

# Press Release

## Communication Unit of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

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### Cooperation between cities and regions, an alternative to conflict: Round Table in Brussels

Strasbourg, 09.10.2008 – "We must counter ethnic divide and confrontation with interaction and dialogue between communities, transcending national borders – especially in the Black Sea basin, which harbours four "frozen" conflicts but offers an enormous potential for cooperation."

This was the key message of Yavuz Milden, President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, in his speech at the opening of the Round Table "The Black Sea between cooperation and conflict", in Brussels on 8 October.

He expressed his conviction that transfrontier cooperation between cities and regions in the Black Sea basin can serve as a sound alternative to conflict between states, and regional autonomy, with panoply of existing flexible models, as a counterbalance to separatism. "Creating a network of communities with shared interest in addressing common problems would certainly influence their choice between cooperation and conflict, in a region which is at a crossroads of major political and economic interests, energy routes, migratory flows and cultural and commercial exchanges," President Milden said.

He stressed that the Black Sea Euroregion, launched by the Congress on 26 September, will offer a platform for cooperation and a launching pad for multilateral projects and initiatives between regions and municipalities in the protection of the environment, coastal management, migration, transport, sustainable tourism, cultural exchanges, and others aspects of economic and social development. The new Euroregion is open to local and regional authorities from Albania, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Bulgaria, Georgia, Greece, Moldova, Romania, Russia, Serbia, Turkey and Ukraine.

The Round Table, moderated by Quentin Dickinson, journalist of Radio France, was held on the occasion of the European Week of Regions and Cities, organised by the Committee of the Regions of the European Union. Among the participants were Asen Gagauzov, Minister of regional development and public works of Bulgaria, Vasil Kuybida, Minister of Regional development of Ukraine, Gheorghe Magheru, General Director of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Romania, Mamuka Jgenti Deputy Permanent Representative of Georgia to the Council of Europe, Oriano Otocan, Representative of the President of the Adriatic Euroregion, Janos Herman, Deputy political Director, External Relations DG, European Commission (Belgium).

They exchanged opinions on what local and regional authorities can do to tackle the present challenges of the Black Sea basin and what structures are required to support their initiatives, and gave examples of good practices and successful projects.

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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 : Yavuz Milden (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).

Addressing the Round Table as a guest speaker, Luc van den Brande, President of the EU Committee of the Regions, underlined the need of cooperation in regions faced with conflicts. "Institutions can help to resolve conflicts but ultimately they do not secure our future and the future of our children. In fact the future is very much in your hands, the hands of the locally and regionally elected representatives who are closest to the citizen. I am convinced that regional and local authorities can and have to assume more responsibility in the field of conflict prevention and the promotion of dialogue. Local and regional politicians will be successful in preventing conflicts if they strengthen their capacity to solve problems without being enslaved by any feeling of revenge," he said.

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