

32nd Session of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities – 28-30 March 2017 - Local democracy in Estonia

## Speaking notes Henrik HAMMAR

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure for me to present to you today the draft recommendation and report on local democracy in Estonia, which were approved by the Monitoring Committee at its last meeting in February.

The monitoring visit to review the state of local self-government in Estonia took place from 6 to 8 September 2016 in Tallinn, Paide and Jõhvi / *joh-vi* /.

The delegation was composed of myself as rapporteur on local democracy, Leen VERBEEK as rapporteur on regional democracy, and Bernd SEMMELROGGEN as expert, whom I would like to thank for his very good cooperation on this report.

It was the third monitoring visit of the Congress to Estonia, the previous two having taken place in 2000 and 2010 resulting in the adoption of Recommendations 81 (2000) and 294 (2010) on local democracy in Estonia.

We arrived right after the adoption by the Parliament of a comprehensive territorial reform that would deeply impact local authorities in Estonia, as confirmed during a high-level meeting with the Minister of Public Administration in functions, Mr Arto AAS. I will go more into details on this important reform process later.

I would like to thank, on behalf of the monitoring delegation, all our Estonian colleagues who contributed to the organisation and smooth running of the visit, including the Permanent Representation of Estonia to the Council of Europe.

I should also add that after the visit we have had an extensive consultation process with the interlocutors who expressed their comments and suggestions. I think we took into account the majority of expressed views. So, before I would start to present the visit itself I would like to thank all our interlocutors for their active participation in the consultations.

Since the latest Recommendation of the Congress in 2010, we would like to welcome the ratification by Estonia in 2011 in of the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority. This illustrates the political commitment of Estonia toward strengthening the participation of citizens in local public affairs.

We noted with satisfaction the revision of the State Budget Law with a view to strengthening the interaction between the state and local authorities on budgetary matters.

As I mentioned at the very beginning of my intervention, the “Administrative Territorial Reform” based on the Administrative Reform Act adopted in June 2016 and the state administration reform generated rich discussions with the interlocutors during our visit.

It became evident to our delegation that reform process was of extreme importance for the country and would influence many particular aspects of local self-government issues in the near future. Therefore, we welcomed the initiatives of the Estonian institutions to start this far reaching reform process of the territorial architecture of the country on local and state level.

Nevertheless, as you all know, monitoring is, and will always be an instant snapshot of the moment of a visit.

Thus, after our visit, on 23 November 2016 a new government assumed office in Estonia.

Today, the Minister of public administration of Estonia participates in our exchange of views and I would like to particularly thank him for his participation as it shows the political will of Estonia and its commitment to ensure the compliance with the Charter.

Moreover, the participation of the Minister today makes us very optimistic about the perspectives of the continuation of the reform projects that may improve the situation of both local authorities and the citizens of Estonia.

As rapporteurs, we are convinced that the respect of the Charter provisions will be helpful to reach the reform targets.

I would now like to give the floor to my co-rapporteur Leen VERBEEK who would go into details on the findings of our delegation that raised our concern and therefore require improvement on behalf of the central government. He will also present our relevant recommendations aimed at ensuring the full compliance with the Charter.

Thank you very much for your attention.