

Press Release

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Ian Micallef: "Twenty years on, the Charter of Local Self-Government has become the cornerstone for local democracy in Europe"

Strasbourg, 29.08.2008 – "The entry into force of the European Charter of Local Self-Government twenty years ago, on 1 September 1988, heralded a new stage of democratic development on our continent, leading to a democracy which is more citizen-oriented, more participatory and therefore more effective," Ian Micallef, President of the Local Authorities Chamber in the Council of Europe Congress, stressed in a statement issued today.

"The Charter laid down in particular, for the first time in history, the principle of subsidiarity – that the responsibility for public services should be transferred to the level where they can be delivered most efficiently, the level closest to the citizen. But beyond the recognition of the need for decentralisation, the Charter represented an evolution of our understanding of democracy, reflecting the conviction that local democracy was a constituent element of democracy itself, not just a tribute paid to the growing power of local authorities.

"This new understanding acknowledged that the devolution of power towards local communities would release their potential and stir up action involving numerous actors at all levels of governance, which would make it possible to take up the great challenges of today. Thus local authorities became the first line of response to the issues of concern to our societies – be it biodiversity, cohesion within and between communities, climate change and sustainable consumption, intercultural dialogue, or urban environment.

"Twenty years on, the Charter, ratified by 43 of the Council of Europe's 47 member states, has become the cornerstone for local democracy in Europe and an integral part of national good governance," said President Micallef.

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 (SOC), Group of the European People's Party – Christian Democrats (EPP/CD), Independent and Liberal Democrat Group (ILDG).