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Towards "partner for local democracy" status for southern Mediterranean countries

Strasbourg, 18.10.2012 - At their 23rd session, the members of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe adopted several texts on 16 October 2012, calling for the introduction of concrete tools for stepping up cooperation with Arab countries.

Amy Koopmanschap, Netherlands (SOC), rapporteur, introduced the debate on "The changes underway in the Arab countries – opportunities for local and regional democracy" by reviewing recent developments. The recommendation and resolution adopted propose making use of the legal instruments available and the experience of European towns and regions to help strengthen democracy in Arab countries. Accordingly, the Congress is calling on the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to consider the possibility of opening the European Charter of Local Self-Government - the benchmark legal instrument in this field - for accession by the countries of the southern Mediterranean, in particular Morocco and Tunisia. Amy Koopmanschap stressed that "the Congress can also provide expertise in the observing of local and regional elections and help to promote education for democratic citizenship and human rights education at local and regional level".

In another resolution, adopted on the same day, the Congress also decided to take the necessary administrative and regulatory measures to ensure that, in due course, it can adopt a "partner for local democracy" status which may then be proposed to local elected representatives from neighbouring countries that are not members of the Council of Europe, like the "partner for democracy" status introduced by the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, already enjoyed by Morocco. "At the Congress, we are convinced that the sweeping political changes in southern Mediterranean countries are opening up historic opportunities for democratic development and that devolving powers to the authorities which are closest to citizens – the towns and regions – can be the key to success here. Like the Parliamentary Assembly, we would like to offer the local and regional authorities of neighbouring countries a specific status aimed at forging ongoing institutional relations that will open the way for sustained cooperation", said Jean-Claude Frécon, France (SOC), as he presented the report.

These initiatives form part of the Council of Europe's new policy regarding neighbouring regions, which was adopted in 2011 and has since resulted in a number of agreements being negotiated and priorities being set for cooperation. The Congress was fully involved at a very early stage in devising and defining these cooperation priorities, as well as in implementing them.

[Report CG\(23\)6](#)

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Video of the debate- [Original version](#) | [French version](#) | [English version](#) [wmv format – Media Player required – the video will also soon be available on YouTube]

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President of the Congress: Herwig Van Staa (Austria, EPP/DC), President of the Chamber of Regions: Nataliya Romanova (Ukraine, IDLG), President of the Chamber of Local Authorities: Jean-Claude Frécon (France, SOC)
Political Groups: Socialist Group (SOC), Group of the European People's Party – Christian Democrats (EPP/CD), Independent and Liberal Democrat Group (ILDG), European Conservatives & Reformists Group

(ECR)