

## Democracy, Social Cohesion and Global Challenges Committee

### Roadmap for 2018 – 2020

The key challenges in Europe and worldwide in the years ahead will inevitably involve the governance and future of territories, the cohesion, protection and well-being of human beings and the resilience of land and communities in individual countries. Tackling them is a task for those who govern us and also for our NGOs, at local, national and European level.

All our countries without exception are being affected by economic trends and social divides that undermine the cohesion of their populations, threatening the humanist values espoused by many individuals and the equitable sharing of services and resources, as well as public ethics and the exercise of democracy, respect for human rights and the rule of law, which are the Council of Europe's founding principles.

This leads us to propose a strategy based on strong partnership with all the relevant stakeholders focusing on four areas of action: promotion of civil society participation in political decision-making, prevention of corruption, protection of human beings and human dignity, and solidarity in responding to risks.

### AREAS OF ACTION

#### 1. Participation in political decision-making

The Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe has recently adopted guidelines for civil participation in political decision-making,<sup>1</sup> a move which was prompted by the need to respond to the erosion of democracy, the weakening of institutions and the concentration of power at the highest level of government. Our committee made a major contribution to the work here over the past years and we intend to continue our efforts very actively.

The tendency towards centralisation is compounded by the appeal of populism, which was the focus of the Council of Europe's most recent World Forum for Democracy.<sup>2</sup> The easily assimilated simplistic arguments and solutions advanced by populists are spreading all the quicker and more widely because of their use of digital media. In our work, we must nevertheless bear in mind that although not everyone has access to these technologies yet, they are a decisive asset for good governance.

Given the setbacks for democracy, we must keep on seeking the right arguments and the examples and tools for mobilising people and restoring the bonds between governments and

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<sup>1</sup> [Guidelines for civil participation in political decision making](#)

<sup>2</sup> [World Forum for Democracy 2017: Is Populism a problem?](#)

citizens. We will do so in partnership with the steering committee responsible for good governance, the elected representatives present at the Council of Europe or elsewhere, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and the international, national and local NGOs working in these areas.

In this connection, our committee will continue to address the issue of gender perspectives in political and democratic processes through a working group.

## **2. Involving civil society in preventing corruption**

In all too many Council of Europe member states, corruption is still a widespread practice and is sometimes almost institutionalised, with no possibility of recourse. Pressure is exerted on judicial bodies which are supposed to be independent. Critical NGOs are harassed to the point of their very existence being threatened. Yet fundamental rights like freedom of association and freedom of assembly are enshrined in international conventions as key elements of democracy and the rule of law.

This will be a new topic for our committee. We intend to address it pragmatically and provide civil society with the necessary tools for monitoring and preventing corruption. A working group will be set up to that end. It will co-operate with GRECO, the parliamentary representatives and the local and regional authority representatives, who all regularly condemn corruption. Its work will also tie in with the 12 principles of good democratic governance advocated by the Council of Europe and its relevant steering committee.

## **3. Protection of human beings and human dignity**

Together with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Bioethics Committee (DH-BIO), the Directorate of Human Rights and the Pharmacopoeia, we will continue our work to ensure that healthcare and welfare provision for the elderly is made more human and respects human rights more effectively. We will do this in co-operation with all our relevant NGOs, the World Health Organisation and the European Commission.

In addition, we will join forces with the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, which has sought our support, and with the above-mentioned bodies concerning antimicrobial resistance, which is a global health risk that is beginning to have a serious impact in our member states.

We have a responsibility to respond to demographic change, inequalities in health care and the health risks threatening the planet and especially our countries. Warning people about the trends here is a key duty for us.

## **4. Social cohesion and risk**

During the previous terms, our committee addressed solidarity in connection with climate change, migration and terrorism. At a time when anxious, self-centred attitudes are still spreading in urban and rural areas alike, we have a duty to continue identifying good practices and backing up the work of other Council of Europe bodies, in particular the Parliamentary Assembly, in response to risks, whether natural, industrial or terrorist.

In line with the issues addressed, the work here will come under the activities of the transversal working group on social and territorial cohesion.

Climate risk is set to remain one of the sensitive issues shared with the Parliamentary Assembly, in preparation for COP24 to be held in Katowice in Poland in 2018, and probably thereafter regarding the implementation in 2020 of the Paris Agreement.

## **STRATEGY**

- We will step up our co-operation with local NGOs, giving them access to the European and international level and supporting their efforts to protect democracy, solidarity and civil society participation.
- We will continue our work linked to the activities of the steering committees to which we contribute and of the conventions and partial agreements which address issues within our area of responsibility: European Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG), Steering Committee for Culture, Heritage and Landscape (CDCPP), DH-BIO, Pharmacopoeia, European Landscape Convention, Bern Convention, North-South Centre, etc.
- We will liaise with the other committees: with the Human Rights Committee regarding matters close to our areas of responsibility and our concerns such as freedom of association and assembly; and with the Education and Culture Committee regarding digital societies.
- With regard to social and territorial cohesion, we will propose a transversal working group to the other committees with a view to ensuring a consistent approach to combating social and regional inequalities.

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Thierry Mathieu, Chair