

# THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

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## Resolution 342 (2012)<sup>1</sup> The changes underway in the Arab countries – opportunities for local and regional democracy

1. The changes resulting from the Arab Spring in the countries of the southern Mediterranean, in particular Tunisia and Morocco, open up great prospects for democratic development at local and regional level. These countries' authorities and societies have the chance to seize a historic opportunity and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe must contribute to this process in the context of the Organisation's policy towards neighbouring regions.

2. With regard to Tunisia, the Congress:

*a.* welcomes the democratic changes, in particular the free elections held in October 2011 to form the Constituent National Assembly tasked with drafting a new constitution and establishing an interim government, but notes the dismissal of mayors, the dissolution of municipal councils and the transfer of responsibility for local governance to "special commissions";

*b.* hopes that the new constitution will include the democratic principles of local self-government and that the local elections due in 2013 will be conducted in accordance with the principles of local democracy and see strong citizen participation and involvement;

*c.* welcomes the authorities' commitment to consider no longer favouring coastal areas over areas in the interior by reversing the traditional breakdown of government investment of 70% and 30%. It hopes that this process goes hand in hand with the strengthening of local authorities, their powers and their financial autonomy so as to ensure integrated development.

3. With regard to Morocco, the Congress also welcomes the reform process started by King Mohammed VI in January 2010 and set out in the "reform package", including the report on advanced regionalisation, following the protests in March 2011. It welcomes the revision of the constitution and the draft organic law intended to provide the basis for reorganisation of local and regional government. The Congress hopes that this will be based on the democratic principles of local self-government and application of the principle of subsidiarity, and that the forthcoming local and regional elections are conducted in accordance with the principles of local and regional democracy and see strong citizen participation and involvement.

4. In general, the Congress believes that the main challenges in terms of local and regional democracy in Tunisia and Morocco are as follows:

*a.* the establishment of a legislative framework based on democratic principles, norms and standards;

*b.* the ending of the practice of supervision of local and regional authorities and an increase in their powers and their financial autonomy, combined with the transfer of resources corresponding to those powers;

*c.* the training of local and regional elected representatives and their staff;

*d.* the transfer of experience in terms of administrative practices in the management of local and regional authorities and good governance;

*e.* the adoption of the measures needed to bring about the participation of citizens, in particular women and young people, at local and regional level.

5. The Congress welcomes the drawing up by the Council of Europe of 2012-2014 priorities for Morocco and Tunisia under its neighbourhood co-operation, which will receive European Union support. It is pleased to be involved in these priority actions and undertakes to play its part in co-operation with the countries of the southern Mediterranean to the full.

6. In the context of the Council of Europe's policy towards neighbouring regions, the Congress therefore calls on its own bodies to:

*a.* consider how decentralised co-operation can be used for supporting decentralisation policies and for strengthening local and regional governance to ensure effective service delivery;

*b.* establish co-operation with the ministries responsible for local and regional authorities and other relevant government bodies to promote the democratic principles of local and regional self-government in administrative practices, in particular concerning the transfer of powers and financial resources at local and regional level, as well as participation and empowerment of women in access to elected office and participation by citizens, notably women and young people; co-operation should also be established with the professional associations working in the fields of promoting democracy, citizenship, local development, young people and employment;

*c.* offer its know-how in the observation of local and regional elections, in particular the forthcoming local, provincial and regional elections in Morocco (in 2012) and the forthcoming local elections in Tunisia (probably in 2013);

*d.* offer, in co-operation with the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), its know-how and experience in the preparation and organisation of elections, to enable the forthcoming local and regional elections in both countries to take place in the best possible conditions;

*e.* invite municipalities in the two countries to take part in the European Local Democracy Week co-ordinated by the Congress;

*f.* develop co-operation with associations of local and regional authorities, in particular the Assembly of European Regions (AER) in this area through joint initiatives aimed, in particular, at exchanges of experience for elected representatives;

*g.* develop and expand co-operation with the associations of local and regional authorities in Morocco and Tunisia to assess the needs of municipalities and encourage them to become involved in the Congress' work, in particular by offering a special status with the Congress to a delegation of elected local and regional representatives from each country;

*h.* co-operate with the relevant bodies to raise awareness among local and regional authorities, governments and national parliaments about existing Council of Europe instruments on local and regional democracy, notably the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) and its Additional Protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207), the Reference Framework for Regional Democracy, the Code of Conduct for the political integrity of local and regional elected representatives, the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages (ETS No. 148) and the Council of Europe Charter on Education for Democratic Citizenship and Human Rights Education,<sup>2</sup> in particular by holding round tables and seminars, etc;

*i.* encourage the creation and continuation of partnerships, capacity development programmes and City Diplomacy activities by European towns and their associations with their Tunisian and Moroccan counterparts, which focus on the strengthening of local and regional governments to improve service delivery to citizens and make it more effective;

*j.* in the context of these activities, promote education for democratic citizenship and human rights education at local and regional level and raise awareness among local and regional elected representatives and their staff of the importance of such education;

*k.* promote, in co-operation with local and regional authorities in the countries of the southern Mediterranean, action in the above-mentioned areas through existing co-operation platforms and networks such as the Council of Europe's North-South Centre, the Euro-Arab Cities Forum, the

Standing Committee for the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership of Local and Regional Authorities (COPPEM), the Arab Towns Organization (ATO) and the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) of the EU Committee of the Regions, with which the Congress has observer status, as well as United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG);

*l.* share its experience of transfrontier co-operation with the local and regional authorities of border areas in Tunisia and Morocco, in order to assist these authorities in realising the benefits of such co-operation;

*m.* offer the experience and know-how of the Congress for the finalisation by the Moroccan Parliament of the draft law on advanced regionalisation, before its adoption;

*n.* offer the experience and know-how of the Congress to the Tunisian National Constituent Assembly's Committee Responsible for Local Government to ensure that local democracy is properly defined in the new constitution.

7. The Congress calls on its members to pursue these objectives.

8. As local and regional authorities in European countries have great experience and a whole range of best practices in the areas of local and regional governance, citizen participation and sustainable urban development, they are able to offer their counterparts in Tunisia and Morocco technical know-how and institutional support.

9. To this end, the Congress calls on European local and regional authorities to:

*a.* establish co-operation with their counterparts in the countries of the southern Mediterranean to determine the latter's needs and offer know-how on democratic governance and the management of local and regional authorities, in particular through twinning schemes, study visits and training programmes;

*b.* step up decentralised co-operation with Tunisian and Moroccan local and regional authorities through the existing European and international networks of local authorities mentioned above which have already launched Euro-Mediterranean projects, and give impetus to the partnerships.

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 16 October 2012, 1st Sitting (see Document [CG\(23\)6](#), explanatory memorandum), rapporteur: A. Koopmanshap, Netherlands (L, SOC).

2. Recommendation CM/Rec(2010)7 of 11 May 2010.