

Press Release

Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

Communication Division

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Tel. +33 (0)3 90 21 49 36

Fax +33 (0)3 88 41 27 51

Internet: www.coe.int/congress

e-mail: congress.com@coe.int



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Congress Bureau calls for postponing referendum in Azerbaijan

Strasbourg, 02.03.2009 – The Bureau of the Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities today requested postponing the referendum on constitutional amendments in Azerbaijan, scheduled for 18 March 2009, pending the opinion of the Venice Commission on their conformity with European democratic norms, particularly with the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

In its statement, the Bureau recalled that on 5 February 2009, Congress President a.i. Ian Micallef expressed his concern to Prime Minister of Azerbaijan Artur Rasizade on the proposed amendment to Article 146 of the Constitution of Azerbaijan, because of its possible inconsistency with certain provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, ratified by Azerbaijan in 2002. Article 146 provides in particular for governmental control of the activities of municipalities, which raises serious concerns and would be problematic with regard to the Charter.

The Congress Bureau therefore welcomed the decision to submit the draft constitutional reform to the European Commission for Democracy through Law (Venice Commission) for opinion.

The Bureau regretted, however, that the Azerbaijani authorities planned to go ahead with the referendum on 18 March 2009, and requested that it be postponed so that the opinion of the Venice Commission, which will be delivered on 13 March 2009, could be taken into account.

The Congress has two chambers, the Chamber of Local Authorities and the Chamber of Regions.

It brings together 318 full and 318 substitute members representing more than 200 000 European territorial communities.

President of the Congress: Yavuz Mildon (Turkey, EPP/CD), President of the Chamber of Regions: Ludmila Sfirloaga (Romania, SOC),

President of the Chamber of Local Authorities: Ian Micallef (Malta, EPP/CD).

Political Groups: Socialist Group (SOC), Group of the European People's Party – Christian Democrats (EPP/CD), Independent and Liberal Democrat Group (ILDG).