

Press Release

Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

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Congress: Michel Guégan concerned by the Flemish Minister's intransigence in the burgomasters' affair

Strasbourg, 09.04.2009 – "I am deeply concerned by the intransigence of Flemish Minister of Home Affairs Marino Keulen in the case of three non-appointed burgomasters," underlined today Michel Guégan (France, NR), Rapporteur on the situation of local democracy in Belgium of the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities.

In December 2008, the Congress held a debate on the non-appointment of elected burgomasters in three communities with special arrangements in the Flemish region. The debate followed a fact-finding mission to Brussels which found, in relation to the situation of burgomasters of Linkebeek, Kraainem/Crainhem and Wezembeek-Oppeem, breaches of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, which has been ratified by Belgium. The Flemish Minister of Home Affairs, who had refused to appoint them as mayors, has just reiterated his refusal following the new request addressed to him on 1 April 2009. The Congress had recommended either to appoint the three mayors, or to proceed to new elections. In the present circumstances, the Congress Rapporteur continues to encourage the burgomasters to bring this matter before the competent judicial bodies.

"The expression of the people's will during elections is the very essence of democracy. Impeding elected representatives from fulfilling their duties, by denying them a formal appointment, makes this electoral exercise empty of all meaning, and this in violation of the Charter of Local Self-Government," said Michel Guégan.

"The Flemish authorities, since December 2008, have not taken into consideration the Congress' recommendation. By acting this way, they have deliberately reached a political impasse. The Congress will examine this matter again during its monitoring mission on the situation of local democracy in Belgium after the regional and European elections in June," he concluded.

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).