

# Press Release

## Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

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## Congress monitoring visit to Iceland: innovative spirit and shared responsibility in the face of the crisis

Strasbourg, 17.06.2009 – The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe carried out a monitoring visit to Iceland from 15 to 17 June, as part of its mission to monitor the situation of local and regional democracy in Europe. "I was most impressed by the solidarity and the shared responsibility which we observed at the municipal and national levels in facing the trial of the economic and financial crisis," said Esther Maurer (Switzerland, SOC), Head of the Congress delegation, at the end of the visit.

The delegation found that the economic crisis, which affected Iceland worse than the other European countries, had no paralysing effects on its political representatives but on the contrary drove an innovative spirit activating processes of participation among all players. "There is a quite remarkable mutual understanding among the various political players at the state and municipal levels," Esther Maurer stressed.

Iceland has a long tradition of local democracy. The new government told the Congress delegation of its determination to strengthen this mode of self-government still further. The Icelandic municipalities have all endorsed this idea of the national government despite some scepticism as to whether the proposed enhancement of their autonomy will coincide with an increase in their financial resources.

The parties with whom the delegation met generally came out in favour of a marked reduction in the number of municipalities while taking into account a degree of opposition from some municipalities.

The Congress delegation would have wished for the principle of subsidiarity to be honoured by granting the city of Reykjavik more powers in view of its capabilities as much as its needs.

Iceland, which ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 1991, was among the last of the countries where the Congress had to carry out a mission to monitor the application of the Charter. The report will be presented by the Head of the delegation at the autumn session of the Congress in October 2009.

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).