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The Congress undertakes to strengthen the impact of the European Charter of Local Self-Government

Strasbourg, 20.10.2011 – On 19 October 2011, as part of its 21st session, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe considered two reports on how to increase the impact of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. Firstly, it encouraged member states to withdraw any reservations and declarations made when ratifying the Charter. Secondly it proposed a series of measures to strengthen the treatment of the Charter in member states' domestic legislation.

The Congress therefore intends to support the establishment of a "unified European space of common standards" for local democracy. "It is in the interests of the citizen to strengthen our systems of local self-government, said the Congress rapporteur, Michael Cohen, (Malta, SOC). When they ratified the Charter, a number of member states limited the scope of its application in the form of reservations or declarations. These should be regularly reviewed in the light of developments in the countries concerned".

The Congress will also continue to promote the effectiveness of the Charter and encourage its direct application in the states parties. "Judicial bodies should base their decisions on the Charter, said Willy Borsus, Belgium (ILDG), rapporteur on the subject. It is also a fundamental principle, he continued, that local authorities should be aware of their options of recourse to the courts, in cases of suspected non-compliance with the Charter."

The Congress also examined five reports on the state of local democracy in Slovenia, Bulgaria, Finland, Serbia, Latvia and addressed recommendations to these Member States.

More information on the monitoring reports and the recommendations adopted at the session at www.coe.int/congress-session

The European Charter of Local Self-Government

The European Charter of Local Self-Government is the first binding international treaty that safeguards the rights of communities and their elected authorities. It requires compliance with a minimum number of principles that form the basis of local democracy. The Congress of the Council of Europe tries to ensure that these principles are enforced.

Of the Council of Europe's 47 member states, 45 have signed and ratified the Charter, the most recent being Andorra, where the Charter came into force on 1 July 2011.

Of these 45 states, 24 have ratified the Charter in its entirety, that is without reservation, while 21 others have limited its scope by means of reservations.

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-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).