

Press Release

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Congress in favour of a strengthening of city diplomacy through a European Charter

Strasbourg, 13.06.2008 - The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities took part in the first World Conference on City Diplomacy, which took place in The Hague (Netherlands) from 11 to 13 June 2008. Held at the initiative of United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), this conference was intended to foster social cohesion at local level and to get local authorities more actively involved in conflict prevention, peace-building and post-conflict reconstruction.

Speaking at the opening of the conference, Keith Whitmore, Chair of the Institutional Committee of the Congress, pointed out that the Congress was already active in this field. "We are the first international organisation to produce a report on City Diplomacy", he said, with reference to the report presented by Onno Van Veldhuizen, rapporteur of the Congress, in March 2008. The Congress had, he said, "been practising City Diplomacy for many years", but without realising it, and he pointed to the experience gained by the Congress, both through its monitoring activities and through the Local Democracy Agencies, launched at its initiative. "It is [...] our conviction that peace must be firmly rooted at the local level in order to be enduring", he went on, explaining that the Congress firmly intended to keep City Diplomacy high on its agenda, and to work inter alia on a future Charter on City Diplomacy.

Vice-President of the Congress Onno van Veldhuizen (Netherlands, SOC) emphasised that, "in its monitoring activities, the Congress is actively contributing to conflict prevention and conflict solution, mostly between local and central government [and] has an official mandate of the member-states [in the European Charter of Local Self-Government] to intervene to investigate alleged breaches of the Charter". He added that the Congress "does not have the legal instruments to enforce the European Charter of Local Self-Government. Its work has more the character of (city) diplomacy, re-establishing dialogue between the parties concerned and defusing potentially explosive situations".

On the occasion of the conference, several workshops took a more in-depth look at the issues raised by city diplomacy. Ulrich Bohner, Congress Secretary General, chaired the workshop on "The Balkans: support to local governments defending multi-ethnicity". This looked at developments past and present in the Balkans, providing participants with a first opportunity to exchange best practices. Jean-Philippe Bozouls, Executive Secretary of the Congress's Chamber of Local Authorities, chaired the workshop on "The political and legal framework of City Democracy". This workshop focused in particular on the European Charter of Local Self-Government, which explicitly gives local authorities the right to form partnerships with counterparts in other countries.

In its final declaration, the Conference called on the Congress to draw up a European Charter on City Diplomacy.

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 : Yavuz Mildon (Turkey, EPP/CD), President of the Chamber of Regions: Ludmila Sfirloaga (Romania, SOC),

President of the Chamber of Local Authorities : Ian Micallef (Malta, EPP/CD).

Political Groups : Socialist Group (**SO**C), Group of the European People's Party – Christian Democrats (**EPP/CD**),

Independent and Liberal Democrat Group (**ILDG**).