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## **The Council of Europe and the European Neighbourhood Policy of the European Union**

Recommendation 1724 (2005)

Reply from the Committee of Ministers  
adopted at the 958<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (15 March 2006)

The Committee of Ministers notes with interest Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1724 (2005) on the Council of Europe and the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) of the European Union. It agrees with the Assembly in appreciating and supporting the efforts to ensure democratic stability, security and well-being in EU neighbouring countries covered by this policy and to avoid the emergence of new dividing lines in Europe.

The Committee of Ministers recalls the European Commission Communication which launched the European Neighbourhood Policy in March 2003, in which the Commission declared its firm intention to use Council of Europe standards, among others, as "key benchmarks" for assessing progress in fulfilling the conditions for increasingly close relations between the European Union and its neighbours.

The Committee of Ministers supports the Parliamentary Assembly's request that the ENP should fully integrate the values and standards of the Council of Europe – values to which our member states are committed – and to make the best use of the Council's expertise, while at the same time avoiding any duplication of action. To this end, initial consultations between officials of the Council of Europe and the European Union have already taken place and will be pursued.

With regard to Council of Europe member states concerned by the European Neighbourhood Policy, the Committee of Ministers would like to stress the already existing co-operation between the Council of Europe and the EU, and the repeated reference to Council of Europe legal instruments in the ENP Action Plans. This was acknowledged by the European Commissioner for External Relations, Benita Ferrero-Waldner, at the Council of Europe's Third Summit of Heads of States and Government (Warsaw, 16-17 May 2005). She reiterated the European Commission's intention to make full use of Council of Europe instruments and mechanisms in the framework of the European Neighbourhood Policy. The Committee of Ministers also considers that the holding of regular consultations between the countries concerned, the representatives of the Council of Europe and of the European Union would be useful for the harmonisation of efforts in order to achieve the priority objectives which are common to the two organisations and for the implementation of the joint programmes aimed at strengthening democratic stability in these countries.

The Committee of Ministers would like to inform the Parliamentary Assembly that co-operation on the ENP is currently under discussion in the context of the work on the Memorandum of Understanding on co-operation between the Council of Europe and the European Union. In this context, it recalls that one of the guidelines adopted at the Warsaw Summit regarding co-operation between the European Union and the Council of Europe reads as follows:

*"Bearing in mind the common aim of strengthening democratic stability in Europe, the Council of Europe and the European Union should increase their common efforts towards enhanced pan-European relations, including further co-operation in the countries participating in the European Union's European Neighbourhood Policy and the Stabilisation and Association processes"*

This should offer a basis for increased co-operation between the Council of Europe and the EU in this field, as well as further possibilities to conclude new joint programmes, especially in the light of the decisions taken in December 2005 on the European Union's financial outlook which introduces in 2007 a new "European Neighbourhood and Partnership Instrument" (ENPI).

The Committee of Ministers encourages the Parliamentary Assembly to further develop its working relations with the European Parliament, with a view to improving the visibility and recognition of Council of Europe involvement in the European Neighbourhood Policy, as advocated by the European Parliament in its recently adopted resolution on the ENP (19 January 2006).

With regard to non-member states of the Council of Europe covered by the ENP, the Committee of Ministers welcomes the pro-active approach of the Parliamentary Assembly to increase contacts and co-operation with those countries. It stands ready to examine the possibility, where appropriate, of opening certain conventions and agreements for signature by non-member states and to explore means and conditions to enable those countries to establish closer ties with the Organisation.

The Committee of Ministers has already intensified its co-operation with some of the countries concerned, in the framework of the "Faro Declaration on the Council of Europe's strategy for intercultural dialogue" (October 2005). Equally, the European Centre for Global Interdependence and Solidarity has well-established contacts with many of the countries of the southern Mediterranean and the Middle East, and relevant experience in the democratisation process of the societies concerned, in particular through civil society support.