

*The President*

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Strasbourg, 15 October 2010

Dear colleagues,

Today, on the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, I would like to reflect on what a remarkable and special event this was. The Charter is a unique text. It was the first international treaty to recognize the rights of local authorities and to which member states agreed to be legally and politically committed. It has become the essential international reference when it comes to local democracy.

We have reason to be proud of this treaty: we not only possess an unparalleled international treaty on democracy that has been ratified by 44 Council of Europe member States, but we also have a clear mandate to monitor its implementation. The Charter is the envy of other international organisations. The UN has used it as the basis for their Habitat Guidelines and we have recently seen a Latin American Charter which is again heavily inspired by our text.

As you know, we are in the process of reforming the Congress and re-prioritizing our work, to give much greater emphasis to the monitoring and implementation of the Charter. We have begun to increase the rhythm of our monitoring activities, and have adopted a set of rules to govern these activities and ensure that they are carried out rigorously and systematically. We still need to engage those states which have yet to ratify it. Earlier this year I began my tour of the three countries concerned with an official visit to Andorra. I am pleased to announce that Andorra will be signing the Charter during our coming session.

The Charter is an organic text which continues to develop and evolve. A kind of "case-law" of the Charter has taken root in the international law of local authorities, which continue to interpret the terms of this unique text in the light of political and economic situation that our continent has traversed over the decades, and in light of the specific developments in each country. We now have a protocol to the Charter on citizen participation, reflecting the changing nature of local democracy and the expectations of our citizens.

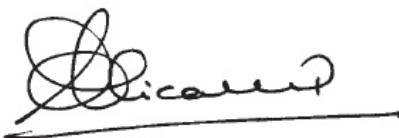
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*Letter addressed to Congress members*

The scope of our monitoring activities is now being extended. Last year's ministerial conference in Utrecht gave the green light for the Council of Europe Reference Framework for Regional Democracy to be used as a reference text in future monitoring missions. The Reference framework was the first fruit of the efforts of several years to promote democracy at the regional level. It is a goal that we will continue to pursue.

During our session next week we will have a special debate to mark this 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Charter. It is a proud moment for us, and I invite you to join in the celebration.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'I. Micallef', with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

Ian Micallef  
President *a.i.*