

ACTIVITY REPORT

(mid-April – mid November 2016)



Communication of the Secretary General of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

At the 1272nd meeting of the Ministers' Deputies
30 November 2016

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Activity Report of the Congress

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Communication by Andreas Kiefer, Secretary General of the Congress

30 November 2016

The 31st Congress Session (19-21 October 2016) was very representative of the Congress's *raison d'être*:

- a forum of exchange for local and regional politicians on topics of great relevance to the Council of Europe's activities
- a place to promote concrete co-operation among local and regional authorities
- a consultative body for the Committee of Ministers
- a monitoring body
- an operational secretariat
- a relay for the Council of Europe's Campaigns and Action Plans

The theme of the two Congress sessions in 2016 was "Ethics and transparency at local and regional level". In this respect, the Congress co-operates closely with GRECO, with the Network of Courts of Auditors of regions (EURORAI) and with NGOs such as Transparency International. We will give a concrete follow-up on this in our priorities and work programme over the coming years. An "Ethics and Transparency Package" was adopted during the October Session which includes the revision of the European Code of Conduct for the political integrity of local and regional elected representatives, the organisation of a joint conference with the Committee of the Regions in February 2017 and the preparation of several reports for the 2017 sessions on the misuse of administrative resources during electoral processes, public procurement, transparency, conflicts of interest, the protection of whistle-blowers and on nepotism.

In October 2016, a second 4-year mandate of members of national delegations began (members' mandates were two years until 2012). The process of renewal went smoothly in most member States. This process includes consultations among the national associations and co-ordination bodies of local and regional authorities and with the national government. The national ministry concerned forwards the proposal for the new members to the Council of Europe. I would like to thank all ambassadors and their teams for their support in this process of renewal of national delegations, which enabled us to ratify the credentials of delegates from all 47 member States.

As of 29 November, there are 26 vacant seats (6 full members [representatives] and 20 substitutes), that is, 4%. We look forward to receiving the missing nominations soon, as full representation in the Congress is in the interest of the countries concerned.

Before the next renewal session in 2020, the rapporteurs on credentials will prepare a "reference list of mandates" that will clarify for local, regional and national authorities which mandates, either electoral or with an individual accountability to a directly elected assembly, are eligible for Congress membership.

The new leadership of the Congress was also elected for two years at this October Session:

- Congress President: Gudrun Mosler-Törnström, SOC, Austria
- President of the Chamber of Local Authorities: Anders Knape, EPP/CCE, Sweden
- President of the Chamber of Regions: Gunn Marit Helgesen, EPP/CCE, Norway

The Congress has adopted, since 2008, a quota of "at least 30% of the under-represented sex". In its new composition, the Congress includes more than 40% of women. In all, 11 out of 17 Bureau members are women. A full list of the members of the Bureau, chairpersons and vice-presidents of the committees are reproduced in this activity report (p.12 and 14).

During our last session, we had very interesting exchanges of views with the Minister of Interior of Estonia, Hanno Pevkur, representing the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, the Minister of Territorial Administration and Development of Armenia, David Lokyan, and the Council of Europe Secretary General, Thorbjørn Jagland. There was also a very active participation of youth delegates.

I would like to thank all ambassadors for supporting the participation of ministers and national delegations and of the youth delegates in the session.

Among others, the Congress members held debates on the follow-up to the Congress Strategy to combat radicalisation, on “Preventing corruption”, on “Misuse of administrative resources during electoral processes”, on the situation of mayors in Turkey. They also adopted an important “Rule of Law Checklist” (prepared with the Venice Commission) and a study on “Trends in Regionalisation in Council of Europe Member States” as well as reports on the observation of local elections in Armenia and Serbia and on the situation of local democracy in Cyprus and Croatia.

The most relevant report for the future work of the Congress is the “Congress priorities for 2017-2020”, also adopted during the October Session. The full text is appended to this report. The resolution and its appendix contain the substance which was widely discussed, in consultation with the national and European associations of local and regional authorities of all member States. The priorities aim at focusing on the local and regional dimension of the work of the Council of Europe and build on the evaluation of the implementation of the 2013-2016 priorities.

They identify two main areas of work: enhancing the quality of local and regional democracy – which covers the good functioning of local and regional communities as well as their level of autonomy and resources and their ability to deliver quality services to citizens – and building safe and inclusive societies that respect diversity – which covers the current challenges to communities, the ways to ensure their improved functioning and the fight against crises that risk destabilising them.

In November, the Congress participated actively in the World Forum of Democracy with discussants, moderators and participants. We will continue to support this important event.

The Congress, together with the European Forum for Urban Security and the city of Rotterdam, organised a Summit of Mayors which gathered some 130 participants from 28 countries, including 55 mayors and deputy mayors of European cities. The Summit was concrete follow-up to the “Alliance of European cities against violent extremism” launched in November 2015 in Aarhus, Denmark. Participants embraced the “Rotterdam Declaration”, which encapsulates the Alliance’s approach towards preventing radicalisation at grass-root level. Together with our partners we will continue disseminating good practice and bringing local and regional politicians together. The next Summit of Mayors will be held in Barcelona in autumn 2017

In the written activity report, you will find further information on the contribution of the Congress to the implementation of Council of Europe Action Plans in member States. These activities – funded by Voluntary Contributions of member States and the European Union – complement the statutory and thematic work of the Congress and the feedback we receive from the member States concerned is very encouraging. I would like to thank our colleagues in ODGP and DG Democracy for the good co-operation in this respect.

Let me take this opportunity to thank the Ambassador and Delegation of Iceland for the organisation of the official visit of Congress President Jean-Claude Frécon and the Ambassador of Serbia for the preparation of the upcoming official visit of President Mosler-Törnström – following the invitation by Prime-Minister Vučić on the occasion of his visit to the Council of Europe last year.

I would also like to thank the Ambassador of Albania for her support in organising a meeting with Minister Çuçi. He announced that the government decision about a consultative Council with the representative associations of local and regional authorities would be taken soon and the launching event could be held before the end of this year. I welcome this announcement as it implements the main objective of the co-operation project funded by Switzerland.

On the occasion of the handover of the Chairmanship from Estonia to Cyprus last week, Congress President Gudrun Mosler-Törnström mentioned the complementarity of the priorities of the Congress – in the institutional framework of the Council of Europe – and of the incoming Cyprus Chairmanship.

The Congress – its leadership, its members and the secretariat – will play their role in implementing the common objectives we share in the Council of Europe, through political activities, through networking and through co-operation activities on the ground.

The written activity Report is made available on the website of the Congress and will be distributed to all our members, thus contributing to an increase of the visibility of the Congress and Council of Europe activities in general.

Thank you for your attention.

Introduction

The Congress is responsible for assessing the situation of local and regional democracy in the 47 Council of Europe member States.

Along with the monitoring of local and regional democracy, its members also observe local and regional elections, implement cooperation programmes and works to achieve inclusive societies, citizen and youth participation, respect for diversity, respect for fundamental rights at local level among many others.

For its sessions in 2016, the Congress has chosen the general theme of “ethics and transparency at local and regional level” because it considers corruption a major threat to democratic stability. But other crisis and threats are challenging European societies and their local and regional communities too – crisis of migrants and refugees, terrorism and radicalisation, racism and violent extremism, economic and financial crisis, war at European borders and within Europe. The Congress is working to help local and regional communities overcome these crises.

In October 2016, the Congress delegations were renewed and a new presidency was elected. Newly elected President of the Congress is Gudrun Mosler-Törnström (Austria, SOC), first Vice-President and President of the Chamber of Regions is Gunn Marit Helgesen (Norway, EPP/CCE) and second Vice-President and President of the Chamber of Local Authorities is Anders Knape (Sweden, EPP/CCE),.

The current report, which covers the period from mid-April to mid-November 2016, gives an overview of the Congress activities and the concrete work fulfilled by its bodies and members in the field.

I. POLITICAL AGENDA

Communication to the Committee of Ministers (Strasbourg, 13 April 2016)

In his communication, Congress Secretary General Andreas Kiefer underlined the importance of political dialogue with Member States, both in regular exchanges with the Ministers' Deputies and in meetings with government representatives in Strasbourg or in capitals cities. In this regard, he welcomed the participation of several ministers at the 30th session in March, as part of debates on the monitoring of local and regional democracy and the post-monitoring procedure. The Secretary General informed the Deputies about the main results of the 30th Session of the Congress.

Visit of the Kosovo¹ delegation to the Congress (Strasbourg, 28 April 2016)

In the framework of a working visit of a delegation from the Kosovo* Ministry of Public Administration and representatives of the Institute for Public Administration. Deputy Minister Hajredin Hyseni expressed interest in co-operation with the Congress, particularly in the field of election observation and awareness raising for the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. Hyseni underlined the commitment of Pristina to implement European standards. The Deputy Minister invited Congress' Secretary General to consider an assessment of the situation of local democracy along the standards of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. The visit was organised with the support of the GIZ (German Society for International Cooperation) and the University of Applied Sciences in Kehl (Germany).

Award of the Maximilian Prize (Innsbruck, 9 May 2016)

The 2016 Emperor Maximilian Prize was awarded to Anders Knappe (Sweden, EPP/CCE), President of the Chamber of Local Authorities of the Congress and Chair of the municipal council of Karlstad. The Maximilian Prize, which is awarded to individuals or institutions active in promoting European local and regional policies, is an annual initiative of the Land of Tyrol and the city of Innsbruck, Austria. The annual award ceremony took place in the presence of the President of the Congress.

Celebration of Europe day (Vinnytsia, 14 May 2016)

During the ceremony to celebrate Europe day, in the presence of Ukrainian Prime Minister Volodymyr Groysman and Mayor of Vinnytsia Serhiy Morhunov, Vice-President Gudrun Mosler-Törnström praised the efforts made by the City of Vinnytsia in order to improve living conditions of citizens, to fight corruption and promote higher education of young people. She said these results were made possible by a dynamic and determined municipal policy. She stated that Europe day symbolises the reconciliation between people after the Second World War and celebrates peace and unity in Europe, even though war may always return as experienced in certain regions of the continent. On the day before, the Vice-President met the students of the Donetsk University in Vinnytsia. She urged young people to get as educated as possible in order notably to better resist to manipulation.

126th meeting of the Committee of Ministers (Sofia, 18 May 2016)

The President of the Congress underlined that the crises Europe is currently undergoing are different in nature, ranging from the problem of controlling the flow of refugees and migrants to problems of safety, including war as well as a wider crisis of confidence among the people in those who govern them and, more seriously still, in democracy. He stated that Local and regional authorities have a particular role to play because of their broad powers and responsibilities. The fight against radicalisation leading to terrorism is a perfect illustration of this: sound grassroots knowledge combined with close links with the public make local elected representatives key partners for prevention and the implementation of deradicalisation programmes.

¹ All references to Kosovo, whether the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nation's Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

Meeting with the Prime Minister of Estonia (Strasbourg, 22 June 2016)

Jean-Claude Frécon met Taavi Rõivas, the Estonian Prime Minister, whose country has held the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe since May 2016. The President of the Congress congratulated the Prime Minister on the way in which local democracy had been developed in his country. He made particular reference to the case-law of the Estonian Supreme Court, which recognises the importance of the European Charter of Local Self-Government

International Remembrance Day of the Roma Holocaust (Strasbourg, 2 August 2016)

Congress Vice-President and Thematic Rapporteur on Roma issues John Warmisham (United Kingdom, SOC) participated in the International Remembrance ("Pharrajimos") Day which commemorates the 72nd anniversary of the extermination of more than 3,000 Roma inmates in the Auschwitz-Birkenau gas chambers on the night of 2-3 August 1944. Mr Warmisham expressed his concerns over today's climate of growing racial tensions that is a threat to the commitment to build a free and democratic future. To help improve the integration of more than 10 million Roma living in Europe, he reiterated his call for a closer cooperation between local and regional authorities.

Visit to the Attica Region (Attica, 5-7 September 2016)

This visit took place at the invitation of Governor Rena Dourou (Greece, NI). The Congress delegation included President Frécon and rapporteurs on refugees and migration, Yoomi Renström (Sweden, SOC) and György Illes (Hungary, ILDG). After the meeting with Governor Dourou, the Congress President also held an exchange of views with Georges Patoulis, President of KEDE, Michalis Angelopoulos, Chair of the Greek delegation to the Congress, and with Greek elected representatives. They discussed implementation of the Congress recommendation adopted in 2015 following the monitoring of the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the possibility of a post-monitoring process.

The Congress President also met Greek Interior Minister Panagiotis Kouroumplis. They held a broad exchange of views on the situation of local and regional authorities in Greece and also discussed the difficulties relating to the massive reception of refugees and the policies pursued at local and national level. In addition, one year after the adoption of the monitoring report on Greece, the Congress President asked the Minister about the implementation of the recommendations in the report and the Greek government's planned reforms. In particular, he welcomed the government's willingness to engage in political dialogue with KEDE and the Greek local and regional authorities. Following these talks, the Congress President said he was confident that there would be fruitful political exchanges with central government, the Greek local and regional authorities and their associations. This exchange of views was followed by a visit to refugee camps (see IV. B. REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS).

International Day of Democracy (Strasbourg 15 September 2016)

On this occasion, the Congress President insisted on the need to develop democracy at all levels of society. He stated that there can be no democracy at national level without a strong and developed local and regional democracy. He added that democracy should be a culture lived daily by all citizens and referred to the European Week of Local Democracy, coordinated by the Congress and which mobilises each year local and regional actors to promote territorial democracy.

5th General Meeting of the national associations of local and regional authorities (Paris, 19 September 2016)

The Congress has been organising the General Meeting of the national associations of local and regional authorities of Europe on a regular basis since 2006. These meetings provide an opportunity for dialogue and exchange between national representatives of local and regional authorities and the Congress on major issues of common interest. The main goal of this 5th General Meeting in September 2016 was to discuss the Congress's future priorities for the 2017-2020 period as well as the situation on three key themes, namely the reception and integration of refugees, radicalisation and violent extremism, and ethics and the fight against corruption.

Official visit to Iceland (Reykjavik, 27-28 September 2016)

President Frécon accompanied by Secretary General Kiefer met the Vice-Chair of the Icelandic Parliament's Environment and Communications Committee and former Minister of Finance and Industry, the Councillor and Chair of the Executive Committee of Reykjavik City Council, the Permanent Secretary at the Ministry of the Interior, and the Director-General of Human Rights at the Ministry of the Interior. The discussions focused in particular on monitoring Iceland's implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, in October 2016 with a view to the adoption in March 2017 of the report drafted after the monitoring visit undertaken in June 2016.

Visit to Scotland (Crieff and Edinburg, 6-7 October 2016)

Vice-President Gudrun Mosler-Törnström took part in the annual Conference of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA). She highlighted the importance of cooperation with national associations which play an essential role in the work of the Congress and their national delegations. Ms. Mosler-Törnström also presented an overview of Congress work regarding decentralisation, consultation process, monitoring the situation of local and regional democracy in United Kingdom, as well as activities to promote inclusion, anti-radicalisation, the integration of refugees, human rights at local level as well as transparency and ethics. She also exchanged words with the Scottish First Minister, Nicola Sturgeon.

In Edinburg, she met Fiona Hyslop, the Scottish Minister for culture, tourism and external relations, who informed her of the preparation - with Wales, Northern Ireland and England - of a United-Kingdom's position for the Brexit negotiations. The Scottish Minister stressed that the Scottish Government would like to ensure that Scotland's interests are taken into account in the best possible way. Ms Mosler-Törnström also met with the Senior Vice-Principal of the University of Edinburgh and academics and practitioners who provided insight in the discussion about the situation of Scotland and the United-Kingdom in the post-Brexit process. Finally, she presented the Congress, its statutory and monitoring work, in a discussion at the University of Edinburgh with students from all over the world.

Exchange with the President of France (Strasbourg, 13 October 2016)

During the session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, the Congress President Jean-Claude Frécon met with the President of France François Hollande. He presented the Congress as "the Council of Europe's second policy-making assembly" and underlined that through its work, it helped promoting at local and regional level the Organisation's values, namely human rights, the rule of law and democracy. Mr Frécon pointed out that President Hollande had himself been in local government and so understood the concerns and difficulties experienced on the ground.

International Day for the Eradication of Poverty (Strasbourg, 17 October 2016)

President Frécon took part in the ceremony marking the International Day for the Eradication of Poverty held in by the Council of Europe's Conference of International Organisations, the focus of which was vulnerable young people. He stated that it is becoming harder and harder for young people to gain access to fundamental, social and economic rights and regretted that being young in itself is sometimes a ground for discrimination, underlining that young people from poorer or migrant backgrounds suffer still greater discrimination in accessing social rights.

II. ACTIVITIES OF THE CONGRESS BODIES

A. 31st SESSION OF THE CONGRESS



The 31st session was marked by the renewal of the delegations and the election of a new leadership for the Congress. On 19 October, Gudrun Mosler-Törnström (Austria, SOC) became the first woman elected as President of the Congress. The Presidents and Vice-Presidents of the two chambers of the Congress were elected on 20 October. Anders Knappe (Sweden, EPP-CCE) was re-elected as President of the Chamber of Local Authorities, and Gunn Marit Helgesen (Norway, EPP-CCE), was elected as President of the Chamber of Regions. The Chairs and Vice-Chairs of the Congress committees were also elected on 19 October. Leen Verbeek (Netherlands, SOC) was elected as Chair of the Monitoring Committee, Jean-Louis Testud (France, EPP-CCE), was elected as Chair of the Governance Committee, and Gabriele Neff (Germany, ILDG), was elected as Chair of the Current Affairs Committee. (see under II. D. COMMITTEES).

The members considered two reports on “Preventing corruption and promoting public ethics at local and regional level” and “The misuse of administrative resources during electoral processes: the role of local and regional elected representatives and public officials” as well as several reports on “The situation of Roma and Travellers in the context of rising extremism, xenophobia and the refugee crisis in Europe”, “Women’s political participation and representation at local and regional levels”, “Gender budgeting”, and “Good governance in metropolitan areas”. They adopted two reports and recommendations on the state of local and regional democracy in Croatia - following a monitoring visit to Zagreb, Rijeka, Omisalj and Krk in March 2016 - and on the state of local democracy Cyprus - following a monitoring visit to Nicosia, Kokkinotrimithia, Ayios Dhometios and Paphos in April 2016.

They held a debate on the Congress’s strategy to combat radicalisation at grass-roots level based on a report presented by Josef Neumann (Germany, SOC) and Bert Bouwmeester (Netherlands, ILDG). They also debated the situation of mayors in Turkey. This debate, presented by the co-rapporteurs Anders Knappe and Leen Verbeek who considered the situation in Turkey following a wave of arrests and the detention of mayors who have been removed from office, was part of a fact-finding mission which began in October and will continue until December 2016 and whose conclusions will be discussed at the 32nd Session of the Congress in March 2017.

The Congress adopted its new priorities for 2017-2020, which were presented by the co-rapporteurs Gudrun Mosler-Törnström and Anders Knappe. These priorities focus on two main areas: strengthening the quality of local and regional democracy and building secure societies that are respectful, inclusive and closer to citizens.

This year, for the first time, the Congress had invited a group of youth delegates to participate in both its annual sessions (March and October) with a view to heightening the relevance of their participation. During the 30th Congress Session (22-24 March 2016), youth delegates aged 16 to 30

years, from 36 different delegations. had the opportunity to start planning local and regional actions to be developed over the summer in the framework of the initiative “rejuvenating politics”. During the 31st Session, these youth delegates presented these diverse and wide-ranging projects to Congress members (see IV. C. YOUTH PARTICIPATION)

Outgoing President Jean-Claude Frécon presented a review of the activities and achievements of term of office from 2014 to 2016. Reiterating the Congress objective of 100% application of the Charter to 100% of European territory, he emphasised the central role of the European Charter for Local Self-Government as a flexible and effective tool serving democracy in our societies. He recalled that during his Presidency, five post-monitoring roadmaps have been signed with national authorities committed to implementing the recommendations made by the Congress on decentralisation.

Council of Europe Secretary General Thorbjørn Jagland addressed the Session on 19 October. He said it was very important for the Council of Europe to work with the Congress which represents the grassroots level closest to the people in the member states. The Secretary General emphasised the relevance of the Congress session agenda which was very much in line with the Council of Europe's priorities, in particular ethics and transparency at local level, the participation of women and governance of metropolitan areas. He also praised the great contribution of the Congress to the decentralisation process in Ukraine and to the Council of Europe's projects in this context.

Interior Minister of Estonia Hanno Pevkur addressed Congress members on 20 October. The Minister detailed Estonia's initiatives in the field of e-democracy. He also stressed the role of local and regional authorities in combating radicalisation and extreme violence which requires a concerted response from all levels of governance: local, national and international. He added that a great deal of responsibility falls on the shoulders of local and regional authorities, who have to deal directly with the difficult consequences of social fragmentation and mistrust between citizens and mentioned other issues in which local and regional authorities can play a key role, in particular, children's rights and gender equality.

Also on 20 October, Armenian Minister of Territorial Administration and Development, Davit Lokyan, participated in a political dialogue with the members of the Congress. The minister emphasised the excellent co-operation between the Congress and the Armenian authorities, who are actively participating in the post-monitoring programme and reaffirmed that the strengthening and development of local democracy are still priorities for Armenia. Mr Lokyan mentioned that the implementation of the Congress recommendations has, in particular, resulted in the ratification of all of the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the development of co-operation programmes, which have helped to strengthen local authority leadership.

(See also under C. The Chambers)

B. THE BUREAU

Strasbourg, 13 June 2016

The Bureau debated and modified the Congress' Priorities for 2017-2020, the revised version of which would be submitted for consideration to the national associations of local and/or regional authorities at their General Meeting of 19 September 2016. Members also discussed the situation in Ukraine and agreed to a high-level meeting of the three presidents of the Congress and the Rapporteur on Ukraine with Volodymyr Groysman, Prime Minister of Ukraine, in Kyiv in autumn 2016, as part of the post-monitoring dialogue with that country. When discussing the follow-up of the 30th and future topics for the 31st Session the Bureau made the decision that all exhibitors and event organisers would be asked to commit to respecting the values and positions taken by the Congress and the Council of Europe, this commitment extending to any communication that they might disseminate during a Congress session. Other topics discussed included changes to the composition of delegations, the 2016 budget, the observation of local elections in Serbia and regional elections in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina and possible candidates for the 2016 North-South Centre Prize. The Bureau also held an exchange of views with Matthew Johnson, Director of the Council of Europe's Directorate of Democratic Citizenship and Participation, on his directorate's activities, on the outcome of the 25th Session of the Council of Europe Standing Conference of Ministers of Education (Brussels, 11-12 April 2016), and on the concrete opportunities for future co-operation with the Congress.

Paris, 20 September 2016

The Bureau approved, for submission to the Congress at the October 2016 session, a draft resolution containing the draft priorities of the Congress for 2017-2020 modified as a result of the discussions held, the previous day, at the General Meeting of the National Associations of Local and Regional Authorities. Members were informed of the situation of local authorities in Turkey and approved a fact-finding mission in Turkey with a first visit on 3 and 4 October 2016 in Istanbul and Ankara to be followed by a second visit in December 2016. With regard to the forthcoming 31st Session, a renewal session, members examined the agenda and approved the composition of the 30 national delegations received thus far. Members were also informed about the grassroots projects designed and implemented by the youth delegates since the March 2016 session, which would be presented at the forthcoming session and approved the revised rules and procedures of the Congress to be submitted for adoption at the October session. In the context of its co-operation with the Council of Europe's intergovernmental sector, members approved the Congress' position on the draft guidelines for civil participation in political decision-making drawn up by the European Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG). They considered the draft recommendation on the legal regulation of lobbying activities in the context of public decision-making drawn up by the European Committee on Legal Co-operation (CDCJ) and decided to ask the Governance Committee to prepare a position document to be forwarded to that committee.

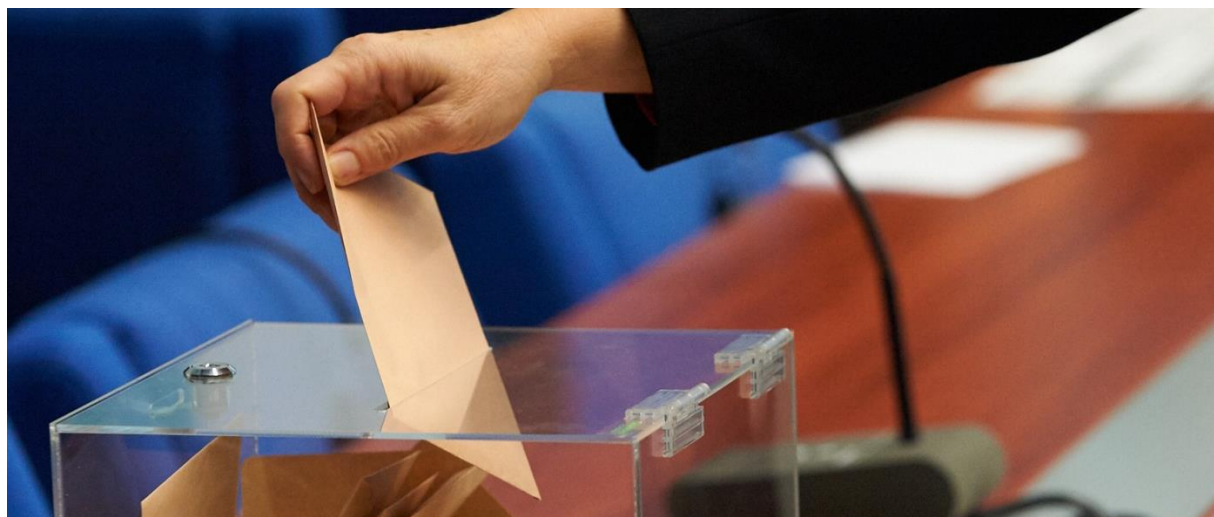
Strasbourg, 18 October 2016 and 21 October 2016, 31st Session

The outgoing Congress Bureau met for the last time on the eve of the 31st Session with President Jean-Claude Frécon in the chair. Members discussed practical matters linked to the five elections which would take place during the session. The Bureau approved the outstanding national delegations and the preliminary draft resolution on the verification of credentials of new members to be presented to the Congress at the opening of the session. They were also informed of the reference list of mandates currently being prepared. Members heard an oral report on the fact-finding mission to Turkey on 3 and 4 October 2016 and decided to add a debate on Turkey to the plenary sitting of 20 October. Members were also given an update on the status of the Congress's co-operation projects currently implemented through voluntary contributions and extra-budgetary resources in Albania, Armenia and Ukraine and the regional activities of the Programmatic Co-operation Framework and decided to make the outline document on these activities available during the session.

Members were informed that the Secretary General of the Council of Europe had appointed Jean-Philippe Bozouls as Director of the Congress, as of 1 October 2016.

The newly-elected Congress Bureau met for the first time on 21 October with Gudrun Mosler-Törnström, who was elected President of the Congress on 19 October 2016, in the chair. Vice-presidents, chairs of committees and presidents of political groups introduced themselves. They then proceeded to discuss information and organisational details concerning the 31st Session and to approve several terms of reference for Governance Committee reports.

C. THE CHAMBERS



On 20 October 2016, during the 31th session, the Congress elected the new presidencies and vice-presidencies of its Chambers:

	Chamber of Local Authorities	Chamber of Regions
Chair Président(e)	Anders Knapé (Sweden, EPP-CCE) / (Suède, PPE-CCE) Letter of application / Lettre de candidature – Biographie / biographie	Gunn Marit Helgesen (Norway, EPP-CCE) / (Norvège, PPE-CCE) Letter of application / Lettre de candidature – Biographie / biographie
1st Vice-Chairs 1^{er} Vice-président(e)s	TOCE Barbara (Italy, SOC / Italie, SOC)	CAMPBELL-CLARK Eunice (United Kingdom, SOC / Royaume-Uni, SOC)
2nd Vice-Chairs 2^{ème} Vice-Chairs	ANSALA Liisa (Finland, ILDG / Finlande, GILD)	LAMBERTZ Karl-Heinz (Belgium, SOC / Belgique, SOC)
3rd Vice-Chairs 3^{ème} Vice-Chairs	ANGELOPOULOS Michail (Greece, EPP-CCE / Grèce, PPE-CCE)	SVITLYCHNA Yuliya (Ukraine, ILDG/ Ukraine, GILD)
4th Vice-Chairs 4^{ème} Vice-Chairs	PEČAN Breda (Slovenia, SOC / Slovénie, SOC)	MAGYAR Anna (Hungary, EPP/PPE / Hongrie, PPE-CCE)
5th Vice-Chairs 5^{ème} Vice-Chairs	CADORET Xavier (France, SOC)	UGREKHELIDZE Sevdia (Georgia, EPP/PPE / Géorgie, PPE-CCE)
6th Vice-Chairs 6^{ème} Vice-Chairs	LAMMERSKITTEN Clemens (Germany, EPP/CCE / Allemagne, PPE/CCE)	CHIRTOACĂ Dorin (Republic of Moldova, EPP/PPE / République de Moldova, PPE-CCE)
7th Vice-Chairs 7^{ème} Vice-Chairs	DOGANOGLU Gaye (Turkey, EPP-CCE / Turquie, PPE-CCE)	ORLOVA Svetlana (Russian Federation, EPP/PPE / Fédération de Russie, PPE-CCE)

The Chamber of Local Authorities

The Chamber of Local Authorities held its 31st Session on 20 October 2016 and began its session by electing Anders Knappe for a second mandate as President of the Chamber.

In his communication to the Chamber as outgoing president, Anders Knappe underlined the role that the Chamber was playing with respect to the crises that European societies were undergoing, such as the refugee crisis and the rise in political extremism. He affirmed his belief that the Chamber had a vital contribution to make in tackling these issues and the need for local authorities to be treated as partners by other levels of government.

The Chamber then examined and adopted a report on local democracy in Cyprus, which had been prepared by the Monitoring Committee of the Congress following a monitoring visit to Nicosia, Kokkinotrimithia, Ayios Dhometios and Paphos in April 2016. The report, presented by rapporteur Bernd Vöhringer (Germany, EPP/ECC), underlined the Cypriot government's political commitment to citizens' participation in local public affairs, while expressing concern with regard to the limited financial autonomy of local authorities, the weakness and imprecision of the legislative basis for the powers and responsibilities of local authorities and the absence of constitutional safeguards for the principle of local self-government and the status of local authorities.

The main debate of the session focused on the situation of Roma and Travellers in the context of rising extremism, xenophobia and the refugee crisis in Europe, based on a report presented by John Warmisham, United Kingdom (SOC), on behalf of the Current Affairs Committee. Two invited Roma speakers, Valeriu Nicolae, the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe for Roma Issues, and Laura Bosnea, local councillor for Râșcani, Republic of Moldova, gave personal insights of the problems and discrimination that the Roma community faced. The Chamber adopted a recommendation stressing the need to adopt anti-discrimination policies to ensure that Roma and Travellers enjoy legal and social equality and calling on governments to develop the legislative framework to overcome institutional anti-Gypsyism and its manifestations, such as segregation (spatial or in schools) and forced evictions.

The final debate of the Chamber session was based on an Information report on the assessment of local by-elections in Armenia (18 September 2016), presented by rapporteur, Liisa ANSALA (Finland, ILDG). This was the first by-election since the July 2016 hostage crisis at a police station in Yerevan and the subsequent resignation of the Prime Minister in September. The observers found that, while the elections were technically well-prepared and overall in line with international standards, the level of political competition was low, with many candidates withdrawing during the course of the campaign.

The Chamber of Regions

The Chamber of Regions held its 31st session in Strasbourg on 20 October 2016. The Chamber elected Gunn-Marit Helgesen President of the Chamber

In her communication, concluding a two year mandate, outgoing president Gudrun Mosler-Törnström presented the main activities carried out by the Chamber, in particular: the evolution of regionalisation in the Council of Europe Member States; the challenges and responses of the regions for facing the economic crisis, and the analysis of territorial autonomy issues (in particular in Ukraine and for Scotland in the United-Kingdom). She welcomed the foresight of the members of the Chamber in identifying those important political challenges for Europe.

Gunn-Marit Helgesen proposed additional paths for the Chamber's future activities, in particular policies in favor of youth, citizens' participation and direct democracy instruments in regional statutes and laws.

This 31st session of the Chamber was focused on "Social rights in Europe: the implementation of the European Social Charter at regional level." The Chamber expressed its intention to work in synergy with the intergovernmental sector of the Council of Europe, with a very pragmatic approach, by identifying obstacles and good practices in the implementation of the Council of Europe instruments. Luis Jimena Quesada, Past-President of the European Committee of Social Rights of the Council of Europe, introduced the debate. He underlined that the European Social Charter was a means of

measuring the progress made by the States signatories in this field and contributed to forging a more solid European conscience. He stated that while the Charter's application was first and foremost a task for the States, the local and regional levels also had a role to play in implementing it spontaneously within the scope of their own powers.

Bureau members and members of the Chamber presented the best practices, legal frameworks and difficulties encountered by the European regions in implementing the Charter. Piero Fassino (Italy, SOC), who contributed to the "Turin Process for the implementation of European the Social Charter", concluded the debate. A summary of the experiences presented and proposals made will be prepared as the initial follow-up to this debate.

The Bureau of the Chamber dealt with regional self-government issues in Europe as well as the contribution to the external and communication activities of the Congress and to the preparation of the Congress Priorities 2017-2020.

D. THE COMMITTEES

On 19 October 2016, during the 31st Session, the Committees elected their new presidencies and vice-Presidencies:

	Monitoring	Governance	Current Affairs
Chair Président(e)	Leen VERBEEK (Netherlands, SOC) / (Pays-Bas, SOC) Letter of application / Lettre de candidature – Biographie / biographie	Jean-Louis TESTUD (France, EPP-CCE) / (France, PPE-CCE) Letter of application / Lettre de candidature – Biographie / biographie	Gabriele NEFF (Germany, ILDG) / (Allemagne, GILD) Letter of application / Lettre de candidature – Biographie / biographie
1st Vice-Chairs 1^{er} Vice-président(e)s	Agnese UGUES (Italy, EPP/CCE / Italie, PPE/CCE)	Manuela BORA (Italy, SOC / Italie, SOC)	Nawel RAFIK-ELMRINI (France, SOC)
2nd Vice-Chairs 2^{ème} Vice-président(e)s	Stewart DICKSON (United Kingdom, ILDG / Royaume-Uni, GILD)	Amelie TARSCHYS INGRE (Sweden, ILDG / Suède, GILD)	Josef NEUMANN (Germany, SOC / Allemagne, SOC)
3rd Vice-Chairs 3^{ème} Vice-président(e)s	Ludmila SFIRLOAGA (Romania, SOC / Roumanie, SOC)	Harald BERGMANN (The Netherlands, ILDG / Pays-Bas, GILD)	Oleksandr SIENKEVYCH (Ukraine, ILDG / Ukraine, GILD)
4th Vice-Chairs 4^{ème} Vice-président(e)s	Beat HIRS (Switzerland, ILDG – / Suisse, GILD)	Andreas GALSTER (Germany, EPP-CCE / Allemagne, PPE-CCE)	Emin YERITSYAN (Armenia, EPP/CCE / Arménie, PPE/CCE)
5th Vice-Chairs 5^{ème} Vice-président(e)s	Vsevolod BELIKOV (Russian Federation, EPP/CCE / Fédération de Russie, PPE/CCE)		Ilsur METSHIN (Russian Federation, ILDG / Fédération de Russie, GILD)

Monitoring Committee

The third meeting of the Committee held on 28 June 2016 resulted in the adoption of the reports on local and regional democracy in Croatia and on local democracy in Cyprus. The Committee also took note of the information report submitted by Harald Bergmann (Netherlands, GILD) on the local and provincial elections held in Serbia on 24 April 2016. A member of the European Commission for Democracy (Venice Commission), Jan Helgesen, presented the "List of Rule of Law Criteria", adopted by the Venice Commission at its 106th Plenary Session (11-12 March 2016). The Committee decided to submit to the next session a draft resolution of the Monitoring Committee endorsing the "List of Rule of Law Criteria".

The Committee, under the chairmanship of its new Chairman, Leen Verbeek, took note of the information communicated by the rapporteurs on the monitoring visit of local democracy in Estonia which took place in September 2016.

In the course of its work, the Committee took note of the information provided by Leen Verbeek in his capacity as co-rapporteur on Turkey on the first part of the fact-finding mission (3-4 October 2016) which concerned the situation of Mayors. The members were also informed by the President of the decision of the Bureau of the Congress to organise a fact-finding mission to Belgium to clarify the functioning of the organs of the democracy in the context of linguistic diversity and to draw up a general report on the use of languages in the 47 Member States at local and regional level. Regarding the observation of elections, rapporteur Liisa Ansala (Finland, ILDG), presented her report on the assessment mission of the partial local elections held in Armenia on 18 September 2016, and Stewart Dickson (UK, ILDG), rapporteur, who also presented preliminary conclusions of the observation of the local elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina on 2 October 2016.

The next meeting of the Monitoring Committee will be held in Athens (Greece) on 16 February 2017.

Governance Committee

At its meeting on 7 June 2016, in Orléans, the Governance Committee held an exchange of views on transfrontier taxation with former President of the Congress Claude Haegi and approved reports on open data, corruption, metropolitan areas and gender budgeting. The report on "Open data for better public services", looks at the potential of open data for improving public service delivery, strengthening local democracy and improving the quality of life in cities. The report and roadmap "Preventing corruption and promoting public ethics at local and regional levels" will serve to orientate the Congress activities in this field for the coming years. "Good governance of metropolitan areas", examines the complex and multi-layered nature of the governance of metropolitan areas, and the associated challenges for representative democracy. "Gender budgeting" looks at this concept as a tool for local and regional authorities to introduce gender mainstreaming into their budgetary preparations. These reports were subsequently adopted at the plenary session in October, with the exception of the report on Open Data, which will be presented at the March 2017 session.

The Committee also approved terms of reference on "Making public procurement transparent at local and regional level" and "Financial compensation of local and regional elected representatives and public officials in the exercise of their office".

The Committee then exchanged views on several texts. The first of these was a questionnaire which will serve as a basis for a new report on adequate financial resources for local authorities. The Committee then discussed a draft report on "Making public procurement at local and regional level," exploring the nature of corruption in local government corruption, identifying the systemic risks of corruption in the procurement sector and proposing policy recommendations to reduce vulnerability to these risks.

It also examined a questionnaire on the financial compensation of local and regional elected representatives in the exercise of their office. Finally, the Committee approved draft terms of reference for five reports that will be prepared in the framework of the Congress strategy to prevent corruption and promote public ethic at local and regional levels, namely "Protecting whistle-blowers," "Revision of Code of conduct for political integrity of local and regional local elected representatives," "Nepotism (recruitment of staff)," "Transparency", and "Conflicts of interest," as well as draft terms of reference for a report on "Status of capital cities".

The next meetings of the Committee will be on 28 March 2017 in Strasbourg, during the 32nd session and on 4 May 2017 in Eupen, Belgium.

Current Affairs Committee

The Current Affairs Committee, under the presidency of Farid Mukhametsin (Russia, ILGD); adopted reports on "the situation of Roma and Travellers in the context of rising racism and xenophobia" and, in collaboration with the Governance Committee, on the "Follow-up to the Congress Strategy to

combat radicalisation at grass-roots level.” It pursued its work on a report on regional and minority languages aiming for its adoption on the anniversary of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages of the Council of Europe due in 2017. The Committee reviewed progress on the report examining the role of youth policies at local and regional levels for young people’s transition to autonomy and working life.

In October 2016, under the presidency of the new Chair, Gabriele Neff (Germany, ILDG), it adopted the report “From reception to integration: the role of local authorities facing migration”.

Following up on the Aarhus Conference of 2015 where the Alliance of Cities against radicalisation leading to violent extremism was launched, the Committee organised (jointly with the Governance Committee) a Summit of Mayors in Rotterdam, in cooperation with the European Forum for Urban Security (Efus) and the Mayor of Rotterdam. The declaration adopted at the end of the summit emphasised the need to develop a plan of action bringing together all local stakeholders involved in preventing radicalisation informing the public, sending a message of cohesion to our societies and pooling resources to train both local government staff and other actors.

Committee members took an active part in a number of events, including the Istanbul Social Integration Summit (May), a roundtable on the protection of Jewish cemeteries (Strasbourg, June), a conference on newly arrived migrants and their integration via sport (Vienna, June) and the plenary session of the Steering Committee on culture and heritage (Strasbourg, June) as well as visits by the co-rapporteurs on refugees and migration to Samos (June) and the region of Attica in Greece (September) to examine the situation in reception and logistics centres.

The next meeting of the Committee will be on 28 March 2017 in Strasbourg, during the 32nd session.

III. MONITORING OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEMOCRACY

A. MONITORING ACTIVITIES

The core mission of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities is the effective monitoring of the situation of local and regional democracy in member States by assessing the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, adopted in 1985.

In the context of this evaluation, the Congress made 3 monitoring visits and adopted 2 Recommendations between April and November 2016.



Monitoring visits

Finland, 17-19 May 2016

The Congress delegation examined the situation of local and regional democracy in the light of the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, ratified by the country in 1991. Co-rapporteurs Artur Torres Pereira (Portugal, PPE/CCE) and Karim Van Overmeire (Belgium, NR), focused on the latest developments since the last Congress monitoring visit in 2011. They met with Jari Partanen, State Secretary for the Ministry of Local Government and Public Reforms, Pekka Sauri, Deputy Mayor of Helsinki, and the representatives of the Parliament, Pirkko Mattila, Head of the Administration Committee, and Annika Lapintie, Head of Constitutional Law Committee.

Iceland, 21-23 June 2016

The Congress delegation examined the situation on local democracy in the light of the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, ratified by the country in 1991. Co-rapporteurs on local democracy Jos Wienen (Netherlands, EPP/CCE) and Zdenek Broz (Czech Republic, ECR) focused on the developments in the field of local democracy occurred since the last Congress monitoring visit in 2009. High level meetings took place in Reykjavik, in particular with Hermann Sæmundsson, Deputy Secretary General of the Ministry of the Interior, Markús Sigurbjörnsson, President of the Supreme Court, as well as Sigurdur H. Helgason, Director General for the Department of Public Management and Reform at the Ministry of Finance and Economic Affairs of Iceland. The delegation also met the Ombudsman Tryggvi Gunnarsson and Vigdís Hauksdóttir, Chairman of the Budget Committee of the Parliament as well as representatives of the city of Reykjavik, Dalabyggð, Garðabær, and Reykjanesbær, and the Icelandic Delegation to the Congress and National Association of Local Authorities.

Estonia, 6-8 September 2016

The Congress delegation examined the situation on local democracy in the light of the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, ratified by the country in 1994. Co-rapporteurs Henrik Hammar (Sweden, EPP/CCE) and Leen Verbeek (Netherlands, SOC) focused on the developments in the field of local democracy occurred since the last Congress monitoring visit in 2010. High level meetings took place in Tallinn, Paide and Jõhvi, in particular with Taavi Aas, Tallinn Mayor a.d., and Kalev Kallo, Chairman of the City Council of Tallinn, Arto Aas, Minister of Public Administration, Eiki Nestor, President of the Parliament, Kalle Laanet, Chairman of the Constitutional Committee, Remo Holsmer, Chairman of the Finance Committee, Ülle Madise, Chancellor of Justice, and Alar Karis, Auditor General at the National Audit Office (Riigikontroll).

Recommendations adopted

Cyprus

During the 31th session, the Congress adopted a report and recommendation 389 (2016) on the state of local democracy in Cyprus following a monitoring visit to Nicosia, Kokkinotrimithia, Ayios Dhometios and Paphos in April 2016. This document, which was presented by rapporteur Bernd Vöhringer (Germany, EPP/ECC), underlines the Cypriot government's political commitment to citizens' participation in local public affairs. Nevertheless, the Congress expressed its concern with regard to the financial autonomy of local authorities as well as the weakness and imprecision of the legislative basis for the powers and responsibilities of local authorities, and for the conditions under which they are exercised. It expressed concern in particular for the absence of constitutional safeguards for the principle of local self-government and the status of local authorities.

Croatia

During the 31th session, the Congress adopted a report and recommendation 391 (2016) on the state of local and regional democracy in Croatia following a monitoring visit to Zagreb, Rijeka, Omisalj and Krk in March 2016. This is the third monitoring report since the ratification of the European Charter of Local Self Government by Croatia in 1997. It was drafted by the co-rapporteurs Luzette Kroon (Netherlands, EPP/ECC) and Ole Haabeth (Norway, SOC). The co-rapporteurs noted with satisfaction that the Charter had been fully incorporated into Croatian national legislation, thereby complying with the Congress' wishes that all provisions of the Charter be applied. They also welcomed the

introduction since the last monitoring visit in 2007 of direct elections for mayors and prefects and a financial equalisation policy. In September 2015 the local authorities had enacted legislation on voluntary mergers of local authorities to simplify territorial divisions and the provision of public services.

B. POST MONITORING DIALOGUE

The Post-monitoring is a procedure established by the Congress to ensure a follow up to the implementation of its recommendations to member States on local and regional democracy, through enhanced political dialogue between the authorities of the State concerned and the Congress. The procedure is initiated at the request of a state's authorities. It is essentially based on political dialogue with the Congress and only concerns the recommendations adopted by the Congress with regard to the countries that have accepted the post-monitoring.

The post-monitoring exercises resulted in the signature of roadmaps with Ukraine (May 2015), Portugal (September 2015) and Georgia (December 2015). Since April 2016, road maps have been signed also with Armenia and Moldova.



Armenia, 9 June 2016

Congress President Jean-Claude Frécon, and Minister of Territorial Administration and Development of the Republic of Armenia, Davit Loqyan, signed a roadmap in Yerevan for the implementation of Recommendation 351 (2014) on local democracy in Armenia. The signing of this roadmap marks their commitment to pursue the co-operation and political dialogue initiated as part of the monitoring of the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, ratified by Armenia in 2002. The rapporteurs welcomed the wide range of reforms which have been adopted in Armenia in the field of local democracy and stressed the importance to pursue the consultation process with local authorities. Principles laid down in the Charter, in particular the principle of proportionality which ensures that the supervisor's intervention is kept in proportion to the importance of the interests it is intended to protect, were also referred to in the roadmap.

Republic of Moldova, 7 July 2016

Congress President Jean-Claude Frécon, and Secretary General of the Government of the Republic of Moldova, Tudor Copaci, signed a roadmap in Chisinau for the implementation of Recommendation 322 (2012) on local and regional democracy in the Republic of Moldova. This roadmap focuses on the full implementation of the national strategy on decentralisation which was adopted after the monitoring visit and welcomed by the rapporteurs.

C. OBSERVATION OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL ELECTIONS

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities has been engaged in observing local and regional elections since the 1990s. Its missions are conducted at the official request of the national authorities concerned and they complement the political monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. Follow-up to Congress' recommendations is provided by a post-electoral dialogue.



In order to give local and regional elected representatives the opportunity to acquire specific skills and competences on election observation, a training seminar was organised by the Congress on the eve of its 31st Session, on 18 October 2016. The training offered information on the history, legal background and methodology of election observation with a special focus on elections for local and regional bodies. Special attention was paid to the appropriate conduct of international election observers. Congress' members who participated in previous missions took the floor to share concrete experiences made in the field.

During the Session, the Congress debated three reports related to election observation as part of its activities to evaluate the situation of local and regional democracy in Council of Europe member states. A transversal report on "Misuse of administrative resources during electoral processes: the role of local and regional elected representatives and public officials" was presented by Stewart Dickson (United Kingdom, ILDG). Two Information Reports on the local and provincial elections held in Serbia and on local by-elections organised in Armenia were submitted by Karim Van Overmeire (Belgium, NR) and Liisa Ansala (Finland, ILDG), respectively.

Local and provincial elections in Serbia, 24 April 2016

The Electoral Assessment Mission to the Republic of Serbia took place from 20 to 25 April 2016. The pre-electoral programme of the 12-member delegation included meetings in Belgrade on the state of local democracy and decentralisation, notably with the Deputy Mayor, representatives of the Standing Conference of Towns and Municipalities, which is the national association of local authorities in Serbia, and with electoral candidates. The delegation also held briefings with stakeholders involved in the preparation of the elections scheduled for 24 April, focusing in particular on the local and provincial part of E-Day. Incidents related to candidates' lists registration, the situation of the media and campaign financing were among the issues discussed. Special attention was paid to the pre-electoral situation in the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina.

On E-Day, the delegation monitored the local elections in 136 Local Self-Government Units and the provincial elections in Vojvodina. The delegation included two members of the EU Committee of the Regions and visited more than 120 polling stations throughout the country.

During the debate at the 31st Session, the Head of the Delegation, Congress' member Karim Van Overmeire, stated that, apart from individual irregularities observed by the teams, polling was organised in a calm and orderly manner, largely in line with regulations and international standards.

He underlined that there was room for improvement on the practical side of the elections, notably with regard to the protection of the secrecy of the vote, and the need for substantial reform to complement

the legal framework of elections including the monitoring of campaign and party financing, misuse of administrative resources and the quality of voters' lists.

Local by-elections in Armenia, 18 September 2016

The Electoral Assessment Mission with regard to Armenia was organised from 14 to 19 September 2016. The delegation, headed by Liisa Ansala, monitored the local by-elections held on 18 September. Preparatory meetings took place in Yerevan and Armavir, with representatives of the electoral administration, the international community, NGOs, the media as well as local authorities and candidates.

On E-Day, a 15-member delegation was deployed to four regions of the country. The respective Information Report was debated during the 31st Session. It stated that this vote was the first one organised after the July 2016 hostage crises and after the Prime Minister resigned in early September. Despite the adoption of a new Electoral Code in 2016, further to the 2015 Constitutional reform in Armenia, the local by-elections held on 18 September were governed by the 2011 Electoral Code. This has led to some uncertainties with regard to the legal framework and had inevitable repercussions related to the general atmosphere in which these elections took place. In general, the teams deployed on E-Day found that the elections were technically well-prepared and overall in line with international standards. At the same time, Rapporteur Ansala pointed to a very low level of political competition with many candidates withdrawing in the course of the campaign and recommended to hold the elections only on one day instead of several days during the year, in view of increased attention and importance given to the elections at grassroots' level.

Local elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina, 2 October 2016

In order to prepare the observation of the local elections scheduled for 2 October 2016 in Bosnia and Herzegovina, a pre-electoral mission was organised on 9 September. During meetings with representatives of the Central Election Commission and authorities of the different Entities, the delegation was up-dated on the state of technical preparations and electoral support programmes. Briefings with members of the international community and domestic NGOs gave insight related to underlying issues of the elections.

The main Congress' n mission took place between 28 September and 3 October 2016. Headed by Congress' Rapporteur Stewart Dickson, the 32-member delegation included 20 Congress' members, five members of the EU Committee of the Regions and two members of national associations of local self-government.

On E-Day, 12 teams were deployed throughout the country and visited some 150 polling stations. Rapporteur Dickson emphasised that with the exception of a few violent incidents and some irregularities, polling was carried out in a calm and orderly manner, generally in line with international standards. However, there were again no elections held in Mostar, due to unsuccessful negotiations between the political stakeholders. Moreover, the Rapporteur referred to recurring issues of elections in the country and the need to reform related, in particular, to the quality of voters' lists, the prevention of electoral fraud and the protection of the secrecy of the vote.

Special event on "25 years of international election observation"

At the 13th European Conference of Electoral Management Bodies, organised from 14 to 15 April 2016 in Bucharest, the Congress had the opportunity to present its experience in observing elections at the grassroots' level. Secretary General Andreas Kiefer outlined the work carried out by the Congress in some hundred missions over the last 15 years. He underlined the cooperation achieved with other key actors in the electoral field, notably the Parliamentary Assembly, the Venice Commission, the EU Committee of the Regions and OSCE/ODIHR. In addition to the country-specific observations and reports, the Congress has developed a strategy to better address transversal problems and recurring issues identified during electoral missions such as the quality of voters' lists, de-politicisation and professionalisation of the electoral administration, the misuse of administrative resources during electoral processes and the situation of independent candidates.

IV. THEMATIC ACTIVITIES

The Congress supports local authorities in the performance of their duties in respect of their citizens and it supports them in their search for solutions to the challenges they face, in particular in terms of security, integration, dialogue and participation, respect for fundamental human and social rights, and the inclusion of vulnerable populations.

It initiates reflections and projects on these topics and contributes actively to the work being done in this connection within the Council of Europe and at European level.

A. INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE / FIGHT AGAINST RADICALISATION



Considering that combatting radicalisation requires preventive measures that include the promotion of intercultural and interreligious dialogue, the Congress has prepared a toolkit to guide local authorities, associations and NGOs in their efforts to organise intercultural and interreligious activities. The toolkit includes digital resource cards, the 12 principles of interreligious dialogue at local level and the guidelines adopted by the Congress. It has been translated into 36 languages of the Council of Europe member States and is available for download in PDF format. It is also available in print in the working languages of the Congress (English, French, German, Italian, Russian and Turkish). The toolkit is available on a new website and is presented in a video clip online since October 2016.

During the October session also, the Congress committees on current affairs and governance held a joint debate on the Congress' strategy to prevent radicalisation in towns, cities and regions. The report and resolution adopted commend the Congress to consolidate its activities in this field by adopting methods to foster pluralist, inclusive and culturally diverse societies in Europe, and by incorporating the concept of "interconvictional dialogue" in its initiatives to foster dialogue on cultural and religious issues.

Pursuing the "Alliance of European cities against violent extremism" launched in November 2015 in Aarhus, Denmark, the Congress, the City of Rotterdam and the European Forum for Urban Security (Efus) jointly organised a Summit of Mayors on 9 November 2016 in Rotterdam. The Summit brought together 131 participants from 24 countries, including 49 mayors and deputy mayors of European cities. In addition to three working sessions focusing on initiatives taken by various European cities to combat the causes of radicalisation, members made six field visits to local initiatives in Rotterdam and attended the presentation of training and awareness-raising programmes, including the Congress' Toolkit for the use of local authorities in intercultural and interreligious dialogue. At the end of the summit, participants embraced the "Rotterdam Declaration", which encapsulates the Alliance's approach towards preventing radicalisation at grass-root level. The next Summit of Mayors will be held in Barcelona in autumn 2017.

Between April and November Congress members and representatives also took part in the following events:

Conference of Ministers of Education (Brussels, 12 April 2016)

Josef Neumann addressed the participants of the 25th Session of the Council of Europe Standing Conference of Ministers of Education, speaking at the session “Effective citizenship education that prevents violent extremism and combats radicalisation leading to terrorism”. He presented the Congress activities to promote intercultural and interreligious dialogue as a “most efficient tool against intolerance and radicalisation”.

Conference on “European cities facing radicalisation: communication and counter-narratives” (Bordeaux, 27 May 2016)

Leen Verbeek participated in this conference co-organised by the European and French Forums for Urban Security and the city of Bordeaux. He recalled that the Congress adopted its “Strategy to combat radicalisation at grassroots level”, at its 28th Session in March 2015 and immediately after the first Paris attacks, together with the Guidelines for local and regional authorities on preventing radicalisation and manifestation of hate at grassroots level.

B. REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS



The Congress has added an important document to its already voluminous literature on migration related issues by approving in its Current Affairs Committee a report on the role of local and regional authorities facing the challenge of the refugee crisis, entitled “From reception to integration: the role of local authorities facing migration”. A reflection group bringing together members, experts and NGO representatives was set up in May to delineate the scope and content of a Congress approach to the issue. This approach focuses on reception of refugees in conditions respecting their human rights and dignity and insists on early integration policies that can facilitate migrants’ long term inclusion into the host communities. The co-rapporteurs for this report visited Samos and the Attica region in Greece in June and September, to gather information and get a first-hand view of the obstacles to successful action posed by the lack of coherent policies.

The approved resolution and recommendation call on member States to remove administrative and practical barriers encountered by asylum seekers during their application process, to develop clear legal frameworks and to ensure financial support for local and regional governments. It will be adopted by the Congress during its March 2017 plenary session.

Between April and November, Congress members and representatives also took part in the following events:

Exchange of views on the impact of the current refugee crisis on local authorities (Strasbourg, 25 April 2016)

This informal exchange of views took place on the initiative of Ambassador Gerhard Küntzle, Permanent representative of Germany to the Council of Europe. Congress Vice-President Clemens Lammerskitten (Germany, EPP/CCE) and Bernd Vöhringer (Germany, EPP/CCE), head of the German delegation to the Congress, referred to the need for a pragmatic approach to this question, in order to enable municipalities and regions to properly respond to the urgent needs of refugees arriving in Germany. They added that politicians should engage in an active dialogue with the host population to ensure their acceptance regarding the living areas chosen for those migrants who wish to integrate.

KEDE Conference on refugee flows and migration issue (Samos, 2-4 June 2016)

A delegation of the Congress participated in the Conference on: “Local authorities, refugee flows and migration – the impact on society, tourism and the economy”, organised by the Central Union of Municipalities and Communities of Greece (KEDE). The Congress co-rapporteurs on refugee and migration questions György Illes (Hungary, ILDG) and Yoomi Renström (Sweden, SOC) took part in the sessions on “Strategic Planning Management of the Refugee Issue at Local Level - The Role of Municipalities” and “Immigration to Cities - Redesigning the Urban Web and Social Integration”. Vice-President Anders Knappe addressed the conference in the framework of the discussion “Social Solidarity, Voluntarism and Humanitarian Aid”.

Conference on “The protection of asylum seekers, refugees and migrants” (Nafplio, 27 May 2016)

Congress Secretary General Andreas Kiefer highlighted the challenge the refugee crisis represents for local authorities, especially as far as the delivery of services, the respect for human and social rights and the building of inclusive societies is concerned, and asked for support from the regional and national levels of government. He drew attention to the responsibilities of regional and local authorities in providing refugees with services in respect of their basic rights such as health protection, an adequate standard of living, education and participation in public life. He underlined the importance of promoting intercultural and interreligious dialogue, organising anti-rumour campaigns and discussing with migrants to achieve a better understanding of their needs, prior to shaping policy responses.

Annual conference of the Enlarged Partial Agreement on Sport (EPAS) on “Newly arrived migrants and their integration via sport” (Vienna, 3 June 2016)

Representing the Congress, Carmen Kiefer (Austria, EPP/CCE) highlighted the role played by sport in the integration of newly arrived migrants and stressed the role of local and regional authorities in bringing together local citizens and migrants and in providing sports facilities.

Conference on “Local authorities, refugee flows and migration – the impact on society, tourism and the economy” (Samos, 2-4 June 2016)

György Illes (Hungary ILDG) represented the Congress in the conference organised by the Central Union of Municipalities and Communities of Greece (KEDE). He recalled the major forefront actions implemented by local authorities for the reception and integration of refugees.

Visit of refugee camps in Attica region (Attica, 6-7 September)

At the invitation of the Governor of Attica Rena Dourou, the Congress delegation (see I. POLITICAL AGENDA) visited several reception and logistic facilities, in particular the Elaionas and Skaramargas camps, as well as the logistics centre for the supply of relief items for the refugees. The delegation also held a meeting with the Governor and her colleagues to examine the region’s policy for receiving

and integrating refugees. Governor Dourou emphasised the political necessity for establishing a network of European regions to jointly discuss the priorities and practical steps that need to be taken - an initiative supported by Jean-Claude Frécon who underlined that Greece could not be left alone to deal with the flow of refugees.

C. YOUTH PARTICIPATION



The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities has long considered youth participation at local and regional level to be key to the development of democratic citizenship.

The Congress has already, since 2014, invited young people, aged between 16 to 30 years and chosen from every member state via a selection procedure, to take part in its sessions. However, following the clear success of this participation in 2015 it decided to take it one step further and, in January 2016, launched the initiative “Rejuvenating politics”.

Youth delegates were asked to commit to a full year of interaction with the Congress, entailing participation in both sessions but also the development of personal, grass-roots projects on youth participation. The idea of the projects was to help youth delegates understand more clearly how local and regional authorities work in order to contribute in greater depth during the sessions, while at the same time multiplying information about the Congress and promoting application of its Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life at home.

Though monitored and assisted, the youth delegates were given autonomy with regard to the choice of project and how they would develop it. Several youth delegates worked together to develop international/transfrontier projects. The results of the diverse and wide-ranging projects were presented by a group of the youth delegates to Congress on the first day of the 31st session. The Congress plans to build on this experience and develop the initiative further in 2017.

D. CHILDREN’S RIGHTS

During the October session of the Congress, members participated in the preparations for the European Day for the protection of children against exploitation and sexual abuse, recording messages that address the public and underline the importance of action by local authorities on this issue. The President of the Congress also recorded a statement which was diffused on 18 November on both the Council of Europe and Congress websites in support of the European Day, with reference to the framework of the Council of Europe Action Plan for the rights of the child 2016 – 2021.

The Congress will continue to work on the promotion of the Congress Pact to stop the sexual abuse of children as part of the One in Five campaign of the Council of Europe. The second edition of the “Seminar for national associations of local and regional authorities” on this theme will be organised in a host city in Serbia in 2017, focusing on the situation of refugee children and unaccompanied minors.

E. FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION

During the 31th session, the Congress held two debates followed by the adoption of two resolutions and reports on “Preventing corruption and promoting public ethics at local and regional levels” and “The inappropriate use of administrative resources during election campaigns and the role of local and regional elected representatives”. The thematic Spokesperson on promoting public ethics and preventing corruption Herwig van Staa (Austria, EPP/ECC) spoke of the importance of ensuring that regions have courts of auditors that are independent of political leaders. This requirement is particularly important since local and regional authorities are managing increasingly large budgets, notably in the framework of EU funds.

He presented a six-point roadmap, including both practical measures and political principles. The Congress will prepare revise the European Code of conduct for the political integrity of local and regional elected representatives and prepare reports on the misuse of administrative resources during electoral processes, public procurement, transparency, conflicts of interest, the protection of whistle-blowers and nepotism.

F. GENDER EQUALITY

The Congress has concluded its work on the balanced representation of women and men in local and regional politics in Council of Europe member States and in the national delegations to the Congress by adopting on 20 October 2016 the Resolution 404(2016) and Recommendation 390(2016) on “Women’s political participation and representation at local and regional levels”. The report states that, through the adoption of a 30% quota obligation in national delegations in 2008, the Congress has succeeded to increase the proportion of women in high level positions in the Congress.

With these texts, the Congress invites local and regional authorities to ensure that representation of women in any decision-making body does not fall under 40%. It encourages them to develop gender-disaggregated statistics to monitor and evaluate nominations as well as the evolution of elections. It also calls on governments to consider adoption of legislative reforms to implement quotas for candidates in elections, revising the electoral system where it has a negative impact on women’s political participation.

In October 2016, the Congress has, for the first time, elected a woman as its President. In the 2017-2020 mandate, 11 out of the 17 Bureau members are women.

G. INCLUSION OF ROMA AND TRAVELLERS / EUROPEAN ALLIANCE OF CITIES AND REGIONS FOR THE INCLUSION OF ROMA AND TRAVELLERS



Preparations for setting up a Ukrainian Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion have been undertaken, following a request made by six Ukrainian municipalities that are participating in

ROMED2 (Roma inclusion on the local level through mediation) and have led to the drafting of a preliminary charter, a working programme and a consultation meeting in October 2016. Once established, the Ukrainian Alliance will form an integral part of the European Alliance, welcoming the first Ukrainian participants and reinforcing Congress activities for local democracy in Ukraine.

To pave the way for increased political participation on the part of Roma citizens, the Alliance has supported the activities of the Division of Electoral Assistance and Census, which prepared Roma candidates and voters for the local elections of 2 October 2016. Three awareness raising workshops were organised for local Roma communities to underscore the importance of using one's right to vote and explain how the voting process functions. A fourth workshop trained candidates who ran for office at the local elections in public speaking, campaigning and other necessary skills for their application. 10 of the 20 participants (9 men, 1 woman) were actually elected into the local councils.

The Alliance taskforce supported the drafting of Resolution 403(2016) on "The situation of Roma and Travellers in the context of rising extremism, xenophobia and the refugee crisis in Europe" adopted during the Congress Session in October 2016. The resolution was presented by John Warmisham (UK, SOC) and highlighted the context of rising extremism, xenophobia and the refugee crisis, which is worsening discrimination against them and stirring anti-Gypsyism. The Congress reminded local and regional authorities of their responsibility to create the conditions for access to economic and social rights for Roma and Travellers. At national level, the Congress recommendation stresses the need to adopt anti-discrimination policies to ensure that Roma and Travellers enjoy legal and social equality. It calls on the governments to develop the legislative framework to overcome institutional.

In September 2016, the Congress secretariat welcomed the seventh Austrian secondment to support the work of the Alliance.

H. SOCIAL INTEGRATION

A Congress delegation participated in the Social Integration Summit organised on 17 and 18 May 2016 in Istanbul. This Summit aimed at highlighting the importance of social inclusion against the multiple crises that Europe currently faces. At the opening Session, the Congress President noted that building a cohesive society demands efforts to combat discrimination, combined with the promotion of respect for diversity, intercultural and interfaith dialogue within communities, integration of migrants and other foreign residents, youth participation and special measures for vulnerable groups or those with specific needs.

Members and representatives of the Congress took part in the thematic sessions: Yoomi Renström on « Social integration in the light of Refugee Crisis », Leen Verbeek on « Integration and international agenda », Dusica Davidovic (Serbia, SOC), on « Inclusion of Roma Citizens », and Gaye Doğanoglu (EPP/CCE, Turkey) on « Social integration of the People with Disabilities ».

At the closing of the Summit on the theme « Urban Regeneration and Social Integration », Congress Director Jean-Philippe Bozouls reminded participants that the Congress had adopted the first urban charter involving an approach based on human rights in 1992. The participants adopted the Istanbul Declaration, committed to Local Action for Social Inclusion and to promoting the social development of cities, guided by the principles of equity, access, participation and cohesion.

I. EUROPEAN LOCAL DEMOCRACY WEEK

The 2016 edition of the European Local Democracy Week (ELDW) took place on 10-16 October with the theme "Living together in culturally diverse societies: respect, dialogue interaction." The theme follows on from that in 2015, with a stronger focus on education for democratic citizenship and human rights. Both echo the strategy to combat radicalisation at grass-roots level adopted by the Congress on 2 February 2015.

This year also saw the arrival of the ELDW on social media platforms. Both a Facebook page entitled "European Local Democracy Week" and a Twitter account @democracy_week have promoted partners involved in the 2016 edition of the ELDW.

In total, 81 partners from 22 countries covering 18 499 247 inhabitants reported their participation in the 2016 edition. To date, 255 activities have taken place and were uploaded on the ELDW website. This year is a record with 25 partners registered as « 12 Star ». As for the contribution of associations, the strongest commitment was shown by France, where 6 associations took part in the initiative, by either organising events or carrying out a communication campaign on the ELDW. Countries with the highest number of participating cities in 2016 are France, Turkey, and Greece. The participants organised a wide range of events on the theme of intercultural dialogue and citizen participation such as seminars, exhibitions or discussions.

The ELDW was introduced at several international meetings:

- the 5th General Meeting of National Associations of local and regional authorities in Paris,
- a Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) event in Nicosia,
- the annual Intercultural Cities meeting in Reykjavik.
- the annual conference of the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA), an ELDW partner. This conference was devoted to the ELDW 2016 theme.

Furthermore, the newly elected Congress President Gudrun Mosler-Törnström met with young local leaders from Fastiv (Ukraine), ELDW partner which took part to the World Forum for Democracy. The ELDW was also promoted at various events of associated partners in the framework of the Congress' co-operation activities and it was praised by the Interior Minister of Estonia during the 31st Session of the Congress.

J. WORLD FORUM FOR DEMOCRACY 2016



The Congress has again been closely involved in the preparation and organisation of the World Forum for Democracy (Strasbourg, 7-9 November 2016). At the opening and at the plenary sessions, the Congress was officially represented by its President Gudrun Mosler-Törnström, who led a delegation of seven Congress members.

The Congress was the official sponsor of two working sessions (labs), – under the theme ‘Democracy and equality - does education matter,’ – with discussants selected from among the Congress members: Gudrun Mosler-Törnström spoke in Lab 4 on “Unlocking Parliament,” and Xavier Cadoret (France, SOC), Mayor of Saint Gerand le Puyand, was a speaker in Lab 7 “Reloading elections”.

Henrietta Bero (Hungary, EPP/CCE), Robert Gruman (Romania, EPP/CCE), Patrick McGowan (Ireland, GILD), Sevdia Ugrehelidze (Georgia, EPP/CCE) and Paul White (United Kingdom, ECR) also were active members of the Congress delegation.

K. MISCELLANEOUS

On 13 May 2016, Secretary General Andreas Kiefer addressed the participants in the Central and Eastern European e-Democracy and e-Governance Days 2016 organised in Budapest, under the main theme “Multi-Level (e)Governance: Is ICT (information and communications technology) a means to enhance transparency and democracy?”. He presented the main Congress activities and in particular the ones in the field of e-democracy and e-governance. He also recalled the need of awareness raising, capacity building and training in these areas.

V. INSTITUTIONAL CO-OPERATION WITHIN THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

A. THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL SECTOR

The Committee of Ministers

The Congress President and Secretary General hold regular exchanges of views and communications with the Ministers’ Deputies. The Congress also takes an active part in the chairmanships of the Committee of Ministers.

On 13 April 2016, Andreas Kiefer delivered his communication to the Deputies of Ministers and presented the Congress activities since December 2015.

On 18 May 2016 President Frécon participated in the Ministerial session held in Sofia where the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers passed from Bulgaria to Estonia.

On 22 June 2016 he met Taavi Rõivas, the Estonian Prime Minister. The President congratulated the Prime Minister on the way in which local democracy had been developed in his country. He made particular reference to the case-law of the Estonian Supreme Court, which recognises the importance of the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

Interior Minister of Estonia Hanno Pevkur addressed Congress members at their 31st Session, on 20 October 2016, on behalf of the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers (see II. A. 31ST SESSION°

Directorate General of Democracy

The Congress cooperates closely with the Directorate General of Democracy and its Centre of Expertise for Local Government. Together they implement the regional project to strengthen the capacities of local authorities within the countries of Eastern Partnership (2015-2017) and the creation of synergies in existing bilateral projects in Albania, Armenia and Ukraine (See under VII. COOPERATION PROGRAMMES AND ACTION PLANS). Regular coordination meetings continue to be held in the Secretariat.

B. THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

The Congress holds regular exchanges with the Parliamentary Assembly, in order to increase co-operation at the level of rapporteurs and the respective secretariats as well as in areas of common interest, in particular in the framework of the implementation of Council of Europe Campaigns.

The Parliamentary Assembly General Rapporteur on local and regional authorities Luis Ramos Leite has held several meetings with the Congress Secretary General and participated in the debate on “Good governance of metropolitan territories” during the Congress Session in October.

During the October Session, the Congress President held a meeting with PACE President Pedro Agramunt. They discussed possible increased cooperation between the Congress and PACE in the fields of Migration and refugees and Youth participation. The #NoHateNoFear Initiative of PACE was

also discussed and it was decided that the Congress Session in March would relay this initiative by inviting its members to take a picture on the stand and use it on social media.

C. THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR DEMOCRACY THROUGH LAW (VENICE COMMISSION)

The Congress is working in close co-operation with the Venice Commission, particularly in the field of election observation and the monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. The Council for Democratic Elections (CED) is a platform for electoral cooperation between the Venice Commission, in its capacity as legal body, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress, as political organs responsible for election observation in their respective areas. Congress' member Jos Wienen (Netherlands, EPP/CCE) is currently Chair of the CDE.

At the CED-meeting in June 2016, Congress' action with regard to the new Venice Commission Guidelines on misuse of administrative resources during elections was presented. A new Report on "Misuse of administrative resources during electoral processes and the role of local and regional elected representatives and public officials" (Rapporteur Stewart Dickson, United Kingdom, ILDG), was adopted by the Congress during its 31st Session and foresees follow-up activities, also in the context of co-operation with the CED.

At the plenary meeting of the Venice Commission on 14 October 2016, the Congress President underlined the importance of co-operation between the Congress and the Venice Commission with regard to the constitutional dimension of decentralisation reforms currently under way in many Council of Europe member states. He stated that almost all the Congress' Roadmaps - signed with national authorities in the framework of its post-monitoring dialogue - contain provisions relating to constitutional amendments and references to the work of the Venice Commission. In addition, at its 31st Session in October, the Congress adopted a Resolution to promote the Rule of Law Checklist recently adopted by the Venice Commission.

VI. EXTERNAL COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

The Committee of the Regions of the European Union

Co-operation between the Congress and the Committee of the Regions of the European Union is ongoing between the Plenary Sessions of the two institutions.

On 2 June 2016, Gudrun Mosler-Törnström represented the Congress at the "Enlargement Day" in Brussels (Belgium), during a session of the Committee of the Regions. She underlined the relevance for non EU countries of recently adopted Congress texts, since the EU enlargement countries are already members of the Council of Europe. Congress tools and adopted texts, in particular as regards monitoring, post-monitoring dialogue and elections observation, are key reference texts for EU candidate countries in their efforts to meet the European standards.

As President of the Chamber she took part, on 5 July 2016, in Odessa (Ukraine), in the meeting of the CoR Task Force on Ukraine. She expressed trust in the ongoing process carried out by Ukrainian authorities on the decentralisation reforms and underlined the good cooperation with the Congress in this context, which includes peer-to peer exchange of know-how.

The Congress Bureau proposed hosting the next meeting of the High Level Group - composed of the President of the Congress, the Presidents of its two Chambers, the President of the Committee of the Regions, its 1st Vice-President and the President of the CIVEX Commission - in the Council of Europe Paris office, on the 31st January 2017.

European Associations of local and regional authorities

The Congress pursues a close cooperation with the main associations and organisations representing territorial authorities in Europe in particular via the participation and input from Congress representatives to a number of events.



On 14-15 April 2016, Breda Pecan (Slovenia, SOC), Vice-President of the Congress participated in the General Assembly Meeting of the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS) in Pristina. She stressed the consequences of the economic crisis on the financing of local authorities and the need to provide them with adequate financial resources, and referred to the recommendation adopted by the Congress in this regard in 2014. She also underlined the importance of transparency in public spending with regard to the allocation of financial resources, announcing that the Congress will present an anti-corruption strategy at its autumn session.

On 21 April, in Nicosia, the President of the Chamber of Local Authorities Anders Knappe opened the Congress of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), praising the Congress as a driving force in local and regional authorities' areas of responsibility, in particular on consultation procedures and financial resources. The debates were organised in 30 sessions covering 7 themes: Governance & Leadership, Economy & Finance, Business, Technology and Innovation, Society and Culture, Environment, Climate and Energy, Cooperation and Partnerships and EU Integration. The Secretary General of the Congress addressed the participants in session "Bringing Europe closer to you!".

This session focused on the tangible benefits and concrete examples of what the EU institutions do in the European countries and for the cities or regions. Anders Knappe participated to the session "The European Charter for Equality of women and men in local life". He presented the Congress' action in this regard, including its quota requirement for women's representation in its 47 national delegations, introduced in 2008. Finally, Congress President Jean Claude Frécon took part in the closing session on the theme "Towards a Local and Regional Vision of Europe 2030." He drew the CEMR Congress conclusions calling for a good governance collective approach for facing the refugee crisis, terrorism, extremism and the on-going economic crisis hitting the European cities.

President Frécon contributed to the General Assembly of the European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA), on 12 May 2016, in Paris, where he welcomed ALDA's commitment to promoting civic involvement and democratic pluralism. He welcomed the current work of ADLA in setting up Local Democracy Agencies in Moldova and Tunisia.

On 27 May 2016, Leen Verbeek participated in the conference "European cities facing radicalisation: communication and counter-narratives," co-organised by the European and French Forums for Urban Security and the city of Bordeaux. He intervened on the challenges of tackling extremism and of building inclusive societies.

The Congress Secretary General attended the meeting of the Balkan & Black Sea Region of the CPMR, held on 30-31 May in Istanbul. He presented the involvement of the Congress in the neighborhood policy of the Council of Europe and its contributions to the neighborhood policy of the EU. He also presented the targeted co-operation activities of the Congress in the framework of the EU-CoE Programmatic Framework for Eastern Partnership countries (2015-2017) and highlighted the series of seminars organised by the Congress for mayors and councilors from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine as well as from the non-member State Belarus.

The Congress Secretary General addressed the Bureau of the Assembly of European Regions (AER), in Bodø, Norway, on 22 June 2016. He informed AER members about the activities of the Congress in the field of information and communication technologies and about the Council of Europe Internet Governance Strategy 2016-2019: 'Democracy, human rights and the rule of law in the digital world' adopted in March 2016. The AER-Bureau decided to co-operate with the Congress in contributing to this Strategy

Helena Pihlajasaari (Finland, EPP-CE) contributed to the 24th Baltic Sea States Subregional Co-operation (BSSSC) annual Conference: "Bridge Over Troubled Water – Value of Regional Co-operation in the Time of Challenges," held in Hämeenlinna (Finland), on 14-16 September 2016. Vice-President Pihlajasaari presented the Congress activities and assets along with the Council of Europe and Congress instruments to facilitate inter-regional cooperation.

On 28 September 2016, Gudrun Mosler-Törnström contributed to the European Health Forum held in Gastein (Austria), recalling that the Council of Europe guarantees the safe composition of medical treatments used across Europe through its 'Convention on the Elaboration of a European Pharmacopeia.' She emphasised the importance of including local and regional authorities in this work.

On 25 October 2016, the Congress took part in the Conference on Equal Opportunities organised by the Assembly of European Regions (AER) in Vienna (Austria).

On 4 November 2016, Yoomi Renström contributed to the 44th General Assembly of the Conference of Peripheral Maritime Regions of Europe (CPMR), in Ponta Delgada (Portugal), where, as Rapporteur, she presented the Congress on-going work on migrant's reception and migrants' integration.

VII. COOPERATION PROGRAMMES AND ACTION PLANS

The aim of the Congress' co-operation activities is to assist a number of member States in implementing the recommendations adopted by the Congress to provide a practical response to the problems identified in the course of monitoring and post-monitoring activities and the observation of elections.

These activities are carried out within the framework of the action plans of the Council of Europe, in close co-operation and synergy with the other entities within the Organisation.

They rely notably on peer exchanges in areas where the Congress can offer specific experience and know-how, such as the role and the responsibilities of local and regional political representatives.



Albania

In the framework of the 2nd phase of the Council of Europe project “*Strengthening Local Government Structures and Cooperation of Local Elected Representatives*”, the Congress continues to be active in Albania. The project, extended until 30 June 2017, aims to support the on-going decentralisation process and the consolidation of the principles of good governance.

In 2016, increased political tensions in the country, partisan bias and the specific agendas of each association have constituted a major obstacle to the further consultation of, and cooperation between, the two associations representing municipalities. The project was restructured to take into consideration the recent reforms on local government and ensure that common positions are reached on issues of common concern.

In addition, national authorities were supported in the preparatory phase for the setting-up of the Local Self-Government and Central Government Consultative Council. A proposal for a draft decision of the Council of Ministers and draft internal rules of the Council was prepared, reflecting the requirements of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and Congress recommendations. The establishment of this new body has unfortunately been delayed as a consequence of the current political situation in the country.

Even though decisive steps have been taken towards the set-up of a regular, pluralistic and structured dialogue, and co-operation among all LGUs, more time is needed to turn this successfully initiated process into a regular and structured platform. An independent evaluation of the project is underway. In particular, it will assess the added value of the Congress intervention and will contribute to the preparation of follow-up activities. The findings and recommendations of the assessment are expected for the end November 2016. In the meantime, the Congress continues to assist the Albanian government in the establishment of the Consultative Council and organisation of peer-to-peer exchanges for Mayors, to discuss their new roles and responsibilities, together with Congress members from other Council of Europe member States.

Armenia

The Congress is currently implementing two projects in Armenia following the local self-government reform in the country.

The two projects implemented by the Congress in Armenia build on the momentum created by the local self-government reform in the country. They focus in particular, on the Law on Local Self-Government and the Law on Administrative and Territorial Division adopted by the Parliament on 23 November 2015. Moreover, the shift towards to a parliamentary system² 2015 paved the way for further legal reforms in the field of local self-government. The activities are aimed at strengthening the role of local councillors, by enhancing their supervisory powers and emphasising the role of inter-municipal bodies and organisations to enhance the efficiency of local self-government. On 9 June 2016, the Armenian national authorities and the Congress signed a roadmap for the implementation of the decentralisation reform. It marks their commitment to comply with the European Charter of Local Self-Government and to pursue the co-operation and political dialogue with the Congress.

The Congress is leading the component “Strengthening local elected representatives’ leadership”, within a project funded by the Danish Government³. Following an agreement with the donor, the project was extended to September 2016, and in a second stage to December 2016. This enabled the project team to assess the short term impact of the activities, to disseminate best practices, and to fine-tune for possible future activities.

The activities implemented in 2016 focused specifically on councillors and on young local leaders, and took stock of recent developments in the field of local democracy in Armenia, with a particular view to the dense electoral cycle in the country: local elections in April, June, September, and October 2016. The participants of these peer-to-peer activities raised their awareness on democratic principles, European standards of local political governance and the importance of citizen participation in decision-making. They shared their experience and understanding of local democracy.

On 27 and 28 October 2016, a peer review developed on the citizen participation initiatives implemented in four communities, as a follow-up to the “Leadership programme” for mayors. Open and critical discussions took place with the communities’ stakeholders (mayors, councillors and citizens/beneficiaries), and helped to ensure sustainable inclusion of citizens in the decision-making process. A *toolkit for enhanced citizen participation* and a video disseminated the results of these initiatives.

As the project will come to an end in December 2016, a closing event will provide Armenian stakeholders (mayors, councillors, young local leaders) with the opportunity to present and share their experience with their peers, local and international experts, representatives from the Armenian government, Local Government Associations, as well as Congress members. In addition, an independent evaluation of the project will take place in November to review how its activities across the three lines of action have achieved expected results, and to assist the Council of Europe to fine-tune while planning future activities. The recommendations from the evaluation report will be discussed in the closing event.

The project Armenia 2: “Institutional support to the Communities Association of Armenia (CAA)” (2014-2016), funded by the Government of Switzerland as a part of the programme “Improvement of the local self-governance system” and co-ordinated by the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (SDC), aims to enhance the capacities of the Communities Association of Armenia to become an active stakeholder in the governance system of the country.

The project activities for 2016 were jointly planned and organised by the CAA leadership and the project team, in line with the project objectives and the newly adopted strategy. In addition, all the national experts to be involved in activities were jointly interviewed and selected. Furthermore, the mid-term review report, commissioned and funded by the SDC through the programme, recognised

² A constitutional referendum was held on 6 December 2015.

³ Line of Action I ‘Support to Local Government Reform’ and Line of Action II ‘Capacity building for local authorities’ are implemented by the Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform.

the project achievements and the overall progress achieved at the level of both the CAA leadership and the CAA members. It particularly noted the positive changes in the organisational practice of the association.

One of the most important on-coming activities is the revision of the CAA statute. The first meeting on this topic was organised on 14 and 15 October. It will involve the CAA leadership, members of the project working group, the project team and experts. The revision of the statute is a crucial step to improve the organisational capacities of the association and to redefine the roles and functions of its statutory bodies. The revised statute will be submitted to the Republican Council of the association for validation in November 2016, and for final approval and adoption during the session of the General Assembly of the CAA. This session is planned before the end of the year and will involve all members of the CAA, national authorities, and relevant international and other stakeholders.

Ukraine

The 2015-2017 Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine, adopted on 21 January 2015 by the Committee of Ministers, includes an important chapter on decentralisation and local government reform.

The Congress is implementing the project “Promoting Local Democracy in Ukraine”, which aims to improve the implementation of democratic principles in Ukraine by enhancing the institutional and leadership capacities of local elected authorities, and disseminating nation-wide best practices of local democracy.⁴ It started in July 2015 and will last until December 2017. It builds on the results achieved through the two previous Ukrainian projects implemented by the Congress (from May 2014 to April 2015) and on the post-monitoring roadmap signed between the Congress and the Ukrainian government in May 2015.

The activities implemented since the beginning of the project focused on strengthening the institutional and leadership capacities of mayors⁵, and on raising the awareness of young local leaders on European principles of local democracy⁶. In addition, the project is targeting local councillors to promote awareness of the principles of local and regional democracy (including the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government), to discuss their role and responsibilities in relation to local political governance, to enhance their capacities with a view to engaging citizens in local affairs, and to foster transparent and ethical decision-making⁷.

Given the number of local actions implemented in communities by the young local leaders taking part in the project, a team of consultants was hired to report on and to assess these initiatives. Success-stories will be further disseminated as good practices to all relevant stakeholders throughout the project.

Recently, a Study visit was organised for a selected group of 20 young local leaders, from 7 to 10 November, in parallel to the 2016 World Forum for Democracy. The participants met and exchanges with representatives of the Council of Europe as well as with German mayors.

The Congress Secretariat will continue to mobilise mayors, councillors and young leaders all over the country. Activities will be implemented in southern and eastern Ukraine, so as to ensure complete geographical coverage.

⁴ It builds on the results of the activities carried out under two previous projects: “Immediate Measures Package for Ukraine” (April 2014-December 2014) and “Strengthening the capacity of local authorities in Ukraine” (April 2014-May 2015).

⁵ Four workshops “Mayors, leaders for change” have been organised so far within this project.

⁶ Four regional seminars for young local leaders have been organised so far, as well as a Study visit during the 2015 World Forum for Democracy.

⁷ Three workshops “Local councillors: everyday actors of local democracy” have been implemented since April 2016.

EU/CoE co-operation framework for the Eastern Partnership

The establishment of a transparent, reliable and efficient local self-government, in line with the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, is one of the commitments undertaken by Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine within the respective Actions Plans and Co-operation Documents, agreed upon between the national authorities and the Council of Europe⁸. The Congress⁹ has made significant headway to enhance the institutional frameworks of these respective countries since the implementation at the beginning of 2015 of the thematic programme V.2 on “Strengthening institutional frameworks”.

Benefiting from a bilateral and multilateral approach, the Congress regional action aims to improve the quality of local self-governance, strengthen the capacities of local authorities in ethical and transparent decision-making, and enhance co-operation in the region. The activities implemented since 2015 address the needs identified and support the reform efforts undertaken in the respective countries.

The determination and commitment expressed by mayors across the region to lead change in their communities has set the ground for the upcoming activities. Expertise on the current national developments in each country and on good practices is provided through the established Community of practice, which met for the second time on 13 – 14 October 2016 in Strasbourg. It enabled the programme to adjust its activities to local needs, while increasing the involvement of the Community in Congress actions.

The upcoming months will see the implementation of the local initiative scheme, together with the allocation of small grants, and the application of innovative, ethical and inclusive actions in municipalities also involved in previous activities. It will aim to increase transparency, accountability and integrity of local government in the targeted countries, by introducing higher ethical standards and fostering citizen participation.

2017 will see the continuation of the Congress’ support to the municipalities involved in the programme through coaching and peer reviews. The selected mayors will have the opportunity to further exchange and discuss on good practices to strengthen democracy in a regional seminar, and Belarus will be involved in an awareness-raising seminar on the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

The Congress also seeks to improve involvement of citizens by local elected representatives in local decision-making processes, as based on the needs highlighted in the study on the roles and responsibilities of mayors and local councillors. A regional seminar is organised on 15-16 November 2016 to reinforce the accountability of local authorities and to exchange with Congress members and experts on the challenges and solutions when engaging citizens.

Mediterranean Partnership

In September 2016, the Congress launched preparations for a programme of partnership and co-operation with the countries of the southern Mediterranean, with an initial focus on Tunisia and Morocco, in the framework of the Council of Europe’s Neighbourhood Partnerships with those countries. The overall objective is to strengthen the local and regional dimension of democratic governance by providing legal expertise, assisting with training and fostering dialogue, co-operation and exchanges of good practices between Tunisian and Moroccan local and regional authorities and their European counterparts. In the perspective, this co-operation will be particularly facilitated by granting delegations from those countries the status of Partner for Local Democracy, existing since October 2014, which set the provisions for their participation in the work of the Congress.

In Tunisia, the current focus is on assisting with the creation of a legislative framework for decentralisation, leading to the holding of local elections in 2017, which the Congress stands ready to

⁸ Since Belarus is not member of the Council of Europe, it is not a signatory of the European Charter for Local Self-Government.

⁹ In partnership with the Directorate General of Democracy and its Centre of Expertise for local government reform.

observe upon invitation from the Tunisian authorities. A delegation of the Congress Secretariat, assisted by an expert, visited Tunis from 2 to 5 November 2016 where it held discussions with government officials, parliamentary representatives, expert community and civil society to define co-operation priorities. A similar visit took place in Rabat – Morocco- from 22 to 25 November 2016 to outline a framework for co-operation in implementing its legislation on advanced regionalisation and measures to improve local and regional governance.

The Congress is implementing this co-operation programme thanks to the voluntary contributions from member States and in particular from Norway.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1: 31ST SESSION (19-21 OCTOBER 2016)

I. Agenda:

<http://bit.ly/Agenda-en>

II. Summary of reports:

<http://bit.ly/31st-session-summary-reports>

III. List of Resolutions and Recommendations adopted at the 31st Session of the Congress

Resolutions adopted:

- RESOLUTION 399 (2016) / 19 October 2016
Verification of new members' credentials and new appointment procedures - Co-rapporteurs: Gaye DOGANOGLU, Turkey (L, EPP/CCE), Leen VERBEEK, Netherlands (R, SOC)
- RESOLUTION 400 (2016) / 19 October 2016
Follow-up to the Congress strategy to combat radicalisation at grass-roots level / Rapporteurs : Josef NEUMANN, Germany (R, SOC), Bert BOUWMEESTER, the Netherlands (L, ILDG)
- RESOLUTION 401 (2016) / 19 October 2016
Preventing corruption and promoting public ethics at local and regional levels / Rapporteur: Herwig van STAA, Austria (R, EPP/CCE)
- RESOLUTION 402 (2016) / 19 October 2016
The misuse of administrative resources during electoral processes: the role of local and regional elected representatives and public officials / Rapporteur: Stewart Dickson, United Kingdom (R, ILDG)
- RESOLUTION 403 (2016) / 20 October 2016
The situation of Roma and Travellers in the context of rising extremism, xenophobia and the refugee crisis in Europe / Rapporteur: John WARMISHAM, United Kingdom (L, SOC)
- RESOLUTION 404 (2016) / 20 October 2016
Women's political participation and representation at local and regional levels / Rapporteur: Inger LINGE, Sweden (L, EPP/CCE)
- RESOLUTION 405 (2016) / 20 October 2016
Gender budgeting / Rapporteur: Cathy BENNETT, Ireland (L, NR)
- RESOLUTION 406 (2016) / 21 October 2016
Congress priorities 2017-2020 / Co-rapporteurs: Anders Knape (Sweden, EPP/CCE) and Gudrun Mosler-Törnström (Austria, SOC)
- RESOLUTION 407 (2016) / 21 October 2016
Good governance in metropolitan areas / Rapporteur: Antonio EROI, Italy (L, EPP/CCE)
- RESOLUTION 408 (2016) / 21 October 2016
"Rule of Law Checklist" adopted by the Venice Commission at its 106th Plenary Session (11 and 12 March 2016) / Rapporteur: Jakob WIENEN, Netherlands (L, EPP/CCE)
- RESOLUTION 409 (2016) / 21 October 2016

Revision of the Rules and Procedures of the Congress / Rapporteurs: Marc COOLS, Belgium (L, ILDG) and Gunn Marit HELGESEN, Norway (R, EPP/CCE)

Recommendations adopted:

- RECOMMENDATION 388 (2016) / 20 October 2016
The situation of Roma and Travellers in the context of rising extremism, xenophobia and the refugee crisis in Europe / Rapporteur: John WARMISHAM, United Kingdom (L, SOC)
- RECOMMENDATION 389 (2016) / 20 October 2016
Local democracy in Cyprus / Rapporteurs: Bernd VÖHRINGER, Germany (L, EPP/CCE), Randi MONDORF, Denmark (R, ILDG)
- RECOMMENDATION 390 (2016) / 20 October 2016
Women's political participation and representation at local and regional levels / Rapporteur: Inger LINGE, Sweden (L, EPP/CCE)
- RECOMMENDATION 391 (2016) / 20 October 2016
Local and regional democracy in Croatia / Rapporteurs: Luzette KROON, the Netherlands (L, EPP/CCE), Ole HAABETH, Norway (R, SOC)
- RECOMMENDATION 392 (2016) / 21 October 2016
Good governance in metropolitan areas / Rapporteur: Antonio EROI, Italy (L, EPP/CCE)

APPENDIX 2: COMMUNICATION OF THE OUTGOING PRESIDENT JEAN-CLAUDE FRÉCON – 19 OCTOBER 2016



Dear colleagues and friends,

The time has come for me to take stock of my presidency – a short, two-year presidency! This is normal in an international organisation made up of 47 member States, where everyone must be given the opportunity to hold senior positions. But I would like to point out that, in reality, a term of office is much longer than it seems if successive presidencies are taken into account. The outcome of a presidential term cannot be ascribed to the incumbent alone. The presidency of the Congress is like a relay race. Each President takes the baton from his or her predecessor and passes it on to the next President. This means that the action of a President is part of a collective continuity.

I should like to begin by warmly congratulating Gudrun for her election as President; she has just been passed the baton, and she will in turn pass it on at the end of her term of office. I know she will continue with the work already done so far, drawing on the courage and determination that she is known for.

For some years now, the Congress has been a political partner of the main Council of Europe bodies, with the aim of serving local and regional democracy.

Our main tool is the European Charter of Local Self-Government. From the first ratification in 1987 by Austria, to the latest ratification, 26 years later, by San Marino, this treaty has now become the common heritage of all of the 47 member States, which are completely or partially covered by the provisions of the Charter.

The Charter is a treaty that allows States to express reservations. And this is a good thing, because its flexibility has made it a convention common to all the member States. However, we have become convinced that the need now is to harmonise the European legal area with regard to local democracy. This is why we have set ourselves an objective of “100 % of the Charter across 100 % of European territory”, and for a number of years we have been concentrating most of our efforts on this goal.

This objective has driven us to develop a political dialogue with governments in order to support them in the implementation of our recommendations.

As I step down from the presidency, five post-monitoring road maps have been signed with governments committed to implementing recommendations formulated by the Congress in the context of the monitoring exercise. Others are currently under discussion. This is a major innovation to ensure that our monitoring recommendations are acted upon.

We must continue to engage in dialogue with member States' governments and convince them to honour the commitments they entered into upon ratifying the Charter, which constitutes a unique legal instrument for upholding and promoting local and regional democracy in Europe. The Charter is also a

source of good practices for national authorities and provides an opportunity to improve local and regional management and governance.

Our societies are experiencing significant crises and, as I have often said during my presidency, decentralisation is part of the solution to these crises - not the only one, but an essential element, as long as our governments are willing to consult us and involve us in determining policies in areas that closely concern us. Unfortunately they do not always do this.

Strengthening local and regional democracy means more responsibilities for towns and regions and more opportunities for their citizens to participate in decision-making processes.

It is by offering improved local public services that we can encourage the development of fairer and more inclusive communities.

This is the message that we must continue to deliver to our citizens and our governments.

This work is encoded in the Congress' DNA, and this is the work that I carried out with all of my colleagues. It is a team effort and I would like to sincerely thank the two Presidents of the Chambers, Gudrun Mosler-Törnström and Anders Knape, but also the Vice-Presidents, the Bureau members, all of my colleagues, and the Secretariat who have accompanied, represented and supported me over the past two years.

I am well aware that there is still much to do, but at the heart of the mandate of President of the Congress there is a long tradition of solidarity in pursuing our project, with the result that we are all moving forward in the same direction, towards the same objective, while taking turns to carry the baton in this unfinished obstacle course.

I pass the baton on to Gudrun with complete confidence.

President François Hollande, who visited the Council of Europe last week, said in a recent speech "we are always replaced, sometimes regretfully, but what matters is continuity".

Dear Gudrun, while stepping down from the presidency, I will remain loyal to the Congress and determined to fulfil the objectives that we have collectively set.

Thank you for your attention.

APPENDIX 3: COMMUNICATION OF THE NEWLY ELECTED PRESIDENT GUDRUN MOSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM – 20 OCTOBER 2016



Dear colleagues,

Two years after my election as President of the Chamber of Regions, in October 2014, the time has come to take stock of the achievements of the Chamber in the light of the longer perspective of the work of this Chamber.

Promoting regional democracy throughout Europe has always been the frame for our activities. This is how we came to discuss devolution and regional self-government in March 2015. Let me recall the thematic debate held during our March 2015 Session on “Scotland after the 18 September 2014 Referendum”. It was with great interest that we followed the Scottish independence referendum - where the majority of Scottish people voted to remain within the UK. The thematic debate that we then held during our 2015 October Session, in the presence of

UK Ministers and Scottish politicians confirmed that the way the United Kingdom and Scottish authorities have dealt with the people of Scotland's aspirations for reinforced autonomy or independence, can be regarded as a best democratic practice.

For obvious reasons, Ukraine has been very high on our agenda throughout 2014. During the debate on “the Regional dimension of the decentralisation process in Ukraine” we were able to take stock of the positive results in developing regional democracy achieved in this country. This gives me the opportunity to reiterate that I commend Ukrainian authorities' political will to go forward and push their reform on decentralisation. This is crucial on Ukraine's path to further consolidate a pluralist democratic society based on European values.

The Congress stood and stands by Ukraine [-via its post-monitoring dialogue, observation of local and regional elections and cooperation programmes-] and I had the opportunity to emphasize this at the meeting of the European Union Committee of the Regions' Task Force on Ukraine, in Odessa on 5 July 201. On that occasion, I was pleased to note that the Congress and the Committee of the Regions of the EU have, once again, successfully joined forces.

Let me mention some other priorities of my Chairmanship that were successfully implemented by the Chamber. One of them was regional and minority languages. I believe that languages must be used, in public and private, in order to survive and thrive and I am proud that the Congress is one of the key players in minority language promotion.

I enjoyed the thematic debate on regional or minority languages in Europe one year ago. The Congress was instrumental in the creation of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages in the 1980s and I look forward to the report on this subject which will be submitted to our Chamber in October 2017, in connection with the 25th Anniversary of the Charter on Regional or Minority Languages.

I also enjoyed the very dense and fluent debate we had during our last session on “The evolution of regionalisation in Council of Europe member states”. We strive for strengthening local and regional

democracy throughout Europe, and it was important to hear what you had to say about these trends. I do believe that regionalisation can contribute to greater political stability. It is a means to prevent conflicts, as it encourages the expression of specific cultures and needs and provides responses to these needs. The Congress motto "Strong Regions in Strong States" sees its full expression in this context.

I really appreciated that so many of you, active politicians in your countries, were eager to share the situation in your regions and I hope that this enthusiasm will be renewed later this morning during our debate on the Social Charter. I like this working method of the Chamber: organising an open debate to gather fresh information about a topical issue and then being able to deepen the reflection and gather good practices.

I am very happy with this new approach of the Chamber, a "practical" approach, identifying in which policies, regions have (or should have) additional competencies, looking for obstacles and collecting good practices for the benefit of all. This is a very efficient way to work in synergy with other sectors of the Council of Europe, for the mutual benefit of both parts.

Dear colleagues,

The economic and financial crisis of these years had a broad impact on regional democracy. Local and regional authorities have been threatened by the consequences of the crisis, in terms of loss of autonomy, lack of resources and indebtedness. The economic crisis has been used by some of our governments to take powers back from local and regional authorities, making increasingly difficult for our regional authorities to provide responses to the legitimate citizens' demands. In this respect I welcome the decision of the Governance Committee of the Congress to start preparing a report on the financial difficulties that territorial authorities are facing.

Let me finally express my satisfaction for the fact that the initiatives launched by the Chamber served as a basis and source of inspiration for the Congress' reports and sessions' themes. It is thanks to your ideas, your contributions and your support, that this has been possible.

APPENDIX 4: CONGRESS PRIORITIES FOR 2017-2020

Congress priorities 2017-2020

Report
CG31(2016)13final

Rapporteurs¹⁰: Anders KNAPE, Sweden (L, EPP/CCE)
Gudrun MOSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM, Austria (R, SOC)

Summary

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities represents the local and regional authorities of the Council of Europe member States. It contributes to the inclusion of the local and regional dimension in the activities of the Council of Europe on democracy, rule of law, and human rights.

The action of the Congress is intended to promote local and regional democracy, identify tools necessary for its proper functioning and to help communities respond to the challenges and difficulties they face. It also helps to strengthen the local and regional voice vis-à-vis the central and federal governments and other European organisations.

Its statutory activities are based on the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the Reference Framework for Regional Democracy.

Its goal is to ensure effective responses to the needs of local authorities and their citizens, while continuing to improve the relevance and effectiveness of its action in the field in the framework of the Council of Europe priorities.

The adoption of the priorities for 2017-2020 gives the Congress the opportunity to recall its statutory missions, assess its action in light of the 2013-2016 priorities and identify strategic directions for the coming years, which include:

- **Enhancing the quality of local and regional democracy** – especially monitoring and strengthening the European Charter of Local Self-Government, observing local and regional elections, raising awareness on human rights at local and regional level and promoting ethics and transparency.
- **Building safe and inclusive societies that respect diversity** – especially combating radicalisation and violent extremism, integrating refugees and migrants, promoting intercultural dialogue and citizen's participation, in particular among young people.

¹⁰ L: Chamber of Local Authorities / R: Chamber of Regions
EPP/CCE: European People's Party Group in the Congress
SOC: Socialist Group
ILDG: Independent and Liberal Democrat Group
ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists Group
NR: Members not belonging to a political group of the Congress

RESOLUTION 406 (2016)¹¹

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, as an assembly of the local and regional authorities of the Council of Europe member States;

1. represents the local and regional communities and their elected officials and helps to ensure their participation in the Council of Europe action aimed at promoting and defending democracy, the rule of law and human rights;
2. defines its new priorities and the direction of its activities at each renewal session of the Congress;
3. consults the national associations of local and regional authorities to define the strategic orientations of its work;
4. has considered the project on priorities for 2017-2020 that aims at:
 - a. enhancing the quality of local and regional democracy and governance, human rights and the rule of law in Council of Europe member States;
 - b. helping local and regional authorities and national governments to face the challenges resulting from the many crisis affecting Europe;
 - c. promoting, sharing and exchanging knowledge and experiences as well as co-operation between elected members of communities of all member States;
 - d. developing citizen participation in the political process and in the creation of a European continent that respects common values;
 - e. developing co-operation with its institutional partners;
5. adopts its 2017-2020 priorities and instructs its Bureau to overview their implement action by the Congress chambers and committees.

¹¹ Debated and adopted by the Congress on 21 October 2016, 3rd sitting (see Document CG31(2016)13final, appendix), rapporteurs: Anders KNAPE, Sweden (L, EPP/CCE) and Gudrun MOSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM, Austria (R, SOC).

APPENDIX I

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A. Introduction

1. The preparation of the priorities for 2017-2020 constituted a key moment for the Congress to reflect on its role, its work and the strategic lines of approach for the years ahead.

2. The Congress is committed to pursuing its action in the spirit of the reform it began in 2010 and to working with the aim of increasing its political and operational responsibilities and enhancing the impact of its recommendations and the associated co-operation activities.

3. In setting its priorities, the Congress sought to ensure that it provided a response to the needs of the authorities it represents and continued to improve the relevance and effectiveness of its action on the ground.

4. Furthermore it enhanced its institutional role as the third political body of the Council of Europe and the only political Assembly to defend the interests of the local and regional authorities across the greater Europe. It will continue to provide these authorities a platform where they may present their know-how and experience in addressing the challenges they are facing and share good practices and solutions to common problems at all levels of governance.

5. As a representative body of local and regional authorities, the Congress can provide answers to the difficulties they face and identify the tools necessary for the proper functioning of local and regional democracy. It also helps strengthen the voice of the local and regional level vis-à-vis central and federal governments, within the Council of Europe and other European organisations.

1. The role of the Congress in the Council of Europe

6. The Congress implements the local and regional dimension of the Council of Europe's action in the field of democracy, human rights and the rule of law.

7. In its present form, it was established in 1994. Its terms of reference and functioning are based on the Congress Charter and Statutory Resolution, adopted by the Committee of Ministers in 1994 and recently amended in July 2015 (see Appendix 1).

8. The role of the Congress is to promote local and regional democracy, strengthen authorities' self-government and improve local and regional governance. It monitors the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the Reference Framework on Regional Democracy by the Council of Europe member States and the holding of free and fair elections at local and regional level.

9. The Congress provides its members and its institutional partners in the Council of Europe and beyond with a platform to exchange ideas, experiences and good practices. It encourages these exchanges and partnerships and seeks to strengthen dialogue between all players in the field of local self-government and regional democracy.

10. In addition to its role as a forum for exchange, the Congress is a consultative body for the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe as well as a monitoring body and it carries out co-operation and thematic activities.

11. In 2014, Secretary General Thorbjørn Jagland set out his priorities for the Council of Europe during his second term of office. These "seven imperatives" were aimed at increasing the relevance and effectiveness of the Organisation.

12. Top priority was given to strengthening the European Court of Human Rights and the principle of shared responsibility. The second imperative was the strengthening and expansion of co-operation with member States. The third priority was the upholding of democratic principles. The fourth priority was to provide assistance to neighbouring countries by introducing the next generation

Neighbourhood Partnership. The fifth imperative was to strengthen the Social Charter and the sixth was to make the Organisation stronger and more cohesive. Lastly, the seventh imperative was to enhance the Council of Europe's operational capacity.

13. On the basis of these "seven imperatives" and the Council of Europe's programmes and budget, the Congress will continue to support the values and standards of the Council of Europe, defending respect for human rights, the rule of law and democracy while contributing to the building of more inclusive societies for the citizens of Europe. It will focus in particular on implementing the Council of Europe's policies, conventions and campaigns, seeking, amongst other things, to incorporate a gender dimension, children's rights and the rights of civil society into all its activities and texts.

14. The Congress will continue to work closely with other entities of the Council of Europe in areas of common interest and with its external institutional partners, such as the EU Committee of the Regions and the national and European associations representing local and regional authorities.

2. Implementation of 2013-2016 priorities

15. The previous Congress priorities adopted at the October 2012 session for the period 2013-2016 focused on three key areas:

- Raising the quality of local and regional democracy and human rights in Europe,
- Rising to the new challenges resulting from the economic and financial crisis,
- Developing co-operation and partnerships.

16. In order to implement these priorities, the Congress has strengthened its monitoring activities, refocused its work in line with the authorities' needs and enhanced its political dialogue with governments and institutional partners while at the same time putting in place tools aimed at ensuring visible and sustainable results in the field. It has also sought to identify and anticipate trends and developments and continued to adapt to political and societal changes in member States and at European level.

17. As part of the monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the observation of local elections, the Congress has increased the number and the quality of its missions and adopted new rules in this respect in order to maintain a high standard in its work. It has paid special attention to following up its recommendations and their implementation by the member States and stepped up its co-operation with other organisations. It has in particular strengthened dialogue with governments by adopting post-monitoring procedures to give practical follow-up to its recommendations, and implemented co-operation and partnership activities in several member States, in particular to respond to recurring issues identified during its monitoring activities and its observation of elections.

18. The Congress has raised awareness among local and regional authorities of the importance of upholding human rights by including this dimension in the role and activities of its Monitoring Committee and by developing performance indicators. It has promoted the networking of cities and regions for the reception of migrants and refugees and has drawn up a number of strategies and tools, in particular in the field of fighting violent extremism and radicalisation.

19. It has contributed to the projects and campaigns undertaken by the Council of Europe such as the 1 in 5 Campaign which it has promoted at local level with its Pact of Cities and Regions against sexual violence towards children. It has also supported the No Hate Speech Campaign and the Campaign against domestic violence.

20. It has encouraged its members to seek to protect the most vulnerable population groups, including the Roma, and in this connection, it set up the Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma inclusion. It has promoted greater citizen participation in local and regional life, especially through its European Local Democracy Week. It has encouraged local and regional authorities to guarantee the rights of LGBT people.

21. As part of its strategy against radicalisation at local level, it has issued guidelines on the prevention of radicalisation leading to terrorism for local and regional authorities and begun devising tools to promote interfaith dialogue at local level.

22. Its work has been undertaken and led by the Congress members, with the support of its Secretariat and in co-operation with other institutional partners both within the Council of Europe – in particular the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly, the Commissioner for Human Rights, the Venice Commission and the operational Directorates General – and outside, in other

international organisations, such as the European Union and its Committee of the Regions, and with national and European associations of local and regional authorities and partners such as the European Forum for Urban Security.

23. During the October 2015 session, the President of the Congress and the Presidents of the Chambers presented a mid-term evaluation of the work carried out under these priorities. The adoption of the new priorities for the next Congress term during the October 2016 session will be an opportunity for the Congress President and the Presidents of the Chambers to present a global assessment of the work carried out and implementation of the 2013-2016 priorities.

3. Outlook for 2017-2020

24. The economic and financial crisis of recent years has had a broad national and European impact which has also had a huge influence on the functioning and quality of local and regional democracy. Local and regional authorities have been faced with the consequences of the crisis, in terms of loss of autonomy, lack of resources and indebtedness. A recentralisation trend has, moreover, been observed in several member States.

25. Furthermore, authorities have also been facing new challenges such as the difficulties associated with the management of high numbers of refugees and migrants, the long-term integration of these new population groups, and the rise of various forms of extremism, rejection, nationalism and terrorism in European societies.

26. The new priorities for 2017-2020 take these developments into account and reflect the particular local and regional consequences of national, European and international developments. They also look at how new technologies will impact and change political life at local level over the coming years and how access to these new technologies – the internet in particular – can be promoted in rural areas and for the elderly.

27. They build on the work already achieved during the period 2013-2016 and represent in this regard continuity in the action of Congress. They form the general framework in which the Congress will be able to undertake its statutory and specific activities and develop its tools in order to help authorities face up to the challenges and deal with the specific difficulties they meet in the exercise of their responsibilities towards their citizens.

28. The Congress will enhance its close co-operation with its institutional partners inside the Council of Europe and outside, in particular with the Committee of the Regions and the European associations of local and regional authorities.

29. It will pursue its dialogue with the national associations of local and regional governments, to involve them in Congress activities and to advocate their role with the member States' governments.

30. The Congress will continue its efforts to give its work more visibility, in particular by promoting and circulating its reference documents and texts and developing new working tools for its members and stakeholders.

31. When identifying and drafting the priorities, between October 2015 and October 2016, the rapporteurs consulted widely with members of the Congress and the national and European associations of local and regional authorities. They have incorporated the specific contributions of the members of the Plenary Bureau, the Bureau of the Chamber of Local Self Government and the Bureau of the Chamber of Regions and of the three Congress committees – Monitoring, Governance and Current Affairs.

32. The priorities of the Congress will be implemented by its two chambers and three committees and be reflected in their work programmes.

33. The Bureau of the Congress will be responsible for ensuring implementation of the priorities in the activities of the Congress. It will make a mid-term assessment of the priorities and their relevance in the light of political developments in Europe and in the member States and will, where necessary, update them.

B. The priorities

I. Enhancing the quality of local and regional democracy

34. Democracy is one of the basic European values and local and regional democracy is nearest to the citizens.

35. The primary role of the Congress is to promote and defend local and regional democracy in keeping with the values and priorities of the Council of Europe. In this respect, the Congress promotes multilevel governance throughout Europe.

36. In Article 3 and 4 of the Congress Statutory Resolution, the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe entrusts the Congress with monitoring activities in connection with the European Charter of Local Self-Government and with the observation of local and regional elections. The full wording is reproduced in Appendix I.

37. At its 1112th meeting in April 2011, the Committee of Ministers encouraged the governments of member States to take account, when implementing governance policies and territorial reforms, of the Reference Framework for Regional Democracy, adopted in Utrecht in November 2009 by the Ministers responsible for local and regional autonomy.

38. In carrying out its work, the Congress contributes to reinforcing and guaranteeing local and regional democracy, in the context of the economic crisis and its consequences for local authorities. In the coming years, the Congress will pay special attention to new trends and will combat any reduction in the powers and autonomy of municipalities.

39. In particular, it will continue to work towards compliance with the concomitance principle between the competences of local authorities and the financial resources which are allocated by central governments, as provided by Article 9 of the European Charter of Local Self-government. It will also continue to look for overall incentives aimed at continuing the processes of decentralisation and strengthening of local and regional democracy.

1. Promoting local democracy

40. As Europe's populations become increasingly urbanised, the management of towns and cities is becoming more and more critical for citizens' quality of life. At the same time, Europe's populations are changing fast, becoming increasingly mobile and diverse, which itself brings new tensions, issues of living together and security problems. These trends also affect the relations between rural and town communities which the Congress will continue to follow.

41. Fundamental to the principle of subsidiarity is the conviction that it is local authorities which are best placed to meet the needs of citizens and to put forward solutions to their problems. A few years ago (in 2008) the Congress adopted its "European Urban Charter II - Manifesto for a new urbanity", setting out these challenges and giving guidelines for how they should be tackled.

42. In 2015 the Chamber of Local Authorities adopted a report on "New forms of local governance".

43. The Congress, and in particular its Chamber of Local Authorities, will continue to debate, share experience and put forward solutions to the problems facing Europe's towns and cities, including in areas of urban development, environment and the preservation of cultural and architectural heritage. It will promote quality and accessibility of public services delivered by local communities.

44. It will continue to identify changing trends of local public services, local governance and central-local relations.

45. It will pursue its work to improve local democracy through enhanced citizen participation at local level and support for local authorities in their work to build safer and more inclusive societies.

2. Promoting regional democracy

46. The Congress is convinced that regional democracy is a factor for political and territorial stability in Europe. It keeps a close watch on trends in regionalisation in its member States and stands ready to provide its support and expertise wherever needed. In recent years, it adopted three important reports on "Regions with special status" (October 2013), "Trends in regionalisation in Council of Europe member States" (October 2015) and "Autonomy and borders in an evolving Europe" (March 2016).

47. As a follow-up to this work, the Congress will continue to act as a strong advocate of regional democracy throughout Europe. It will further promote, including through its monitoring, post-monitoring and co-operation activities, the Reference Framework for Regional Democracy, which will have its 10th Anniversary in 2019, as an instrument promoting political stability and territorial integrity.

48. It will pursue and strengthen its co-operation with European regional associations, in particular through its Chamber of Regions, and develop the regional dimension of its co-operation with the Committee of the Regions of the European Union.

3. Monitoring local and regional democracy

49. Monitoring of local and regional democracy and the observation of local and regional elections are among the core activities of the Congress. Over the last few years, the Congress has developed a coherent practice, streamlined its procedures and consequently introduced new rules and procedures.

50. The quality of local and regional democracy requires compliance with international law, which generates obligations for those states that have ratified related treaties such as the European Charter of Local Self-Government and its Additional Protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority.

51. In addition to these texts which impose a number of legal obligations on member States and local and regional authorities, the Reference Framework for Regional Democracy is also a collection of guidelines that states can learn from when they are in the process of reform or reflecting on regional democracy.

52. Lastly, the recommendations made by the Congress to the authorities of the states concerned are also a reference basis and a key vehicle for strengthening the quality of local and regional democracy.

53. On a regular basis, the Congress draws up country-by-country reports on the situation of local and regional democracy in all member States and ensures, in particular, that the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government are implemented in domestic law. It submits its recommendations to the Committee of Ministers which forwards them to the governments concerned.

54. The Congress will continue to promote the implementation of these texts by states and monitor the policies and reforms pursued in the field.

55. The Congress will continue to organise monitoring visits to all member States on a regular basis and adopt recommendations on improvements to be made in law and in practice.

56. Considering the consequences of the economic crisis for the local and regional communities, it will in particular pay attention that necessary and adequate financial support is given for municipal activities and services, in accordance with the principles of the Charter.

57. The Congress will elaborate, at least once during each mandate, a compilation of the main findings of the monitoring of the situation of local and regional democracy in the member States which would identify recurring issues in the light of the Charter and on which the Congress should focus its action in order to better assist member States. The result of this process of scrutiny will serve the dialogue with the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and the member States.

4. Applicability of the Charter in the member States

58. In 2013, the Congress enumerated the recurring issues identified in its monitoring recommendations submitted to states. This work makes it possible to pinpoint the main challenges that are common to all national authorities in terms of local democracy issues and enables the Congress to target its actions and its assistance more accurately and meet the needs of states more effectively. It informed the Committee of Ministers of these recurrent issues and decided to present an update every three years.

59. The Charter is one of Council of Europe Conventions that offer a particular system of ratification “à la carte”. In ratifying the Charter, States undertake to comply with a hard core of basic principles whose ratification is compulsory. At the same time, Article 12 enables States to refrain from ratifying specific provisions of the Charter. This flexibility makes it possible to accommodate the diversity and specific features of local government structures in member States. But Article 12 also lays down that each State which ratifies this text considers itself to be bound by it. Consequently, the Charter is applicable and thus can be directly invoked before courts.

60. *The Congress will continue to advocate the implementation of all provisions of the Charter, encouraging, particularly through political dialogue as part of its monitoring and/or post-monitoring activities, the ratification of provisions not yet ratified by certain states, so that 100% of the Charter will as far as possible cover 100% of the territory of Europe.*

61. *In addition, the Congress will pay a particular attention to the applicability of the Charter in order to curb any reluctance or denial in applying it.*

62. *It will on a regular basis take stock of the situation, including identifying which member States have not fully ratified and/or transposed the Charter into domestic legislation and will submit its updates to the Committee of Ministers.*

63. *It will also continue to keep a close watch on trends in regionalisation and to promote the development and strengthening of regions, on the basis, in particular, of the Reference Framework for Regional Democracy. It will also continue its reflection on the potential of regional structures and institutions for reducing regional tensions.*

5. Dialogue with member States

64. The Congress maintains a regular political dialogue with member States through the Committee of Ministers as well as through bilateral meetings with governments of member States in the framework of post-monitoring activities. This dialogue seeks to promote local self-government principles and to work directly with governments to better implement the European Charter on Local Self-government which they ratified. This co-operation with national authorities is a precondition for strengthening the implementation of Congress recommendations on local and regional democracy. It is based on a constructive discussion on the main challenges that national, local and regional authorities have to deal with and is a key to the discovery of relevant solutions.

65. *The Congress will pursue its regular dialogue with the Committee of Ministers, its Rapporteur Groups and its steering committees.*

66. *It will continue to share its expertise with those states which so request and to offer its support for reforms on the basis of a roadmap drawn up jointly with the authorities of the states concerned, containing a timetable for implementation of the measures on which they have agreed.*

67. *As part of this effort it will continue to promote a structured and regular political dialogue with those member States that have either not fully ratified the Charter (and/or its additional Protocol) or not transposed it into national legislation to identify ways they can be supported in ensuring the implementation of Congress recommendations for full compliance with the Charter.*

6. Observing local and regional elections

68. In addition to its monitoring activities of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, the Congress observes local and regional elections upon invitation by the national or regional authorities responsible for the organisation of elections. Through these missions which lead to reports and recommendations, the Congress helps to improve electoral processes based on international standards, and more generally, foster greater democratic stability in Europe.

69. In recent years, the Congress has enhanced its co-operation with strategic partners working in the field of election observation, in particular the OSCE-ODIHR, the EU Committee of the Regions and the Venice Commission whose Council for Democratic Elections is currently being chaired by the Congress. This has enabled the Congress to have a greater impact and a higher profile within the Council of Europe and beyond.

70. *The Congress will continue to organise missions to observe local and regional elections, where appropriate in co-operation with other European institutions. It will develop country-specific recommendations based on specific observations in the field together with reports on recurring across-the-board electoral issues including the quality of voters' lists, misuse of administrative resources during campaigns and voting rights at local and regional level.*

71. *In addition, it will pursue the dialogue with stakeholders in the respective countries for a more consistent implementation of its recommendations in the interest of further democratic development.*

7. Awareness-raising of human rights at local and regional level

72. The Congress has undertaken to make local and regional elected representatives more aware of their human rights responsibilities in carrying out their responsibilities vis-à-vis the daily lives of local residents. This includes the social dimension of Human Rights enshrined in the European Social Charter.

73. It has collected data and examples of good practice on implementation of policies by local and regional authorities. In May 2015, it organised an international Forum, with the participation of the Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights, during which the Graz Declaration was adopted.

74. The Graz Declaration sets out the parameters of a series of activities that the Congress will implement within an Action Plan in the coming years. These will include an international symposium in 2017 and the drawing up of a practical handbook to provide elected officials with the tools enabling them to take appropriate decisions which are in full compliance with human rights in areas which have an impact on fundamental freedoms (for example in the fight against radicalisation and terrorism).

75. The Congress will continue and intensify its awareness-raising work, in co-operation with other partners.

8. Promoting ethics and transparency at local and regional level

76. Good political governance is based on the population's trust and elected representatives at all levels must therefore act as role models for society as a whole. In a resolution adopted in 2015, the Congress states that "People who occupy public office must have a high level of integrity and should ignore, in their decisions, their personal interests or other considerations related to their personal position".

77. The Congress will work on means to prevent corruption, which requires the strengthening of values based on ethics and transparency, including transparency in declarations of interest and public procurement. It will in particular promote rigorous governance frameworks and the development of common standards, as part of an overall and cross-sectorial strategy which will also involve other international organisations and specialised entities. The Congress will also support the development and the widening of the use of e-democracy tools on a local and regional level, as this can help to increase transparency and better involve citizens.

78. Reports will be drawn up and the 1999 European Code of conduct for the political integrity of local and regional elected representatives will be revised and extended to cover executive staff and officials in local and regional government.

9. Implementing co-operation programmes

79. Fully involved in the preparation of Council of Europe Action Plans, the Congress Secretariat develops and implements co-operation projects at local and regional level. These activities are taking into account the Congress monitoring reports and elections observations reports as well as its thematic priorities, and are driven by the demand of the member States themselves. The guidelines adopted in March 2015 on "Improving the impact of the recommendations of the Congress – Guidelines for co-operation activities in member States of the Council of Europe" serve as a basis for implementation.

80. The co-operation projects will consist mainly of series of peer-to-peer exchanges and interactive sessions with the participation of Congress members and experts. Easily adaptable to specific target groups, relevant themes and local contexts, these projects aim at accompanying local and regional authorities as well as other relevant stakeholders to take action in the field to further implement the principles of the Charter and the Congress recommendations. Roundtables, seminars and workshops are conceived as an experience of mutual learning and sharing of know-how and knowledge.

81. By accompanying the implementation of the principles of local and regional democracy, developing the competencies of local elected representatives (women and men) and enhancing their institutional capacity, promoting consultation among local and regional authorities, and increasing citizen participation, these co-operation programmes will support the Congress in ensuring the full application of democratic principles at local and regional levels in Europe.

82. Well established synergies with the activities of the Council of Europe's Directorate General of Democracy and its Centre of Expertise for the Reform of Local Administration will be reinforced.

II. Building safe and inclusive societies that respect diversity

83. The aim of good local governance is to create an environment and living conditions that will help citizens to open up. The Congress is convinced that local and regional authorities are more and more responsive to the expectations of their citizens in this respect and must find ways of nurturing more diversified societies increase the intergenerational balance of interests and ensure safe and prosperous living conditions.

84. The purpose of representative democracy is to ensure that all groups have an equal opportunity to voice their opinions and influence decision-making. Interaction between local residents and decision-makers and improved communication both serve to strengthen inclusion, joint responsibility of and co-operation between citizens, decision-makers and local-governments as well as non-governmental organisations. It creates pre-conditions for the strengthening of local vitality and viability.

85. The Congress will assist municipalities in exercising their powers, ensuring quality and accessibility of public and municipal services, increasing civic engagement of citizens, and searching for solutions to face a range of challenges, particularly in terms of security, integration, dialogue and respect for fundamental human and social rights.

86. The implementation of the Council of Europe Action Plan on "Building Inclusive Societies" at local and regional level will be at the centre of its action.

1. Combating radicalisation and violent extremism

87. Radicalisation and violent extremism have resulted, since the end of 2014, in an upsurge of deadly terrorist acts in many cities around the world. These attacks highlight the urgent need for cities to undertake more initiatives to combat extremism and radicalisation,

88. As part of the Council of Europe's comprehensive Action Plan for 2015-2017 on the fight against violent extremism and radicalisation leading to terrorism, the Congress drew up a strategy to combat this phenomenon in cities and regions. As part of this strategy, it produced "Guidelines for local and regional authorities on preventing radicalisation and manifestations of hate at grass-roots level" and launched a platform for exchanges to facilitate co-operation between cities with regard to the prevention of radicalisation: the "Alliance of European cities against violent extremism".

89. It is this strategy that the Congress will continue to develop in order to find lasting responses, based in particular on prevention and education. Prevention measures and education can increase youth inclusion and strengthen their own capabilities to resist violence provoking propaganda. The Congress will help by promoting the exchange of good practices in this field.

90. In a general manner, the Congress will continue fighting all forms of violent extremism and manifestations of hate at local level.

2. Integration of refugees and migrants

91. In most cases national governments and parliaments have the main responsibility for immigration policy, including the policy on refugees. The humanitarian responsibility is shared by local and regional authorities. Municipalities and regions also have an important role in promoting the integration, the participation and non-discrimination of immigrants and in advancing good relations between them and local residents. Local authorities should thus be actively involved in the drafting and implementation of the state's immigration policy.

92. In 2015, the Congress held several debates on the refugee and migrant crisis during its plenary sessions and adopted a Declaration in which it stated that, faced with a humanitarian emergency on this scale all local and regional authorities must play a major role in refugee reception arrangements, regardless of their geographical position in Europe. It also underlined the Congress's deep commitment to social cohesion and harmonious co-existence in a pluricultural society and highlighted the rich contribution made by migrants to European societies.

93. The Congress will help with the networking of cities in order that their activities and initiatives for the reception of refugees and the long-term integration of migrants can be co-ordinated more

effectively. It will promote in particular the exchange of good practices and peer-to-peer training within European networks which have been working on these subjects for a long time.

94. It will also work to strengthen solidarity and burden-sharing in the reception and integration of migrants between authorities in all European states.

95. It will in particular promote good practices concerning children and young people, whose integration in the new culture and the daily life must be particularly favoured.

3. Promoting intercultural dialogue

96. Cities, regions and states should work together to promote respect and tolerance in European societies. It is important to bridge the gaps and ignorance that divide cultures, and to promote the role of education in the acquisition of the skills needed for democratic culture. Local authorities should create public spaces that bring together citizens and allow the expression of freedom of religion or non-religious beliefs in a spirit of dialogue and exchange.

97. The Congress will further promote dialogue between the different population groups. It will support mutual adaptation and acceptance by local residents of other groups such as migrants.

98. It will be closely involved in the Council of Europe Action Plan on “Building inclusive societies” and, in this context, the No Hate Speech campaign. In particular, it will develop a local and regional dimension of the campaign.

99. Furthermore, it will help local and regional authorities to facilitate interfaith dialogue, in particular by devising educational tools that they can use to organise intercultural and interfaith activities.

4. Active participation of citizens

100. The quality of democracy depends above all on citizens’ trust in their institutions and their participation in the democratic process. Citizen participation is the bridge and vehicle for achieving the twin goals of quality of local democracy and building more inclusive societies.

101. The involvement of citizens and increased dialogue with their elected representatives must be integrated at all levels of governance. In this respect, the Congress relies on the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority which was opened for signature in 2009.

102. Furthermore, in October each year since 2007, the Congress has called on all member and several non-member States to hold European Local Democracy Week (ELDW), encouraging the participating authorities to organise events for and with citizens around annual themes decided upon in line with the Congress’s priorities.

103. The Congress will continue, particularly in its monitoring activities, to encourage national authorities to sign and ratify the Additional Protocol, especially as a number of countries that have not yet ratified it do already apply its provisions in practice.

104. The Congress will continue to support the development of activities and initiatives to promote the active participation of citizens, such as European Local Democracy Week.

105. It will also continue to be involved in the preparation and follow up of the World Forum for Democracy which has been held by the Council of Europe since 2012, and to actively participate in the event.

5. Youth empowerment

106. The Congress makes great efforts to enhance the participation of young people in the decision-making process and the public life of their communities. It promotes in particular the Revised Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life adopted in 2003.

107. Since 2014, it has involved youth delegates in its work, especially during plenary sessions. The Congress has created an ad hoc reflection group on how to encourage young people to participate in decision-making processes at European level and has adopted reports on specific issues that affect the daily lives and the future of young people.

108. Active participation in the sessions and the working group's reflection will continue. Based on this work, the Congress will continue to lead targeted activities to enhance young people's trust and interest in political institutions and to promote their active participation

109. The reflection engaged should help creating the vision of 'A Young European in the 2020s' and map out the opportunities which must be created.

110. The Congress will also encourage greater engagement and dialogue between local and regional authorities and the education systems across Europe in order to enhance civic commitment encourage greater youth participation and combat radicalisation of young people.

6. Rights and protection of minority, underprivileged and vulnerable populations

111. The role of local, regional and national authorities is to protect their citizens, with due regard for their diversity, especially when they are a minority or in vulnerable situations. They must adopt and implement policies to secure respect for their fundamental rights and ensure their integration in society. They must in particular ensure that people in vulnerable situations get information on their fundamental and human rights effectively and understandably.

112. The Congress will participate in the implementation of the Council of Europe Action Plan on Child Rights 2016-2017 and encourage exchange of best practices in the field of children's rights protection among its members.

113. It will continue to develop action to be taken at local level for Roma inclusion, in particular under the "Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion" set up in 2013 by the Congress.

114. It will continue to promote equality between women and men and encourage measures taken to prevent violence against women.

115. It will continue to defend the rights of LGBT people and fight their discrimination.

116. It will contribute to the Council of Europe strategy 2016-2022 to promote the rights and full representation and participation of people with disabilities in society.

117. It will continue to promote regional and minority languages, in particular the Council of Europe's European Charter of Regional and Minority Languages.

118. It will promote better access to proximity services and to new technologies such as the internet for elderly people so that they are not isolated or disconnected from society.

7. Empowering rural areas

119. For decades, the trend in many European countries has been the development of cities and urban centres to the detriment of rural areas. The disappearance of public services and transports, small businesses and jobs causes people in remote areas to migrate to the capitals or cities with the hope of finding jobs, a better quality of life and services such as hospitals, medical professionals, schools, transport, means of communication etc. This exodus leads to a dramatic depopulation and exclusion of rural areas as well as to the abandonment of whole sectors of the population who cannot undertake such migration, especially because of their age, their inability to pay the cost of living and housing in cities or simply because they do not want to leave their land.

120. With predominantly rural regions representing over a third of the European territory, it is urgent for national as well as for regional and local authorities to develop comprehensive policies ensuring that the European standards of living that are praised as a model across the world are applied equally to both urban and rural areas.

121. The Congress with the support of national associations of local and regional authorities will help to promote the potential of rural areas and to highlight their strengths and qualities.

122. The Governance Committee will prepare a report on "A better future for Europe's rural regions" that will be presented in October 2017 and that will focus on the issues mentioned above by looking at territorial cohesion, social sustainability, employment, capacity building and infrastructure development.

123. The Congress will also support initiatives to repopulate and revitalise these areas.

APPENDIX II

Extract from Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2015)9 relating to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 8 July 2015

Art. 1

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe [...] is a consultative organ composed of representatives of local and regional authorities.

Art. 2

1. The Congress, in addition to its consultative functions, furthermore undertakes activities the aims of which shall be:

a. to ensure the participation of local and regional authorities in the implementation of the ideal of European unity [...], as well as their representation and active involvement in the Council of Europe's work;

b. to submit proposals to the Committee of Ministers in order to promote local and regional democracy;

c. to promote co-operation between local and regional authorities;

d. to maintain, within the sphere of its responsibilities, contact with international organisations as part of the general external relations policy of the Council of Europe;

e. to work in close co-operation, on the one hand with the national, democratic associations of local and regional authorities, and, on the other hand, with the European organisations representing local and regional authorities of the member States of the Council of Europe, and notably with the Committee of the Regions of the European Union.

2. The Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly shall consult the Congress on issues which are likely to affect the responsibilities and essential interests of the local and/or regional authorities which the Congress represents.

3. The Congress shall prepare on a regular basis country-by-country reports on the situation of local and regional democracy in all member States and in States which have applied to join the Council of Europe, and shall ensure, in particular, that the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government are implemented.

4. The Congress shall also prepare reports and recommendations following the observation of local and/or regional elections.

As part of its monitoring of local and regional democracy in Europe, the Congress maintains a regular dialogue with member states of the Council of Europe. The Committee of Ministers, which includes the 47 Foreign Ministers of these states, the Conference of Ministers responsible for local and regional authorities, as well as its Steering Committees – like the one on Local and Regional Democracy (CDLR) – are partners in this regard.

Several times a year, the President and the Secretary General of the Congress provide the representatives of the 47 member states in the Committee of Ministers with a record of its activities and hold an exchange of views.



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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, 28 of which are members of the European Union. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities is an institution of the Council of Europe, responsible for strengthening local and regional democracy in its 47 member states. Composed of two chambers – the Chamber of Local Authorities and the Chamber of Regions – and three committees, it brings together 648 elected officials representing more than 200 000 local and regional authorities.

The Congress

Le Congrès

COUNCIL OF EUROPE

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