



Le bicamérisme et la représentation des régions et des collectivités locales : le rôle des secondes chambres en Europe

Conférence organisée par le Sénat de la République Française et le Congrès des Pouvoirs locaux et régionaux du Conseil de l'Europe en coopération avec l'Assemblée Parlementaire du Conseil de l'Europe et la Commission de Venise du Conseil de l'Europe

Les régimes bicaméraux prennent mieux en compte les intérêts des collectivités territoriales

Speech by Halvdan Skard

(President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities
of the Council of Europe)

Mr Chairman,
Excellencies,
Ladies and Gentlemen,
Dear colleagues,

It is an honour for me to address this conference within the walls of the Senate of France, which is the embodiment of local and regional democracy in this country and the link between territorial and national democracy, representing territorial authorities at national level. By virtue of this fact, the Senate and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, of which I am President, are natural and regular partners in the efforts to advance territorial democracy on our continent. Our long-standing cooperation has already produced important synergies – I am thinking, for example, about the colloquy in June 2001 on decentralization in France, co-organised by the Senate and the Congress, and, of course, this conference today on the role of second chambers, in which the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly and Venice Commission are taking part as well.

I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to the Secretary General of the Senate Alain Delcamp for his outstanding work on local and regional issues and his contribution to the work of

the Congress. I also welcome here my counterpart in the Parliamentary Assembly Lluís Maria De Puig, who was for a long time Assembly Rapporteur on regionalisation in Europe and who was elected Assembly President in January this year. I also would like to pay tribute to the work done by Senator Patrice Gélard in the framework of the Venice Commission.

Ladies and Gentlemen,

The theme of this conference – the role of second chambers – is of paramount importance to the Council of Europe Congress, an assembly of local and regional elected representatives which has two chambers – the Chamber of Local Authorities and the Chamber of Regions. Recently, the Congress has been increasing its cooperation on territorial democracy with the Committee of the Regions of the European Union and I am happy to welcome here the newly elected President of the Committee, Luc van den Brande. This cooperation is specifically included in the new Charter of the Congress, adopted by the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers in May last year. Some of the cooperation passes through our ad hoc Working Group "Regions with Legislative Powers" whose President, Jean-Claude van Cauwenberghe, will present the general conclusions of this conference. In fact, it is within this Group that the theme of this conference was proposed.

I would like to recall in this regard that Mr van Cauwenberghe has been for many years the driving force behind the draft Council of Europe Charter of Regional Democracy, a complement for the regional level to the European Charter of Local Self-Government. This draft text has already received support from several European regional organisations and the EU Committee of the Regions, and was also mentioned to the European Ministers responsible for Local and Regional Government at their conference in Valencia, Spain, in October last year. It is currently being finalised within the Congress and will be submitted to our Plenary Session in May 2008. I would make a plea for your support in the framework of the French Senate that the Charter of Regional Democracy is adopted in the future as a legal instrument.

We in the Congress strongly believe that in a democratic society the voice of local and regional authorities – the authorities closest to territorial communities – must be heard during the legislative process at national level. Bicameral systems give such an opportunity, to take better account of the interests of local and regional communities. In this regard, it will be interesting to compare experiences in different countries because we are living in a period particularly rich in institutional and constitutional reforms – not only in new democracies, but also in countries with Senates or second chambers established a long time ago.

This is why this conference is so important. Wishing it every success, I would like to finish my speech by the words of Hans Mommsen, distinguished Professor of Contemporary History who wrote some 20 years ago: "The nation state is dead, long live the region!"



Thank you.

