Parliamentary Assembly
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COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONSEIL DE L'EUROPE

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Doc. 11133
22 January 2007

External relations of the Council of Europe

Recommendation 1753 (2006)

Reply from the Committee of Ministers
adopted at the 984th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (17-18 January 2007)

1. The Committee of Ministers has carefully reviewed Recommendation 1753 (2006), including in the light of Resolution 1506 (2006). These two documents provide a wealth of ideas for further developing the Council of Europe's contribution to peace and stability in the present global context.

2. Whilst acknowledging the importance of external relations for the Council of Europe, and of the contribution by the Organisation to the enhancement of universal values outside of Europe, the Committee of Ministers is nevertheless convinced that priority must be placed on the European dimension of the Organisation's mission.

3. The Third Summit of Heads of State and Government held in Warsaw in May 2005 called for further progress in building a Europe without dividing lines and confirmed the Council of Europe's core objective of preserving and promoting human rights, democracy and the rule of law in Europe. In their Declaration, the Heads of State and Government stressed that all activities of the Council of Europe must contribute to this fundamental objective. In this context, they adopted an Action Plan, which is reflected in the allocation of the means of the Organisation.

4. The Committee of Ministers underlines that some Council of Europe conventions as well as the work of the Venice Commission are open to non-member states. Before envisaging the possibility of opening to non-member states some of the other Council of Europe instruments, institutions and mechanisms (including, on the one hand, the European Convention on Human Rights and the European Court of Human Rights, as well as the European Convention for the Prevention of Torture, and on the other the machinery of non-judicial protection of human rights such as the Office of the Commissioner for Human Rights), current work on a comprehensive strategy to secure the effectiveness of these instruments, institutions and mechanisms, in particular that of the Court, must be completed. In the meantime, any interested non-member states could profit from the rich and proven experience of these Council of Europe institutions.

5. In order to strengthen the existing partnership with observer states and to encourage these states to make full use of the opportunities offered by their status, the Committee of Ministers, at the 971st meeting of the Ministers' Deputies held on 12 July 2006, decided that observer states (Canada, Holy See, Japan, Mexico and United States of America) would also be invited to attend the regular meetings of the Ministers' Deputies as from September 2006.

6. The importance of relations between the Council of Europe and the European Union has been underlined at the Third Summit. They were an important element of the discussions between the Ministers during the 116th Session and were the main topic on the agenda of the Quadripartite meeting between the Council of Europe and the European Union held in Brussels on 3 November 2006. The Parliamentary Assembly participates in the work on the draft Memorandum of Understanding, which aims to reinforce co-operation between the two organisations.

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7. Practical co-operation between the Council of Europe and the OSCE received a new impetus through the Joint Declaration endorsed by the Third Summit. The implementation of the Declaration has already brought positive results, as confirmed by the high-level "3+3" meeting held in New York on 21 September 2006 and the meeting of the Co-ordination Group between the Council of Europe and the OSCE held in Strasbourg on 29 September 2006.

8. On 6 September 2006, the Committee of Ministers approved a draft resolution on co-operation between the United Nations and the Council of Europe which was subsequently adopted by the UN General Assembly on 13 November 2006. The Committee of Ministers appreciates the Assembly's input in the preparation of this text.

9. Today's challenges and threats require co-ordinated responses at international and national level, involving both the legislative and executive branches of power. In this context, reference should be made in particular to the question of intercultural and inter-religious dialogue, which the Committee of Ministers is closely examining through the follow-up to the Faro open platform and the preparation of the White Paper on intercultural dialogue. Furthermore, it is initiating reflection on this matter through a newly established ad hoc group. The continuation of the already existing regular exchanges between the Assembly's relevant committees and the Rapporteur Group on External Relations (GR-EXT) of the Committee of Ministers is an important mechanism for dialogue between the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly, in the promotion of Council of Europe values.