

**Council of Europe Conference of Ministers
responsible for Local and Regional Government**

“Good local and regional governance in turbulent times: the challenge of change”

16th Session, Utrecht, 16 - 17 November 2009

The challenge facing ministers at a difficult time

The global financial crisis has given a severe jolt to the very foundations of the world's economy and economic governance. While signs of a recovery are emerging, it is clear that the after-effects of the recession will continue to be felt for a long time. Local and regional authorities which, in Europe, manage proportions of public expenditure ranging up to as high as 80% are in the forefront of efforts to find a way out of the crisis, through exceptional investment expenditure, spending in the social sphere or on vocational retraining, etc. Their ability to cope with these exceptional challenges, which will remain long after the recession has come to an end, will be the focal point of the discussions among the European Ministers responsible for local and regional government when they meet in Utrecht (Netherlands) on 16 and 17 November 2009.

Meeting under the auspices of the Council of Europe, the Ministers will consider the policy options open to them as they seek a way out of the crisis through better local and regional governance. These range from rationalisation of the supply of local public services to changes in the methods of funding local authorities, from an easing of the administrative constraints on municipalities to the delegation of budgets, and from stronger dialogue between central government and local and regional authorities to a rationalisation of local and regional structures. All of these issues will be discussed amongst the Ministers and between them and the local and regional elected representatives from member states who are members of the delegation sent by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

It is also at the ministerial conference that the Utrecht Agenda will be adopted, covering the challenges in the sphere of local and regional governance facing member states over the period 2010-2013, challenges to which a response will be given in the context of intergovernmental co-operation at the Council of Europe.

Other subjects on the conference agenda are transfrontier co-operation and follow-up to the report by the Minister of Public Administration and Local Government of Finland, Mrs Mari Kiviniemi, on how to enhance the work of the Council of Europe in the field of local and regional democracy. Two new conventions, the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the Right to Participate in the Affairs of a Local Authority and Protocol No. 3 to the Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities concerning Euroregional Co-operation Groupings (ECGs), will be opened for signature.

The Council of Europe and local and regional democracy

Best known for its action to protect human rights, the Council of Europe, founded in 1949, is a forum for co-operation between European states on everything related to human rights, democracy and the rule of law. Its strategic priorities include the promotion and consolidation of local and regional democracy and good local governance. The European Ministers responsible for local and regional government, at their meetings usually held every other year, adopt political positions, determine the areas and subjects of their co-operation and give extra impetus to the Organisation's activities in this field. Among the Council of Europe's achievements in the sphere of local and regional democracy are conventions (European Charter of Local Self-Government, Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level, Madrid Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation between Territorial Communities or Authorities), assistance programmes, a Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform, and European Local Democracy Week.