

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Recommendation 325 (2012)¹ The changes underway in the Arab countries – opportunities for local and regional democracy

1. The political changes sweeping the countries of the southern Mediterranean provide a unique opportunity for establishing democracy in which the political, economic and administrative decentralisation of power to authorities closer to grass-roots needs – municipalities and regions – is of vital importance.

2. In this context, the Council of Europe has a duty to support the process and, in particular, the expansion of local and regional democracy. It has a range of legal instruments setting out the principles and standards for the development of local and regional democracy, as well as extensive experience of implementing them in administrative practices and the management of local and regional authorities.

3. In this connection, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe welcomes the action of the Parliamentary Assembly in Morocco and Tunisia, in particular the observation of elections, and calls on it to encourage those countries' national parliaments to draw up legislative frameworks for local and regional democracy and adopt democratic principles of local and regional self-government, based in particular on 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 and other relevant Council of Europe legal instruments. The legislative frameworks should, in particular, deal with increased powers and the financial base of local and regional authorities, as well as participation of citizens, in particular women and young people, at local and regional level.

4. The Congress also welcomes the drawing up of 2012-2014 priorities for Morocco and Tunisia under the Council of Europe co-operation policy towards neighbouring regions, which will receive European Union support. It is pleased to be involved in these priorities.

5. Underlining the importance of taking due account of the local and regional dimension of the Council of Europe's policy towards neighbouring regions, the Congress calls on the Committee of Ministers to:

a. promote among the national governments of the countries of the southern Mediterranean the democratic principles of local and regional self-government in administrative practices, in particular concerning the transfer of powers and

financial resources, as well as participation by citizens, in particular women and young people, at local and regional level;

b. promote the standards established by the above-mentioned Council of Europe legal instruments and 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;

c. consider the possibility of opening the European Charter of Local Self-Government for accession by the countries of the southern Mediterranean, in particular Morocco and Tunisia;

d. promote decentralised co-operation and, where possible, provide financial support for projects by European municipalities and regions for their counterparts in the countries of the southern Mediterranean, in particular training programmes for elected representatives and their staff;

e. ensure, in the framework of its 2012-2014 co-operation programmes with Morocco and Tunisia, that activities concerning combating corruption and money laundering pay particular attention to these problems at local and regional levels.

6. In addition, the Congress calls on the Council of Europe's European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission), in the context of its expert appraisals of the constitutions and legislation of the countries of the southern Mediterranean, to make sure that the right to local self-government is recognised and the democratic principles and standards of local self-government are included.

7. Lastly, the Congress calls on European Union bodies, including the Committee of the Regions, through the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM), with which the Congress holds observer status, to contribute to the development of democracy in the regions of the southern Mediterranean, in particular by:

a. stepping up co-operation with municipalities and regions in the southern Mediterranean to determine the latter's needs and transfer know-how on democratic governance and the management of local and regional authorities, in particular through training programmes for elected representatives and their staff and through study visits;

b. developing initiatives and activities involving exchanges of experience and the promotion of local and regional implementation of public policies, as well as exerting their influence in connexion with the renegotiation of the European Union's neighbourhood policy and the definition of a Mediterranean macro-region;

c. devising ways of adapting decentralised co-operation to the various forms of local and regional public policies and fostering measures to reinforce and support the national decentralisation policies of the countries of the southern Mediterranean;

d. enabling local and regional authorities and their representatives from the countries of the southern Mediterranean to play a full part in renegotiating the European Union's neighbourhood policy for 2014-2020;

e. fostering a European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) modelled on European regional policy and the allocation of structural funds and, in this context, studying the possibility

of drawing up and implementing local and regional development plans, based on the twinning model.

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).