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| **MINISTERS’ DEPUTIES** | CM Documents | **CM/Cong(2017)Rec385-final** | 2 February 2017 |

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| **“Autonomy and borders in an evolving Europe” Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe Recommendation 385 (2016)**  (Reply adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 1st February 2017 at the 1276th meeting of the Ministers’ Deputies) |

1. The Committee of Ministers has carefully examined Recommendation 385 (2016) of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities entitled “Autonomy and borders in an evolving Europe” and has brought it to the attention of the European Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG).

2. The Committee of Ministers reaffirms its attachment to local and regional democracy, which plays an essential role in our democratic societies, including promoting the protection of fundamental rights at local level.

3. The Committee would point out that the Council of Europe has several standard-setting instruments which aim to ensure the institutional balance between the unity of the State and the autonomy of sub-national entities, as well as to ensure good governance at local level. The Helsinki Declaration on Regional Self-Government, adopted by the European ministers in charge of local and regional authorities at their 14th meeting in Helsinki in 2002, and the Reference Framework on Regional Democracy, of which they took note at their 16th meeting in Utrecht in 2009, contain benchmarks and specific examples of procedures which member States can draw on when designing or implementing territorial reforms.

4. The Committee notes that many member States have chosen inter-municipal co-operation and amalgamation as a means of ensuring sustainability in the delivery of quality public services while maintaining a high degree of representative democracy. In this connection, it points out that the Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform has produced a toolkit for both central governments and local authorities when designing or implementing inter-municipal co-operation and amalgamation.

5. The Committee of Ministers points out that the resolution of territorial conflicts lies outside the Council of Europe’s field of competence. Nevertheless, the Committee intends to continue supporting the work of the Venice Commission and of the Congress with the aim of promoting the adoption of suitable solutions to sub-national territorial issues, in line with the relevant principles of international law.