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EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR DEMOCRACY THROUGH LAW

(VENICE COMMISSION)

**in co-operation with
the Ministry of Interior of Belgium**

**5th EUROPEAN CONFERENCE
OF ELECTORAL MANAGEMENT BODIES**

“Distance voting”

**Brussels, Belgium
Egmont Palace (Kleine Zavel/Petit Sablon No. 8)
20-21 November 2008**

SYNOPSIS

The Fifth European Conference of Electoral Management Bodies – “Distance voting” was organised by the Venice Commission in co-operation with the Elections Unit of the General Direction of Institutions and Population, Federal Public Service, in Brussels, on 20 - 21 November 2009. The issues which were addressed during the conference included the recent elections in Member States (focusing on problems of distance voting and action taken to remedy them), as well as the Comparative report on complaints and appeals procedures in the Council of Europe Member States, the problem of reaching citizens abroad and persuading them to register and to vote and the latest developments in the field of e-voting in the Council of Europe Member States. Representatives of Austria, Belgium and the United Kingdom informed the conference on distance voting organised in their respective countries during the latest elections.

Around 70 participants from different national electoral management bodies of the following countries attended the conference: Armenia, Austria, Azerbaijan, Belgium, Estonia, Finland, Germany, Italy, Kyrgyzstan, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Mexico, Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Russian Federation, Slovakia, Spain, Sweden, “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, Ukraine and United Kingdom as well as representatives of the Congress of Local and Regional authorities of the Council of Europe.

Representatives of the following international and regional organisations also attended this event: the Association of Central and Eastern European Election Officials (ACEEEO), the International Foundation of Electoral Systems (IFES) and the Organisation for Security and Co-operation in Europe/Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (OSCE/ODIHR).

The Conference was opened by Messrs Patrick Dewael, Minister of the Interior of Belgium and Luc Van den Brande, Senator, Member of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Belgium, President of the Council for Democratic Elections.

Reports were presented by Messrs Gregor Wenda (Austria), Stephan De Mul (Belgium), André Kvakkestad (Norway), Jose Luis Viedma (Spain) Peter Wardle (United Kingdom), Ángel Sanchez Navarro (Spain, Member of the Venice Commission) and Robert Krimmer (Research in electronic voting, Austria).

The second day of the conference was devoted to the workshops on security issues of distance voting, advantages and challenges of distance voting from abroad and to administration and timelines of distance voting.

The Conference:

- 1) Noted the existing commitments:
 - a. to ensure the implementation of the rights enshrined in Article 3 Protocol 1 of the 'European Convention on Human Rights' and the applicable case-law of the European Court of Human Rights;
 - b. to implement the obligations and commitments of other respective international instruments – including the 'Copenhagen Document of the OSCE';
- 2) Invited the Member States of the Venice Commission to ensure that all principles for free and fair elections as enshrined in the 'Code of Good Practice in Electoral matters' adopted by the 'Venice Commission' in October 2002 are respected, also with regard to distance voting;

- 3) Took note of instances where the use of distance voting had contributed to better implementing the principle of universal suffrage.
- 4) The three workshops held on security issues of distance voting, advantages and challenges of distance voting from abroad and on administration and timelines of distance voting concluded that
 - a. While the key security issue in postal voting was voter authentication, additional key issues in internet voting included transparency and system vulnerability;
 - b. While there was a great diversity in the systems of and views on voting from abroad, a general tendency towards enfranchising electors abroad and easing registration and voting procedures from abroad was evident;
 - c. Procedures and timelines should not restrict the exercise of the franchise of electors abroad.
- 5) Invited the Electoral Management Bodies to provide the Secretariat of the Venice Commission with their current electoral legislation if possible in one of the official languages of the Council of Europe.
- 6) Requested the Secretariat the Venice Commission to continue to provide the secretariat of the European Conferences of the Election Management Bodies.