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European Charter of Local Self-Government in force for 25 years

Strasbourg, 2 September 2013 – 25 years ago on 1 September 1988 the European Charter of Local Self-Government came into force, establishing the role of local government as the first level where democracy is exercised. Its entry into force signified the support of the Council of Europe member states for the furtherance of local and regional democracy.

Herwig van Staa, President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, emphasised that the rise of local democracy had been a major innovation in modern-day democracy during the 20th century. "Over the last 25 years, the Charter has confirmed its role as the first authoritative international treaty in this field. The Congress ensures compliance with the principles set forth by the Charter, in particular through regular monitoring of their application by the member states," he pointed out.

The Charter lays down the fundamental principles that govern the democratic functioning of local authorities, notably devolution of power to the authorities closest to the citizens, the recognition of local self-government in national legislation, the guarantee that local elected representatives may freely discharge their mandate, full and unrestricted responsibilities for local authorities, and their financial autonomy.

Mr van Staa described the Charter as the first international instrument to have advocated the application of the principle of subsidiarity, one which made way for the idea that public affairs should be handled as close as possible to the citizens and at the most effective level.

In 2009, to ensure that democracy is exercised at the grassroots and with the citizens' active participation, an additional protocol on citizen participation supplemented the text of the Charter.

[European Charter for Local Self-Government](#)

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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: Herwig Van Staa (Austria, EPP/DC), President of the Chamber of Regions: Nataliya Romanova (Ukraine, IDLG), President of the Chamber of Local Authorities: Jean-Claude 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), European Conservatives & Reformists Group (ECR)