

# THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

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## Resolution 343 (2012)<sup>1</sup> Policy of the Council of Europe towards neighbouring regions: the role of the Congress

1. The events which have taken place in the southern Mediterranean, Central Asia and the Middle East were triggered by a strong popular desire for democracy and change, and have led to radical processes of opening up and democratisation, which are still ongoing.

2. In the light of this situation and the dynamics it has set in motion, the Council of Europe has decided to step up its relations with some of these countries with a view, firstly, to enabling them to benefit from the experience acquired by the Organisation during the democratic transition in central and eastern Europe after 1989 and, secondly, to developing dialogue and productive partnership with the countries in those regions which wish to develop democracy at all levels, establish the primacy of law and ensure respect for human rights.

3. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe welcomes this approach and is willing to give fresh impetus to the co-operation it has already forged in the past with some countries in the southern Mediterranean.

4. It is convinced that the establishing of genuine local and regional democracy is a vital precondition for guaranteeing pluralist democracy based on respect for human rights and the rule of law throughout the countries in question.

5. The Congress welcomes the moves by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe to propose bilateral co-operation programmes with neighbouring regions and welcomes being fully involved in the preparation and future implementation of practical activities.

6. It also notes with satisfaction that some of these countries have acceded – or are preparing to accede – to Council of Europe conventions and partial agreements.

7. In its capacity as a territorial political assembly made up of local and regional elected representatives from the Council of Europe's 47 member countries, the Congress considers that it can enable its new partners to benefit from its achievements, instruments and experience and that it thus constitutes a forum for encounters and exchange that will be particularly valuable not only for the countries of the southern Mediterranean, Central Asia and the Middle East, but also for itself.

8. It is also convinced that reinforcing our exchanges and working relations with local and/or regional elected representatives from these neighbouring regions and countries

can only help promote the Council of Europe's fundamental values, especially local democracy.

9. As regards Morocco, the Congress is particularly pleased to have been able to pursue the co-operation begun in 2010 on the advanced regionalisation project and to hold meetings between members of the Congress and Moroccan parliamentarians regarding the organic law on advanced regionalisation now being prepared.

10. Moreover, once Morocco's new territorial organisation is in place, and on the strength of its experience in this field, the Congress reiterates that it is fully prepared to provide guidance on the preparation, holding and monitoring of the local and regional elections that will take place after this law is passed.

11. The Congress also welcomes the participation of numerous Moroccan towns in the 2012 European Local Democracy Week and the interest shown in genuine local participatory democracy.

12. As regards Tunisia, the Congress is closely following discussions in the National Constituent Assembly (NCA), which must chart out the path to the democratic and pluralist State called for by the Tunisian people during the revolution of January 2011.

13. The Congress is pleased to have had the opportunity to meet and exchange views with the NCA's committee on regional and local public authorities and is convinced that the dialogue launched by the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) – in which the Congress is fully involved – can serve as a valuable source of information and inspiration for the Tunisian Parliament.

14. The Congress is particularly satisfied to note that the NCA attaches due importance to the structures, financial resources and powers to be assigned to local and regional authorities that will be decisive for future democracy.

15. The Congress is closely observing developments in these two countries and is glad that some of its talking partners have expressed an interest in reinforced, regular and structured co-operation with the Congress. It pledges to continue working in this direction.

16. In this spirit, the Congress particularly welcomes the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe's initiative in creating a "Partner for democracy" status for national parliaments in these countries, in order to facilitate regular exchanges and encourage participation by these countries "in the political debate on common challenges which transcend European borders"<sup>2</sup>.

17. Like the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress considers that the co-operation which it wishes to develop with the elected representatives of local and regional authorities in non-member countries in neighbouring regions would be more effective, coherent and dynamic if it took place within a framework of regular institutional relations and contacts.

18. To that end – once local elections have been held – the Congress is willing to propose a special status paving the way for co-operation on a regular basis with the newly elected territorial authorities of neighbouring non-member States who wish to participate.

19. In view of the above, the Congress decides to take the necessary administrative and regulatory steps which will allow it, in due course, to adopt a special “Partner for

local democracy status” that may be granted to elected representatives of local authorities in those neighbouring countries.

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1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 16 October 2012, 2nd Sitting, rapporteur: J.-C. Frécon, France (L, SOC).

2. Recommendation 1818 (2011) on the request for Partner for Democracy status with the Parliamentary Assembly submitted by the Parliament of Morocco.