**THE CONGRESS**
OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

# Recommendation 274 (2009)[1]
# E-democracy: opportunities and risks for local authorities

1. The development of information and communication technologies (ICTs) offers local authorities exciting new opportunities to connect with their voters and to improve the effectiveness and transparency of their work. By introducing electronic democracy (e-democracy) applications, local authorities can increase participation and voter engagement and improve the quality of life at local level.

2. Citizens are making increasing use of ICTs for political mobilisation and debate. Local authorities need to seize the opportunities offered by this new reality, to keep abreast of developments and to embrace the new facilities available to them.

3. E-democracy, although still in its infancy, is evolving rapidly. While there are no clear-cut or general models to be adopted, important lessons have already been learnt and there are clear principles to be applied.

4. The strength of democracy lies in the level of participation in the political process. The uptake of technology is an opportunity to widen that participation. Care must be taken that it does not at the same time create new groups of marginalised citizens.

5. E-democracy is largely a bottom-up phenomenon, with much of the activity happening at the local level. However, the application of technology to democratic processes at the local level has implications for democratic practice at all levels.

6. In the light of the above the Congress,

*a*. bearing in mind the conclusions of the 2008 Forum for the Future of Democracy (Madrid, 17-18 October 2008);

*b*. bearing in mind the work of the Council of Europe Ad hoc Committee on E-Democracy (CAHDE);

*c*. bearing in mind its own reports and recommendations on e-democracy, notably:

– "Young people and new information and communication technologies: a new opportunity for local democracy" (Resolution 207 (2006));

– "E-tools: a response to the needs of local authorities" (Recommendation 248 (2008) and Resolution 266 (2008));

– "Electronic democracy and deliberative consultation on urban projects" (Recommendation 249 (2008) and Resolution 267 (2008));

– "The digital divide and e-inclusion in the regions" (Recommendation 263 (2009) and Resolution 282 (2009));

*d*. bearing in mind Parliamentary Assembly Recommendation 1860 (2009) and Resolution 1653 (2009) on electronic democracy,

7. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe:

*a*. follow up the Madrid Forum for the Future of Democracy, encouraging public bodies at all levels to make use of ICTs to consult citizens;

*b*. pursue the work begun by the CAHDE, examining the potential of e-democracy for improving the quality of local democracy, increasing capacity building and promoting civil society initiatives in this area;

8. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe call on member states to:

*a*. recognise the positive contribution that e-democracy applications can make to all areas of local governance;

*b*. support and encourage local initiatives in e-democracy;

*c*. assist local authorities in implementing the recommendations contained in the resolution on e-democracy that accompanies this recommendation by:

– providing central services of tools and resources to local authorities;

– facilitating exchanges of experience;

– taking due account of the risks and barriers to e-democracy and developing good practices for local authorities which will enable these to be managed;

*d*. use European Local Democracy Week to pursue and promote new e-democracy experiments;

*e*. promote research on the potential health risks associated with the use of information and communication technologies, particularly among young people.

1. Debated and approved by the Chamber of Local Authorities on 14 October 2009 and adopted by the Congress on 15 October 2009, 3rd Sitting (see Document CPL(17)2, explanatory memorandum presented by A. Cook, United Kingdom (L, EPP/CD) and E. Van Vaerenbergh, Belgium (L, ILDG), rapporteurs).