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20th session of the Congress: "Greater Europe needs the Congress" says Philippe Richert, French Minister responsible for local and regional authorities

Strasbourg, 23.03.2011 - "The Europe of local democracy, the Europe of the 200 000 local and regional authorities, Greater Europe, needs the Congress", said Philippe Richert, French Minister for Local authorities under the Minister of the Interior, Overseas, Local authorities and Immigration, responsible for local and regional authorities, at the [20th session](#) of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe on 22 March 2011.

Speaking in the debate on the reform of that institution, Mr Richert reiterated the importance of local democracy and emphasised the efforts of the Congress to promote a "Europe of municipalities and regions, of characters and identities, of territorial diversity".

"The Congress has been relevant, effective and exemplary in carrying out its monitoring activities, fact-finding missions, observing of elections, and programmes of cooperation and has demonstrated its ability to foster local and regional democracy in Europe", he pointed out.

More specifically regarding the ongoing reform of the institution, Mr Richert backed a refocusing of the Congress on its fundamental missions. "The targeting of activities will make it possible to cope with a difficult budgetary situation, by clearing a sufficient margin for manoeuvre ensuring the smooth running of Congress activities. It will also be able to consolidate its positioning within this pan-European organisation and its reputation in European public opinion".

"The functioning of the Congress has a cost, because democracy has a value", he concluded.

A recommendation and a resolution on the reform of the Congress within the Council of Europe reform were adopted at the end of the debate.

Discussion at the Congress on the reform of its structures and working methods began back in 2008 and was stepped up in 2009 and 2010 when the Council of Europe Secretary General, Thorbjørn Jagland, launched a broad programme of reform for the Organisation to realign the Council of Europe with its fundamental values – the rule of law, democracy and human rights.

The [report](#), presented by Karl-Heinz Lambertz, Belgium (R, SOC), and Anders Knappe, Sweden (EPP/CD), takes stock of the first two phases of Congress reform already implemented and sets out the third phase to be embarked upon following the adoption of the revised versions of the Congress' statutory texts by the Committee of Ministers on 19 January 2011.

The first two phases enabled the Congress to improve its effectiveness and response capacity, by creating more streamlined and more political structures, simplifying its functioning and expanding key activities such as monitoring local and regional democracy and observing local and regional elections. One major feature of the third phase will be an in-depth revision of the Rules of Procedure of the Congress.

The rapporteurs also called for strengthened institutional links and political dialogue with the Committee of Ministers and the other organs of the Council of Europe in order to

incorporate the local and regional dimension in any action of the Organisation. They further stressed the importance of developing active cooperation with the Committee of the Regions and the Agency for Fundamental Rights of the European Union.

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: Keith Whitmore (United Kingdom, ILDG), President of the Chamber of Regions: Herwig van Staa (Austria, EPP/CD), President of the Chamber of Local Authorities: Jean-Paul 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).