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Congress calls for action plan to improve grassroots democracy in Azerbaijan.

Strasbourg, 18 October 2012. – A resolution and recommendation on the situation of local and regional democracy in Azerbaijan were debated on 17 October, at the 23rd Congress Session. The report, presented by the co-rapporteurs Jos Wienen, The Netherlands (L, EPP/CD) and Gudrun Mosler-Törnström, Austria, (R, SOC), assesses the developments in grassroots democracy in Azerbaijan since the Congress's monitoring report of 2003.

The Congress welcomed the creation of three national associations of local authorities, but regretted that they do not enjoy an active role in representing municipal interests. However, the report observed that most of the recommendations addressed in 2003 to the national authorities have not been implemented and that no timeline exists for their implementation. Furthermore, the report expressed serious concerns with regard to the non-compliance with most of the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self Government, ratified by Azerbaijan.

"There is simply no local and regional democracy in Azerbaijan, no developments, no roadmap since the previous recommendation, and this should be a matter of concern for all of us," underlined co-rapporteur Gudrun Mosler-Törnström. The report stresses the virtual inexistence of local self-government and the strong supervision of municipalities by state bodies, as well as the weak financial potential of these municipalities. In addition there is a lack of a formal consultation procedure for the consultation of municipalities through their associations in the decision-making process on issues which directly affect them. In this context, the Congress invites the Government of Azerbaijan to take the necessary measures to adopt an action plan in order to implement the Congress's recommendations.

In terms of concrete action, the Congress asks its Bureau to consider inviting the Minister of Justice of Azerbaijan, in his capacity as Minister for Local Authorities, to address the Congress during its October session in 2013, and to discuss the developments envisaged by Azerbaijan's authorities. It furthermore invites its Monitoring Committee to organise urgently in Baku a seminar on the implementation of the Charter in Azerbaijan, in cooperation with national, regional and local authorities, and relevant NGOs in the field of local democracy, as well as to carry out a mid-term monitoring visit in order to assess the situation of local and regional democracy in light of the latest adopted Recommendation, and to evaluate the progress made in the meantime. **"I think we should carry on reflecting on how to better encourage Azerbaijan to comply with its commitments if we want to give a real meaning to the ratification of a Convention,"** concluded co-rapporteur Jos Wienen.

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