

## **THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES**

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### **Recommendation 146 (2004)<sup>1</sup> on the 4th Forum of Cities and Regions of South-eastern Europe, Prijedor, Bosnia and Herzegovina (22-23 September 2003)**

The Congress,

1. Thanks:

*a.* the Municipality of Prijedor and the authorities of the Republika Srpska and Bosnia and Herzegovina for their warm welcome to the 4th Forum of Cities and Regions of South-eastern Europe (10th Economic Forum), which took place in Prijedor on 22 and 23 September 2003;

*b.* those in charge of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe for supporting this activity, aimed at fostering local and regional democracy;

*c.* the participants at the Forum, particularly the local and regional representatives of South-eastern Europe and their European local and regional partners, and the representatives of national governments, international organisations and NGOs;

2. Recalls that the Prijedor Forum was organised in co-operation with the European Foundation for the Sustainable Development of the Regions (FEDRE);

3. Is closely following political and economic developments in South-eastern Europe, and their impact on local and regional authorities, and in this connection:

*a.* deeply regrets the tragic death of the President of “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, Mr Boris Trajkosovski, who opened the first Forum of Cities and Regions of South-East Europe, which took place in Skopje, in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”, from 16 to 18 November 2000. It calls on the Macedonian political leaders to continue their efforts to ensure the peaceful and mutually beneficial coexistence of Macedonia’s various communities, and accordingly comply with the Ohrid peace agreements;

*b.* welcomes Serbia and Montenegro’s accession to the Council of Europe on 3 April 2003;

*c.* welcomes the adoption by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers, at its meeting in Moldova on 5 and 6 November 2003, of the Chişinău Political Declaration on Transfrontier and Interterritorial Co-operation between States in South-eastern Europe. This Declaration is a follow-up to Recommendation 112 (2002) of the Congress on the Forums of Cities and Regions of

South-eastern Europe (8th and 9th Economic Forums) held in Istanbul and Novi Sad (in November 2001 and April 2002);

*d.* welcomes the adoption by the Committee of the Regions of the European Union, on 19 November 2003, of an opinion on the role of local and regional authorities in the democratic consolidation process in the Western Balkans;

*e.* hopes that the proposals made by the Council of Europe with a view to promoting decentralisation in Kosovo will lead to satisfactory political developments in the various communities, in keeping with the spirit of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the European Convention on Human Rights;

*f.* trusts that the recent political changes in Serbia and Montenegro will help that country fully to honour the commitments it accepted on joining the Council of Europe, and restore the stability required for its economic and social development;

*g.* trusts that the presidential elections and local elections to be held in Serbia in June 2004 and September 2004, respectively, the local elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina on 2 October 2004 and in “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” early in October 2004, will be properly conducted and that there will be a high turnout in all the communities;

*h.* reaffirms the crucial role that local and regional authorities must play in establishing peace, reconciling communities scarred by the wars that ravaged the former Yugoslavia, and fostering the political stability and economic development of South-eastern Europe, with a view to European integration;

*i.* is convinced that improving economic conditions at local and regional level is a fundamental and essential factor for the development of democratic institutions in South-eastern Europe;

*j.* firmly believes that integrated local development calls for co-ordinated action by the various international, national and local bodies concerned;

*k.* supports the activities conducted by international and European organisations, and particularly the Council of Europe’s technical co-operation programme against corruption and organised crime;

*l.* welcomes the agreements on the Drina-Sava-Majeвица and Sofia-Nis-Skopje Euroregions, signed in Brcko on 7 May 2003 and in Sofia on 21 September 2003 respectively;

*m.* welcomes the forthcoming opening of a Local Democracy Agency (LDA) in Mostar and the plan for an LDA in Georgia;

4. Recommends that the governments of South-eastern European countries:

*a.* implement policies and laws compatible with the European Charter of Local Self-Government, particularly with regard to the matching of local authorities’ resources

and responsibilities, and calls on the government of Serbia and Montenegro to sign and ratify the Charter;

*b.* sign and/or ratify – if they have not already done so (namely Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro and “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”) – the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities (ETS No. 106) and its two additional protocols;

*c.* conclude interstate agreements as appropriate on the development of transfrontier and interterritorial co-operation between local and regional authorities in South-eastern Europe, as a follow-up to the Chişinău Political Declaration, adopted by the Council of Europe’s Committee of Ministers at its meeting on 5 and 6 November 2003;

*d.* enact laws to protect investments and curb corruption in local and regional authority management, for the purpose of restoring investor confidence and encouraging citizens to play a greater part in public affairs;

*e.* ensure implementation of, and compliance with, the European Code of Conduct on the political integrity of local and regional elected representatives, adopted by the Congress in 1999;

*f.* step up their efforts to promote decentralising reforms, on the basis of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and in keeping with the commitments they accepted on joining the Council of Europe;

*g.* devise training strategies for local and regional authorities, with the help of the Council of Europe and the ENTO network (European Network of Training Organisation for Local and Regional Authorities);

*h.* give local authorities the powers they need to manage public property, including property which may be subject to privatisation, in the areas for which they are responsible;

*i.* facilitate the sustainable return of refugees and displaced persons by giving local and regional authorities the resources needed to guarantee them social rights (healthcare, education, housing, pensions, etc.) and ensure their safety;

*j.* introduce simplified visa procedures and other measures to encourage the establishment of transfrontier co-operation areas, forestall new dividing lines in Europe, and promote transfrontier co-operation between the countries of South-eastern Europe and the European Union;

*k.* harmonise their legislation, for the purpose of bringing it into line with European Union standards;

*l.* facilitate the setting-up of platforms for dialogue between central, local and regional authorities, their associations, and international partners on promoting decentralising reforms and regionalisation in South-eastern Europe;

5. Calls on non-governmental organisations, and particularly the Assembly of European Regions (AER), the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR),

United Cities and Local Governments and the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe (CPMR) to:

*a.* foster technical and human partnerships, exchanges and one-off projects with South-eastern European cities and regions in a wide range of fields, such as energy, environment, transport, water and waste management, youth, education and culture;

*b.* take part in Congress activities aimed at developing intermunicipal, interregional and transfrontier co-operation between local and regional authorities in South-eastern Europe, and also, more generally, decentralised co-operation activities, for example:

i. the Local Democracy Agency (LDA) Programme;

ii. the SEDECO (Service for Decentralised Co-operation in Europe), set up by the Congress, the City of Lausanne’s Syni programme and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), to give an impetus to the establishment of partnerships between European local and regional authorities;

*c.* step up their activities in South-eastern Europe and provide expert guidance on the setting-up and operation of Euroregions, particularly by establishing partnerships between the Euroregions;

6. Asks those in charge of the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe and the donor countries and organisations to:

*a.* give priority to projects aimed at strengthening local and regional democracy and transfrontier co-operation in South-eastern Europe, and provide financial support for Congress projects in this field, particularly the 5th Forum of Cities and Regions of South-eastern Europe (11th Economic Forum), which is to be held in Budva (Serbia and Montenegro) on 11 and 12 October 2004, the LDA programme, the NALAS network and the SEDECO project;

*b.* emphasise, in Working Tables I and II, small projects designed to support local and regional initiatives, Euroregions and the local economy;

*c.* continue to support the various initiatives aimed at developing transfrontier co-operation between local and regional authorities in South-eastern Europe, notably by developing operational Euroregions, which play a useful part in strengthening good neighbourly relations;

7. Recommends that the Committee of Ministers, on the basis of the Prijedor Declaration, unanimously adopted on 23 September 2003:

*a.* make additional resources available for the development of local and regional democracy and civil society, in the form of voluntary contributions and in the assistance programmes for South-eastern Europe (particularly the Council of Europe post-accession programmes for Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia and Montenegro, and the confidence-building measures programme);

*b.* instruct the Committee of Experts on Transfrontier Co-operation (LR-CT) to assist South-eastern European countries, according to their needs, in the negotiation and signature of multilateral and bilateral agreements on transfrontier co-operation, with regard to the Chişinău Political Declaration and its appendices;

*c.* encourage initiatives aimed at fostering transfrontier co-operation in the regions of Gjiłane (Kosovo/Serbia and Montenegro)/Kumanovo (“the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”)/Presevo (Southern Serbia/Serbia and Montenegro), Brcko (Bosnia and Herzegovina) and Trebinje (Bosnia and Herzegovina)/ Hercegnovi (Serbia and Montenegro)/Dubrovnik (Croatia);

*d.* support development of the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS), one of whose objectives is to help provide training for staff of those associations, and of local and regional authorities in South-eastern Europe;

*e.* support programmes (such as the Council of Europe’s Programme against corruption and organised crime in South-eastern Europe – PACO) and special measures to curb corruption in local and regional government in South-eastern Europe – including an ongoing process of civic education – and, more specifically, the setting-up of a local and regional anti-corruption network, which would link the various departments, agencies, etc., and run activities to curb corruption in local and regional authorities in South-eastern Europe;

*f.* encourage the passing of laws to restore property to its lawful owners;

8. Invites the European Commission to:

*a.* step up its efforts to strengthen the role played by local and regional authorities in European Union countries in helping to consolidate democracy in the western part of South-eastern Europe, particularly within the framework of the “new neighbourhood instrument” for countries close to the European Union, in which the Council of Europe should be as closely involved as possible;

*b.* support and reinforce the initiatives taken to assist local and regional authorities in South-eastern Europe, particularly within the framework of the CARDS programme;

*c.* continue to support the general projects of the Association of Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA), which

now includes eleven agencies in South-eastern Europe (Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, Kosovo/Serbia and Montenegro and “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia”) and plays a crucial role in promoting local and regional democracy, regional and transfrontier co-operation, intercultural dialogue and local economic development in the countries of South-eastern Europe;

*d.* extend, without delay, its twinning assistance programmes to partnership projects involving towns and municipalities in South-eastern Europe (Croatia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia and Montenegro, “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” and Albania), for the purpose of drawing Europeans’ attention to problems in this part of Europe and demonstrating European solidarity;

*e.* give its financial backing to:

*i.* the NALAS network’s projects;

*ii.* the SEDECO, set up by the Congress, the City of Lausanne’s Syni programme and UNOPS, to give an impetus to the establishment of partnerships between European local and regional authorities;

*f.* support the initiatives taken by governments, local authorities and NGOs in South-eastern European countries to facilitate the sustainable return of returnees/refugees and displaced persons;

9. Invites the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) to:

*a.* take account of the proposals for the sustainable return of refugees and displaced persons in South-eastern Europe, contained in the Prijedor Declaration (particularly paragraph 5) and in this recommendation;

*b.* closely follow, and give maximum support to, work done and projects launched for refugees by the Congress on the basis of the report on “migration flows and social cohesion in south-eastern Europe: the role of local and regional authorities”, prepared by the Committee on Social Cohesion for the 11th plenary session of the Congress.

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1. Debated and adopted by the Congress on 27 May 2004, 3rd Sitting (see Document CG (11) 8, draft recommendation presented by S. Sofianski (Bulgaria, L, EPP/CD) and N. Polic (Bosnia and Herzegovina, R, NR), rapporteurs).