

Press Release

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Signing of the Lisbon Treaty: Statement by Halvdan Skard, President of the Council of Europe Congress

Strasbourg, 13.12.2007 – "The improved decision-making process of the European Union, as set out by the Lisbon Treaty, which would involve also local and regional authorities, will give a new impetus to the European process as a whole," stated today Halvdan Skard, President of the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, on the occasion of the signing of the Reform Treaty in Lisbon on 13 December 2007.

"The Treaty reaffirms respect for local and regional self-government and gives consultation rights to local and regional authorities, which represents a reinforcement of the necessary democratic participation at territorial level. The application of the principle of subsidiarity has been extended and in this respect the Council of Europe's Charter of Local Self-Government can represent the reference text, when it comes to define the main principles of self-government," he said.

President Skard also expressed satisfaction with the inclusion, within the European Union policies, of some of the main local and regional concerns. The management of public services, the climate change impact; the policies for reinforcing security, freedom and justice are some of the major challenges that territorial authorities have to tackle. On this last aspect, the *acquis* of the Council of Europe in the field of human rights represents a solid legal framework for building a "Europe having a human dimension", he continued.

President Skard also welcomed the inclusion of territorial cohesion among the objectives of the European Union, all the 27 member states of which are among the 47 member states of the Council of Europe. In this respect, he stressed that interregional and cross-border cooperation initiatives, promoted by the Congress and going beyond the EU's external borders, can make a valuable contribution to achieving this objective.

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The Congress has two chambers, the Chamber of Local Authorities and the Chamber of Regions. It brings together 318 full and 318 substitute members representing more than 200 000 European territorial communities. President of the Congress Halvdan Skard (Norway, SOC), President of the Chamber of Regions: Yavuz Milden (EPP/CD, Turkey), President of the Chamber of Local Authorities : Ian Micallef (Malta, EPP/CD). Political Groups : Socialist Group (SOC), Group of the European People's Party – Christian Democrats (EPP/CD), Independent and Liberal Democrat Group (ILDG).