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Enhancing the visibility of the Council of Europe

Recommendation 1746 (2006)

Reply from the Committee of Ministers
adopted at the 989th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (14 March 2007)

1. The Committee of Ministers has taken note with interest of Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1746 (2006) on enhancing the visibility of the Council of Europe as well as Resolution 1498 (2006) on the same subject. It welcomes the efficient role played by the Assembly, having regard to the topical interest of its agenda, in increasing the visibility of the Organisation as a whole.
2. The Committee of Ministers, through its Thematic Co-ordinator on Information policy, has been examining for some time the issues raised by the Assembly with great attention, and after a careful analysis of the situation, agrees that a new approach to the Council of Europe's communication strategy as a whole is needed. Recognising that improved visibility, as well as better internal and external communication, are necessary elements for ensuring efficiency and effectiveness, as well as contributing to the transparency of the Organisation, a new Council of Europe communication strategy has been elaborated by the Directorate of Communication, presented to the Secretary General and the Executive Board, and welcomed by the Committee of Ministers in October 2006.
3. The steps and working methods needed to successfully implement the strategy have been identified in a road map which is currently under consideration by the Committee of Ministers. This new approach will seek to put greater emphasis on those topics in which the Council of Europe truly excels and which are most likely to raise the Organisation's visibility, a thorough professionalisation and modernisation of the output and working methods, and greater synergy, co-operation and co-ordination between different parts of the Council of Europe, as well as making greater use of the Council of Europe information network. As regards allocating sufficient resources so that the Organisation's communication activities reach the general public, and bearing in mind the current budgetary situation, the measures to be undertaken to successfully implement the strategy should be achieved by making the most effective use of existing resources.
4. The Action Plan of the Third Summit of the Council of Europe in 2005 identified a number of priority activities linked to the Organisation's core values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. The follow-up to the Summit decisions gave rise to a number of thematic campaigns, such as "Building a Europe for and with Children", "Combating violence against women" and the new "All different, All equal" youth campaign. It also called for specific focused groups to be set up in order to discuss new ways of optimising the relevance and effectiveness of activities, such as the Group of Wise Persons created to analyse the functioning of the Court of Human Rights, and the Task Force for Social Cohesion in the 21st century. By intensifying action in different sectors, these campaigns and high-level groups supply meaningful subject matter for the promotion of the Council of Europe, and provide the opportunity to organise highly visible events.
5. An independent study on the Council of Europe's visibility could be highly beneficial for the Organisation and was therefore mentioned in the communication strategy. In order to measure the development of our visibility over time, such a study would need to be carried out several times. However, until now the budgetary situation of the Organisation has made such a survey very difficult to implement, since a special budget or voluntary contributions would need to be found. There is a limited potential, which will be explored within the Organisation, to carry out similar research through the existing Eurobarometer structure or by involving the information and field offices.

6. As regards presence in the member countries, the Committee of Ministers adopted in December 2006 a new resolution on the Council of Europe Information Offices, containing revised terms of reference for the offices aimed to place greater emphasis on the communication related aspects of their work. The Secretariat is currently seeking solutions to enable these structures – and the offices of the Special Representatives of the Secretary General – to better contribute to the Organisation's communication activities, through providing training programmes – the first of which has already taken place – and making greater use of locally-based communication specialists. Due to the current budgetary situation, there is no possibility to create outposts or offices in every Council of Europe member state. However, a number of steps are currently being taken towards achieving this aim, including possible modifications to the Organisation's current network of press correspondents and steps to extend external partnerships with national governments and other bodies where possible.