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Grassroots democracy in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” evolves along Congress’s lines

Strasbourg, 18 October 2012. – A report and recommendation on the situation of local and regional democracy in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” were debated on 17 October 2012, at the 23rd Congress Session. The report, presented by the joint rapporteurs Simon James, United Kingdom (L, ILDG) and Andree Buchmann, France, (R, SOC), assesses developments in local and regional democracy in the country since the Congress’s last recommendation in 2007. In general, the Congress expresses satisfaction that the measures taken since the adoption of its Recommendation 217 (2007) represent marked progress towards better local democracy and decentralisation and that cooperation between municipalities and the central government works well.

These positive developments were underlined by Congress co-rapporteur Andree Buchmann, who praised the commitment of the country’s authorities: “I would like to congratulate the authorities of “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” on the political will they have shown to improve the quality of local democracy on the basis of our texts”. The report also pinpointed several areas of concern where efforts should now focus, namely competencies, finances, supervision and participation.

In terms of concrete action, the Congress recommends that the authorities in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” consolidate and finalise the decentralisation process, primarily by enhancing the portfolio of the Ministry of Local Self-Government and clarifying the issue of overlapping competencies. It is furthermore recommended that distinct strategies to reduce the great wealth and development disparities between rural and urban municipalities be developed, and also that the role and functions of Skopje as capital city and as local authority dealing with 10 sub-entities be clarified.

Co-rapporteur Simon James, United Kingdom (L, ILDG) highlighted the positive effects of the political dialogue undertaken during the monitoring visit, whilst underlining that “the decentralisation process needs to be continued and consolidated because it holds a particularly important place in this country; it is part of the very fabric of democracy and it also facilitates the cohabitation of different ethnic groups”. In addition, the Congress report advocates raising public awareness of citizen participation and civil society involvement in local political life, as well as promoting the participation of women therein. It also encourages the government to sign and ratify the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207) as well as the Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level (ETS No. 144).

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