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## The need for a global consideration of Human rights implications of Biometrics

Motion for a recommendation  
presented by Mr Wodarg and others

This motion has not been discussed in the Assembly and commits only the members who have signed it

September 11<sup>th</sup> and other terrorist attacks around the world have demonstrated the urgency of a more secured world. Ensuring the safety of the citizens and society has become a major concern. The increasing use of information sensitive applications, such as e-commerce, e-government, e-banking and health monitoring, has triggered a real need for reliable, user-friendly, and widely acceptable control mechanisms for checking the identity of an individual. Biometrics, which bases personal authentication on the intrinsic aspects of a human being, is emerging more and more as a viable alternative to more traditional approaches such as PIN codes or passwords.

Accurate automated systems for human identification are also increasingly becoming a critical component of anti-terrorist and migration policy programs. In the last four years, the public outcry for better and more universally available identification technology has been significant and public leaders have responded with legislation mandating not only better security but achieving that result using high-tech biometric devices such as biometric passports, ID-cards, etc. Biometrics is becoming a matter of geopolitics in today's globalised information society, the key concept of which is human identity.

However, the Assembly is seriously concerned about the current lack of guarantees for the protection of fundamental rights and individual freedoms – such as the respect for privacy or respect for human dignity – within the context of the wide and uncontrolled utilisation of biometrics. The creation of a very intimate interdependence between the human body and technology, the so-called informatisation of the body, is a serious concern from a human rights perspective.

The Assembly is aware that different continents of the world enjoy different approaches to the issues of data protection and human rights. e.g., the laws governing privacy in the US primarily address these rights from a consumer perspective, while Europe regards privacy as a basic human right. The Assembly believes that principles of ethics and human rights are universal to mankind, and they should enjoy full observance in such sensitive issues as human identity and the fight against terrorism. It also believes that any policy efforts to govern modern identification technologies have to be worldwide or will be doomed to be ineffective.

In the light of the above and within the spirit of the Third Summit and the newly launched European Convention for the Prevention of Terrorism, the Assembly is convinced that the Council of Europe, as a major pan-European Human Rights organisation, has an important role to play in this combined field of personal data protection, biomedicine and human rights. As a pioneer in institutionalising the concept of bioethics, it should also look into the ethics and human rights aspects of biometric data collection and storage in partnership with the European Commission BITE (Biometric Identification

Technology Ethics) project. The Assembly further calls upon its member states to promote common European efforts of multidisciplinary research on appropriate policies for enhanced security, respect for privacy, respect for human dignity and technological transparency for the purpose of meeting the trust and security requirements in our progressing digital information society.

*Signed*<sup>1</sup>:

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<sup>1</sup> SOC: Socialist Group  
EPP/CD: Group of the European People's Party  
ALDE: Alliance of Liberals and Democrats for Europe  
EDG: European Democratic Group  
UEL: Group of the Unified European Left  
NR: not registered in a group