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Strasbourg, 24 September 2010

Dear Minister,

I refer to your letter of 27 July to Congress President *a.i.* Ian Micallef concerning the questionnaire for the Advisory Group on your report and I have the pleasure to reply on his behalf after consulting the Congress Bureau. As the questionnaire is addressed to governments and the national delegations of the Congress, I shall not comment on it as such, but I would nevertheless like to share a few observations with you, on behalf of the Congress.

The Congress is committed to improving and enhancing cooperation with its partners within the sphere of the Council of Europe and beyond. First of all, I should point out that the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities functions in a similar way to the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. The main institutional partner of the Congress in the Council of Europe - as for the Parliamentary Assembly - is the Committee of Ministers.

Through the Committee of Ministers, the Congress also has relations with the working structures which are under its umbrella, including the CDLR. The Congress enjoys a healthy relationship with the Committee of Ministers, with a level of political dialogue that continues to improve.

Even so, we believe that there is still room to improve this relationship and we are exploring ways of reinforcing it, to strengthen our partnership with the Committee of Ministers and with the intergovernmental sector in general. One way of doing so would be to ensure better follow-up of Congress recommendations by the intergovernmental sector. Once our recommendations are adopted, they should be discussed in the relevant rapporteur group, and particularly the Committee of Ministers Rapporteur Group on Democracy (GR-DEM).

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I should add that this level of cooperation already exists in some sectors. Some Rapporteur Groups of the Committee of Ministers (GR-C, GR-SOC, GR-J) consistently give detailed attention to the follow-up of the Congress recommendations which are referred to them.

With regard to monitoring the European Charter and election observation, the Congress, in line with the reform of the Council of Europe, has paid a great deal of attention to improving the quality, capacity and transparency of these activities. In this spirit we have recently introduced new guidelines to inject greater transparency and harmonise our procedures. I see a clear role for the intergovernmental sector in assisting member states to implement the recommendations which ensue from these activities and for the involvement of the Congress in this follow up.

As to the idea of developing the Council of Europe's local and regional democracy agenda with the Ministerial Conference, I would say that, while we often share the same goals it is quite natural that we have different ways of achieving them, given the fundamental differences in our statute, structures and composition. Therefore we can predict that we will have a significant part of our agendas in common, rather than a 'common agenda' as such. And, of course, the Congress is ready to pursue activities to promote, enhance and further develop local and regional democracy in Council of Europe member States jointly with the Ministerial Conference.

The Congress is about to change its working structures and a new specific Committee shall be *inter alia* responsible for cooperation with the bodies of the Council of Europe responsible for local and regional issues. This also shows our commitment to intensifying our relations.

I trust that you will receive these comments and observations in the constructive spirit in which they are intended, and I look forward to continuing our reflection on these issues in the framework of the Advisory Group on your report.

Yours sincerely,



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President of the Institutional Committee
of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities,
Head of the Congress delegation to the Advisory Group