

# Press Release

## Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

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## Court recognises discrimination of a non-citizen in Latvia: Congress' reaction

Strasbourg, 02.03.2009 – "I welcome the European Court of Human Rights' judgment of 19 February in the case of Andrejeva v. Latvia, which only confirms the Congress' position on the situation of non-citizens in that country. By this judgment, the Court has in fact supported the spirit of the Congress' recommendation adopted in December 2008," Congress Vice-President Jean-Claude Frécon (France, SOC), head of a special mission to Latvia, stated at the meeting of the Bureau of the Congress' Local Authorities Chamber on 2 March 2009.

"The Court has found a violation of Article 14 (prohibition of discrimination) of the European Convention on Human Rights, and did not accept the Latvian government's argument linking the right of an individual to the naturalisation process. This is exactly the position expressed by the Congress last December, when we called on Latvian authorities to separate the question of political rights from that of naturalisation, and to grant political rights at local level to all non-citizens, which will foster their integration into Latvian society. The Congress then urged the authorities to grant non-citizens voting rights at local level," said Vice-President Frécon.

"Some 16 % of the population in Latvia, or 370,000 people, have the so-called 'non-citizen' status. Apart from this title which implies their exclusion, they do not possess de facto the same political rights as Latvian citizens. Yet, the vast majority of them are long-term residents, often born in the country and largely integrated within the society. We believe that not allowing these Latvian residents to participate in the local life undermines the spirit of the European Charter of Local Self-Government which Latvia signed and ratified in 1996," he continued.

"We believe that giving non-citizens political rights, starting with the right to vote in local elections, will make them feel more involved in a society to which they already belong. It is heartening to see that the European Court of Human Rights shares the view that refusing to grant all residents of the country the same rights means discrimination, and the Latvian authorities should not wait for more cases like this before changing their position. I reiterate the Congress' appeal to them made in December, and I certainly hope that they will heed the opinion of the Congress and now of the European Court of Human Rights with regard to non-citizens in their country," concluded Vice-President Frécon.

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).