

# CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES OF EUROPE

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## **Recommendation 91 (2001)<sup>1</sup> on the Forum of Cities and Regions of South-East Europe**

### **7th Economic Forum (Skopje, 16-18 November 2000)**

The Congress,

1. Thanks the city of Skopje and the authorities of “the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia” for their hospitality on the occasion of the Forum of Cities and Regions of South-East Europe (16-18 November 2000), attended by some 300 participants, mainly local and regional elected representatives from South-eastern Europe but also representatives of local and regional authorities throughout Europe, international organisations and NGOs;

2. Observes that the Skopje Forum, which it organised in co-operation with the Foundation for the Economy and Sustainable Development of the Regions of Europe (Fedre), was its major contribution to the local democracy project under the Stability Pact for South Eastern Europe during the year 2000;

3. Expresses concern about the developing situation in South-eastern Europe, considers it necessary to step up efforts by the Council of Europe and local and regional authorities aimed at eliminating all obstacles hampering peaceful co-operation in the Balkans and hopes that the political changes which have occurred in South-eastern Europe since autumn 2000 will improve the political climate and the conditions for stability and economic development in South-eastern Europe and will create the right conditions for closer co-operation between local and regional authorities in the Balkans;

4. Reaffirms its aim of helping to restore a multi-ethnic society and promoting democratic citizenship, human rights, tolerance and respect for cultural and religious diversity in South-eastern Europe;

5. Reaffirms its commitment to observance of ethical standards in local government and emphasises the need to introduce, in each country, an appropriate legal framework for combating corruption, gaining citizens’ confidence, and encouraging them to take part in public affairs;

6. Reiterates its conviction that economic development which improves the population’s well-being is a crucial factor in the stability of democratic institutions;

7. Believes that the forum helped raise awareness in European political and economic circles of the special

development problems faced by the cities and regions of South-eastern Europe;

8. Emphasises the major role played by civil society in the large reforms under way in South-eastern Europe;

9. Invites the cities and regions of South-eastern Europe to learn from the experience which the transition countries have gained of developing partnerships with other European cities or regions;

10. Reaffirms the importance of:

*a.* opening up borders in South-eastern Europe by developing interregional and cross-border co-operation between local or regional authorities in order to improve neighbourly relations and reduce potential tensions on both sides of borders;

*b.* exchanges of skills and technical expertise between local authority managers in different parts of Europe;

*c.* encouraging the development of co-operation between local communities in South-eastern Europe in the spirit of the Stability Pact;

*d.* recognising local and regional diversity and, to that end, encouraging joint management approaches involving all partners;

*e.* providing the populations of South-eastern Europe with a better standard of living by stimulating the local and regional economy as part of a policy of sustainable development including the development of agriculture;

*f.* foreseeing that the next Economic Forum of the Regions of Europe takes place as a follow-up to the Skopje Forum in order to consolidate and develop its effects in favour of the Balkans area in particular;

11. On the basis of the Skopje Declaration, adopted unanimously on 18 November 2000, recommends that the Committee of Ministers encourage governments to give voluntary contributions and political support to:

*a.* implementation of the local democracy projects put forward by the Council of Europe (see action plan approved at the Bucharest Forum, February 2000) in connection with the Stability Pact (Working Table I), particularly those projects with which the CLRAE is directly involved;

*b.* promotion of a multilateral agreement (between the governments of South-eastern European countries) legally authorising cross-border co-operation between local communities (and local public bodies) on the basis of the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities and its two additional protocols;

*c.* the conference which it is to organise in 2001 to promote a network of associations of local and regional authorities in South-eastern Europe, intended eventually to become a union of these associations;

*d.* the Congress's efforts to contribute in the most effective way possible to further development of the Szeged process, bearing in mind the conclusions of the 3rd Szeged Conference (23 and 24 March 2001);

*e.* the Congress, by providing it with the resources necessary for it to properly fulfil its role as a focal point for partnerships (concluded or in the pipeline) with cities or regions in South-eastern Europe (see Skopje Declaration, paragraph 3.7), on the lines requested by those in charge of the Stability Pact;

*f.* European cities and regions which are developing technical partnership projects with cities or regions in South-eastern Europe;

12. Calls on the European Union:

*a.* to support, through Interreg III, Phare and Cards, technical partnership projects between cities or regions in the Balkans;

*b.* to extend the twinning-aid programme to include all South-eastern European countries;

*c.* to support the plan for a multilateral agreement between South-eastern European countries which will remove obstacles to cross-border co-operation between local and regional authorities, and also – through the Interreg III programme – to provide financial aid for specific cross-border co-operation projects.

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1. Debated by the Congress and adopted on 31 May 2001, 3rd Sitting (see Doc. CG (8) 8, draft recommendation presented by Mr C. Haegi and Mr Y. Mildon, rapporteurs).