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**High-level conference on
“Governing the Game Changer – Impacts of artificial intelligence
development on human rights, democracy and the rule of law”**

Helsinki, 26-27 February 2019

**“AI and Democracy” - Introductory speech
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Starting preparation for this conference, my colleagues in Directorate General for Democracy and I tried to imagine a young person, first time voter, on the day of elections in some twenty years from now. Let's call her: Dositea.

Provided Dositea still believes in the integrity and meaning of elections, will she go to the nearest polling station or will she vote from home? Will she have a social number that has already categorized her in a “voting” rank, depending on her social profile, or “social credit” as we know from China already today? Will she be aware of this ranking, will she agree to be ranked? How will she know whom to choose? Will Dositea be able to distinguish facts from deep fake texts, deep fake voices and videos? How will she be approached by the potential candidates, through the social platforms, media, or *AI-powered micro-targeting techniques*? How will she choose? Will she consult Alexa, Siri or whatever AI “consultant” will there

be for her to digest the programs? Upon which criteria will this selection and “digestion” be made?

In the future, AI will likely have a tremendous impact on the way public authorities are constituted (on **elections**), on the way citizens are involved in decision (on **citizen participation**) and on the way public authority is exercised (i.e. **on governance**). Such impact can be very positive but can also present fundamental risks.

Emerging technologies, including AI, can facilitate direct participation of citizens in decision making enormously. Is this a positive development as we see that electoral participation has declined in Europe? Can this lead towards so called “direct” democracy? Will representative democracy remain important and should it derive more legitimacy from these new forms of participation?

Will Dositea be protected from online electoral interference, already mentioned by the Secretary General in his introductory remarks? Is there something we can do already now to try to empower Dositea and secure the quality, integrity and legitimacy of the election processes and her democratic choices?

With this in mind we recently published a study, distributed here, that argues for the CoE involvement in helping countries develop new and efficient standards that would ensure solidity of our democracies, based on irreproachable and trustworthy elections. I am glad that our expert on these

issues, Mr Yves-Marie Doublet is here with us today, and will be, I am sure, happy to answer questions on this topic xxx

The early days of the internet coincided with an optimistic period in Europe and the world. We were worried to legislate too much, after all “information wanted to be free”, was the motto of those early days, often used by technology activists to criticise laws that could limit transparency and general access to information.

The era of AI comes at a very different stage of our *societies, affected by a wide-spread dissatisfaction with the present - and fear and uncertainty about the future*. Our attitudes towards new technologies often reflect that fear and the sense of loss of control.

AI technology’s intrinsic ideology is shaped by its makers and their beliefs. We have, with the help of ECRI, also started reviewing the critical areas where AI may perpetuate discrimination and inequality.

In its new monitoring cycle, which starts in 2019, ECRI will examine the possible consequences of the growing use of AI, particularly with respect to its potential influence in triggering hate speech, in the conduct of law enforcement bodies leading to racial profiling practices, and its potential effects on integration policies for refugees or minorities.

Later in the program, in the panel just after this speech, Christian Ahlund, former Chair of ECRI will be able to tell you much more.

In partnership with the French authorities, the Council of Europe will hold its annual World Forum for Democracy on “**Information and Democracy**” (6-8 November 2019). This will be a precious occasion to pursue our reflections with other actors and partners, also beyond Europe.

Our civilisation is based on diversity. Diversity of ideas. Diversity of opinions. Diversity of cultural content (books, films, TV-series etc). Pluralism of ideas is essential to maintaining our ability to think, to be free, to make a better society, a fairer world.

Now how will Dositea be exposed to this pluralism? Will she go to a bookstore and look through many different book titles at display? They are not necessarily what she would be looking for, but she may end up picking some of those titles that triggered her curiosity. Will she go to cinema with her friends, see some titles she otherwise wouldn't have a chance to see? Or she would rather buy books via Amazon or turn on Netflix.... which might gradually turn her into a “couch potato”?

Already now Netflix has a specific business model that influences our democracy. Let's take an example of a TV series about Danes, shot in Denmark in Danish. Isn't it great to have them on such a global platform? However, there is one thing not clear or important to the viewer. The digital platform producers have booked a cast and crew locally for a period of 6 months. They are paid for their time only, simply to be available if a good

idea comes. This could be prolonged again for 6 months – they are simply there on the spot. Great for the freedom of creation, no?

However, apart from precarious short-term social conditions for the crew, essentially this model prevents local independent filmmakers from shooting their “independent” local story as Danish actors and technicians are unavailable. In addition, the local independent film makers cannot participate in co-productions or compete for European film funds (since the condition for both is to employ a local crew). This aggressive commercial practice dramatically impacts on the ability of smaller territories to keep on telling their own stories by their own authors. And I didn’t even mention national minorities and their stories, their culture – as protected by our framework convention.

However, this is not the biggest problem. Video-on-Demand platforms use “viewing habits” (ie what we have watched recently) and “demographics” (our age, sex, race, sexual orientation, geo-localisation etc) to target what we may potentially like to watch. This is not really a problem as such until you realise that you are no longer choosing freely, because your selection is limited to what an algorithm has decided you could or should be interested in.

Then how does the algorithm know whether you watch *Game of Thrones* because you like history-fiction drama, or you are “enthusiast” about gender equality? Whatever – the tendency is to keep you in your bubble, and to help you forget the uncomfortable complexity of pluralism.

But this is not the end. Article 10 of the ECHR protects freedom of expression. For instance, the freedom of a filmmaker to tell his story through moving images. But Article 10 also protects the freedom of RECEIVING information, ie the “right to be informed”, to receive audio-visual content, a diverse and plural content. For what we know now a very limited group of people will simply decide what should be the esthetical content – and through that implicit values - for millions of people to watch?

But there is another problem. Perhaps Dositea, as a young European, would demand her national or international institutions to try to regulate this. However, the rules from other continents would have been established in this market... if we do not wake up and do something today.

Democracy requires freedom. We are not sure yet if it requires algorithms.

Will Dositea be empowered to pursue this freedom? Through the education now, we try to explain the values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. What kind of life shall we be educating for? “*When there is no more here and everything is now*”, said Paul Virilio, French cultural theorist. Getting prepared is vital – also when thinking of the predicted substantial loss of jobs through future widespread use of AI.

Will the education systems be knowledge based – while the AI will have a lot of knowledge already? Or will it be based on competences? Will we be providing Dositea and her peers with the skills to adapt and master the

complex world in which technology will be playing an ever more important role, providing them with critical digital literacy competences?

We have recently published a *Digital Citizenship Education Handbook*, to advise education practitioners on Well-being Online and Rights Online. Currently, we are working, together with major Internet companies, on a set of model guidelines regulating partnerships between education institutions and the private sector. But is this enough? Standard media and information literacy courses may no longer do the job, should we rather prepare "advanced literacy" with algorithmic awareness?

Regarding **children's rights in the digital environment**, last year the Committee of Ministers adopted a recommendation including Guidelines for member states to respect, protect and fulfil the rights of the child in the digital environment. We have now started to support their implementation, developing tools to address, for example, self-generated sexual content.

In the **field of culture**, we work against the odds of global cultural standardisation and homogenisation as we saw in Netflix example.

The AI revolution is as much a social and cultural revolution as it is a technological one. To pave the way for Dosithea and her future, this conference will generate inspiring insights and help clarify what we have to do together. Council of Europe is fit to do that as it was able with other challenges through its 70 years long history.

Thank you