

Press Release

Council of Europe Press Division

Ref: 782a07

Tel: +33 (0)3 88 41 25 60

Fax: +33 (0)3 88 41 39 11

pressunit@coe.int

internet: www.coe.int/press



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The Council of Europe and the Association for Progressive Communications propose a code for public participation in Internet governance

Rio de Janeiro, 13.11.2007 – Intergovernmental and civil society organisations have proposed a self-regulatory mechanism to foster participation, access to information and transparency in Internet governance at the Internet Governance Forum (IGF) in Rio de Janeiro on 12 November 2007.

The mechanism should ensure that all the institutions which play a role in some aspect of governing the internet commit to transparency, public participation (including participation of all stakeholders) and access to information in their activities. The proposal was announced at a best-practice forum on public participation in Internet governance and access to information, co-organised by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE), the Council of Europe and the Association for Progressive Communications (APC).

The new proposal reflects the Council of Europe's commitment to the concept of public service value of the Internet. For Internet governance to satisfy democratic needs, the part to be played by users should be recognised and strengthened, said the Council of Europe Deputy Secretary General Maud de Boer-Buquicchio at the IGF best-practice forum on "Public participation in Internet Governance: Emerging issues, good practices and proposed solutions". The forum also explored which tools, online and offline, should be available for public participation in Internet governance. The Council of Europe is preparing a set of tools based on existing applications in member states, said the head of the e-democracy project Michael Remmert.

The United Nations Economic Commission for Europe's Convention on Access to Information, Public Participation in Decision-making and Access to Justice in Environmental Matters (the "Aarhus Convention") was presented at the Forum as a suggested model for such a mechanism. The Convention is designed to engage both governments and inter-governmental institutions, as well as other civic organisations, said Hans Hansell, leader of the ICT Group for Development at UNECE. "The Aarhus Convention firmly establishes access to information, transparency and participation in governance processes as a shared value, and supports institutions in implementing the convention," Mr Hansell explained.

With its simple mechanism for dealing with complaints, as well as an information clearing house, the Aarhus Convention sets a particularly valuable model for the Internet governance community because transparency, participation and access to information, and accountability are the cornerstones of good governance, commented Anriette Esterhuysen, Executive Director of APC. "This is a framework that can underpin other processes and even support them, without replacing any existing institutional configuration, policies or regulations," Ms Esterhuysen added.

"Like the IGF, the new agreement we are proposing can constitute a non-threatening platform for progress and positive change and can be established as a self-regulatory mechanism. Institutions which want to demonstrate their commitment to being transparent, inclusive and accountable, can become signatories," Ms Esterhuysen concluded.

Council of Europe contacts

Estelle Steiner, Press Officer, Mobile +33 (0)6 08 46 01 57, estelle.steiner@coe.int

Sophie Lobey, Communications Officer, Mobile +33 (0)6 64 09 93 40, sophie.lobey@coe.int

APC contact

Frédéric Dubois, Information coordinator, Mobile +1 514 660 0664, frederic@apc.org

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