

Press Release

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Yavuz Mildon: “Congress ready to assist local authorities in Georgia”

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Strasbourg, 12.09.2008 – Yavuz Mildon, President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, visited the city of Gori and surroundings on Thursday 11 September. He saw destroyed civilian buildings and ongoing efforts for their reconstruction. President Mildon also went to the still existing Russian military checkpoint at Karaleti (Shida Kartli Region) but was not allowed to cross.

“Local communities clearly bore the brunt of the hostilities: the conflict had a devastating effect on the capacity of local authorities to provide basic public services to their populations, and seriously affected local self-government in Georgia in general,” stressed Yavuz Mildon. “The civilian population suffering from the consequences of the conflict must be our primary concern. It is crucial to provide for basic needs of local communities, especially displaced persons, and I appeal to local and regional authorities of Europe to respond to the call for humanitarian aid launched by the Local Democracy Agency in Kutaisi,” he said. President Mildon underlined that local authorities needed help in restoring damaged infrastructures and ensuring security, and that conditions must be put in place for an early and safe return of displaced persons to their communities.

In Gori, he met with State Minister for Regional Issues David Tkeshelashvili and Governor of Shida Kartli Region Lado Vardzelashvili, and was informed by the Georgian delegation to the Congress of the massive destruction of a number of Georgian villages. “This may be considered as systematic ethnic cleansing, the perpetrators of which must be brought to justice. Only the return of displaced persons to their villages and homes will allow for the re-establishment of local democracy in Georgia, in conformity with the European Charter of Local Self-Government,” said President Mildon. He looked forward to an early deployment of EU observers and supported the idea of preparing an international impartial report on the development of the conflict.

During the visit from 9 to 11 September, President Mildon held discussions with the First Deputy Foreign Minister, the First Deputy Minister of Regional Issues, Vice-Speaker of Parliament, the Mayor and the Head of the Municipal Council of Tbilisi, members of the Georgian delegation to the Congress and of the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG), as well as Heads of Mission of OSCE, EU/EC and UNDP.

“The Congress’ experience in Georgia, which includes in particular the creation of NALAG in 2004 and of the Local Democracy Agency in Kutaisi in 2006, will be useful for our assistance to local authorities in their efforts. The Congress stands ready to provide its expertise for elected representatives to contribute to the full restoration of local self-government in Georgia,” concluded President Mildon at the end of the visit.

On 17 September, he will meet in St Petersburg with Sergey Mironov, President of the Federation Council (upper chamber of the Russian Parliament), to discuss the details of his forthcoming visit to North Ossetia, Russian Federation, at the end of September. President Mildon will report on his visit to Georgia to the Congress Bureau meeting on 19 September in Strasbourg.

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).