitate democratic practice. Of particular importance in this respect is Committee of Ministers Recommendation (2004)11 on legal, operational and technical standards for e-voting (copies available in conference pack). This Recommendation, adopted almost exactly one

year ago, is the first international legal instrument to deal with e-voting and some of the delegates at this Conference have been members of the Expert Committee that prepared the Recommendation and ACEEEO also participated very actively.

I should also like to mention the Council's Recommendation on e-governance, also adopted in 2004. This Recommendation addresses the question of how to improve the provision of public services by using ICT. A second important issue in the Recommendation is the use of ICTs to strengthen the participation, initiative and engagement of citizens in national, regional and local public life, in other words : e-democracy. In this respect, it is very important to say that democratic practice is not limited to the act of voting but that a lot is taking place between elections and ICT are also increasingly used in electoral campaigns.

The latest contribution by the Council of Europe to issues relating to the Information Society is the Committee of Ministers' Declaration on Human Rights and the Rule of Law in the Information Society. This declaration will be submitted to the Tunis Phase of the UN World Summit on the Information Society (WSIS, 16-18 November 2005).

If governments and their electorates are to trust e-voting schemes, these must reflect the same democratic standards that govern traditional, non-electronic means of voting in political elections and referendums. Recommendation Rec (2004)11 on legal, operational and technical standards for e-voting is structured in three main parts. The first lays out common legal standards for e-voting that comply with the fundamental principles of universal, free, equal and secret suffrage. The second part covers the operational standards that apply to all phases of the electoral process, starting with the notification of the e-enabled election, voter registration and candidate nomination, the voting stage as such, and finally the generation of results and the auditing of e-enabled elections. The third part outlines the technical requirements for accessibility, interoperability, security of the vote and monitoring.

The General principle of the Recommendation is that e-voting must be as reliable and secure as democratic elections and referendums which do not involve the use of electronic means.

The Recommendation seeks to:

- Apply the principles of democratic elections to e-voting;
- provide member states with a comprehensive checklist for all stages of the electoral process;
- Set minimum standards for remote and non-remote e-voting;
- promote and ensure interoperability of e-voting systems;

As a follow-up to the Recommendation, the Council of Europe is organising an exchange of good practice and is exploring the need for further intergovernmental co-operation, e.g. on accreditation and certification of e-voting systems. Moreover, it is providing assistance to some e-voting pilot projects at member state level.

Recent practical experience with e-voting

Recent and forthcoming e-voting experiences include:

- Spain, February 2005: non-remote e-voting pilot at the occasion of the referendum on the EU constitutional treaty;
- Estonia: October 2005: binding remote e-voting at local elections;
- Buenos Aires, Argentina, October 2005: non-remote e-voting pilot at local elections.

There is, however, also an increasing number of e-voting applications in the non- or pre-political field, e.g. elections to assemblies of chambers of commerce, student councils, staff committees or health insurance boards. These elections play an important role in familiarising people with new forms of voting and help to improve e-voting systems.

Where do we go from here ?

The concrete challenges that need to be addressed include in particular:

- developing accreditation, certification and auditing systems;
- depending on the “intensity of an election, devising appropriate procedures of voter authentication, such as:
 - PIN-code,
 - One-time individual password,
 - Electronic signature;
- modernising the voter registration regime:
 - centralised electoral roll (France),
 - individual voter registration (United Kingdom).

Conclusions

The Recommendation on e-voting has a provision that the Committee of Ministers should review progress made with e-voting and the application of the Recommendation after two years. Moreover, member States are invited to report new developments to the Council of

Europe, which will then be brought to the attention of the other member States (clearing house function).

To conclude, I would like to make clear that the Recommendation has not been developed with the assumption that e-voting would and should be rapidly introduced. It is important to underline that this will be a long process, with a number of technical, political and economical variables, different in each country and to each e-voting system. The Council of Europe is determined and prepared to accompany its member States in this process.

Finally, if you allow, Chair, I am pleased to announce that in the framework of our activities in the field of e-democracy and in the margins of the WSIS Summit in Tunis (16-18 November), the Council of Europe will be holding a parallel event on 17 November on “From here to e-democracy: promoting e-participation and dealing with harmful content”.

I would thus be most pleased to learn about any initiative or experiences worldwide on e-voting or e-democracy that could be presented at that occasion.