

# 20 YEARS OF THE CONGRESS

1994 - 2014



...aw Summit



1957 | First Conference  
Jacques Chaban-Delmas



2014 | 26th Ses



1994 | First Congress Session

COUNCIL OF EUROPE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

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## 20 years of the Congress: Building a vibrant democracy

20 years of the Congress is the appropriate milestone to take stock of the achievements of its political and operational work, and to pay tribute to the pioneers of the first years as well as to the former presidents of the Congress since 1994. It is also the opportunity to hear from the most important institutional partners of the Congress in the Council of Europe how they see the future for co-operation and interaction aiming at promoting and implementing the values of the Council of Europe at local and regional level.

This publication highlights the history of the Congress (since 1994) and its predecessors (since 1953) and presents an imaginary interview that Jacques Chaban-Delmas could have given on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of the Congress. The President of the Congress and the Presidents of the Chamber of Local Authorities and the Chamber of Regions outline their views on achievements and perspectives for local and regional democracy.

Building a vibrant democracy from the bottom up, in the towns, cities and regions of Europe, has always been the *raison d'être* of the Congress and its predecessor, the "European Conference of Local Authorities" for more than half a century. Local and regional politicians have been the driving force for the devolution of power through decentralisation and regionalisation on our continent, the importance of which is now recognised by the governments of all Council of Europe member States. Congress leaders and members have supported interaction and dialogue between all levels of governance and have helped to develop new ways of involving our citizens in the decision-making process by complementing representative democracy with elements of direct and participative democracy.

Today, the Congress has solid accomplishments to show, beginning with the legal basis: The European Charter of Local Self-Government and its Protocol on citizen participation, the Madrid Convention on

cross-border co-operation between territorial communities and its three Protocols, the Reference Framework for Regional Democracy, the European Charter of Regional or Minority Languages and the European Charter on youth participation in municipal and regional life, the Convention on the Participation of Foreigners in Public Life at Local Level – these are among the milestones on this way.

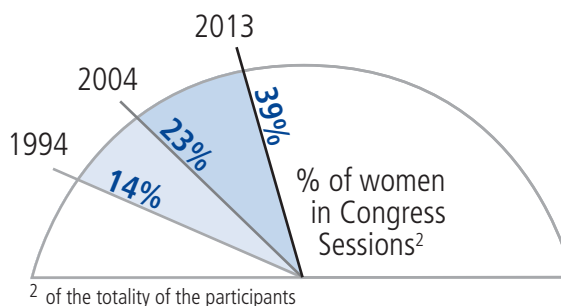
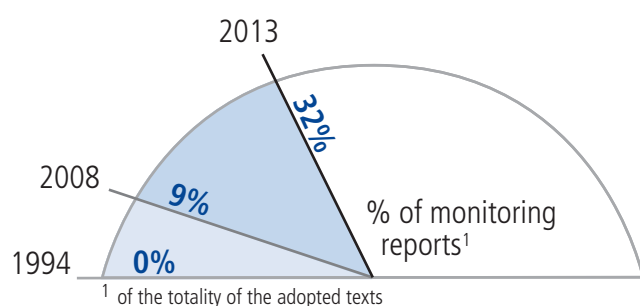
Results have been achieved by reforming the Congress, refocusing its activities on the areas where its expertise is the most renowned and crucial, namely the promotion and monitoring of local and regional democracy, and improving the procedure, quality and impact of its work in the field. Since 2008, the number of adopted texts has been reduced whereas the number of monitoring reports, as well as the participation of women has significantly increased.

Now, the Charter of Local Self-Government is ratified by all 47 Council of Europe member states, and more and more countries adhere to those Charter provisions that were not initially accepted. Europe is standing on the threshold of the Charter's universal application and a common European space of common standards for local democracy.

**Andreas Kiefer**

Secretary General of the Congress

**Focus:** The Congress has refocused its activities on the monitoring of local and regional democracy in Europe and increased women's representation.



# Milestones in the history of the Congress



The heads of State and Government of the member States of the Council of Europe meeting in Vienna on 9 October 1993 approve the creation a consultative organ genuinely representing both local and regional authorities in Europe.

**The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities was born out of the conviction that local, and subsequently regional, authorities should be given a chance to have their say as efforts to construct a united Europe began. Starting as a mere committee of the Parliamentary Assembly, it subsequently became the “Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe” and was finally, in 1994, established as the “Congress of Local and Regional Authorities”.**

In 1953, the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe – now known as the Parliamentary Assembly – set up a “Special Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs”. Two years later, the Assembly asked for a European conference of local elected representatives to be set up. The new structure, bringing together 124 local elected representatives from 13 of the Council of Europe’s then 15 member states, met for the first time in Strasbourg on 12 January 1957. With a French President, Jacques Chaban-Delmas, it took as its name “European Conference of Local Authorities”, meeting every two years at first, and then annually. In 1975, it altered its name to “Conference

of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe”, subsequently becoming the “Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe” (CLRAE) in 1983.

During the 60s, the Conference dealt mainly with the effects of European construction on local authorities, but it also took an interest in housing and urban renewal issues. It sought to encourage a European feeling in towns and cities, especially through twinning arrangements. Playing a visionary role in terms of not only subjects dealt with, but also political ideas on matters such as subsidiarity and decentralisation, it came up with the first proposal for a



## "Local democracy, a burning obligation"

### Jacques Chaban-Delmas

The Congress owes a great deal to a French statesman who was behind the Council of Europe's recognition of the importance of local and regional authorities. Between 1952 and 1957, Jacques Chaban-Delmas, Mayor of Bordeaux, worked tirelessly to set up the European Conference of Local Authorities, of which he was the first President. To pay him a richly-deserved tribute, the Congress is publishing this imaginary posthumous interview inspired by his speeches, in which Jacques Chaban-Delmas recalls the early years of the great initiative that would give rise to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe.

**Mr President, in 2014 we will be celebrating the 20th anniversary of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, an event with which the Congress members wish to associate your name.**

**J. Chaban-Delmas:** Thank you, and my thanks naturally also go to all my fellow Congress members, those of yesterday and those of today. I should say that I followed the Vienna Summit, even if from afar. President Mitterrand, whose convictions I shared with regard to the "burning obligation" to establish local democracy, handled things very well, together with the Austrian government. Thanks to him the new Congress derived its legitimacy from a decision taken by the Heads of State of all European countries. Well done the Vienna Summit!

**Were you the initiator of this recognition of local democracy?**

**J. Chaban-Delmas:** Yes, and we have come a long way ... if you only knew the boundless energy it took to launch the Conference of Local Authorities, the Congress's predecessor, between 1952 and 1957. I can tell you that, at the outset, the good fairies did not gather around the Congress's cradle. It was in fact more as if evil spirits were doing everything they could to prevent the holding of the conference. If some people had not tenaciously defended the idea, myself of course and a number of great Europeans, it would have come to nothing. These supporters were not all French – far from it, but, like me, they were all fervent defenders of local and regional rights, local democracy activists. Without them the European Conference of Local Authorities would never have seen the light of day. As time goes by, it seems as if everything in the past was idyllic, but there were indeed problems and, believe me, they were commensurate with the challenges and the results!

**Did you have a future vision for the Conference from the outset?**

**J. Chaban-Delmas:** From where I am today, I of course have a commanding view of things, which greatly facilitates a long-term vision. However, I well remember 1952 and the first meeting, at the Palais Rohan in my home city of Bordeaux, of what was then merely an ad hoc committee of the Parliamentary Assembly. Many people hoped it would cease to exist after having drawn up a report that could be consigned to the archives. I myself already wanted to involve local authorities in the European construction process and in the Council of Europe, which had a key role at the time. I had the support of Jacques Camille Paris, then Secretary General, who was a good fellow and a Companion of the Liberation, someone I particularly appreciated who did much to support the project.

**Are you saying that local authorities were absent from the European construction process?**

**J. Chaban-Delmas:** Absolutely! It was a big mistake to try to build Europe solely with the national authorities. My ambition at the time was to give the process a territorial component, to use your current-day terminology. We ourselves talked about municipalities or local authorities, the regions did not really exist. My entire approach was in fact inspired by Montesquieu's political philosophy of the separation of powers. I would like to let you in on a secret: Montesquieu was a proponent of subsidiarity even before the word came into existence. Moreover, I remember that on the day of our meeting, in 1952, we even visited Montesquieu's castle at La Brède. From then on, the Conference, and at present the Congress, was imbued with the spirit of this great man. With this prevailing spirit, I predict a bright future for you.



European definition of regions, in 1978. It showed that regions can make a contribution to the harmonious development of Europe, in both political and economic contexts. On its work was based the European Outline Convention on Transfrontier Co-operation, under which, from 1980 onwards, border regions were able to start to work together on the basis of specific objectives.

At the same time, the CLRAE wanted a European charter to safeguard local authorities' rights and roles vis-à-vis states. Drawn up as early as 1981, the European Charter of Local Self-Government was adopted by the Committee of Ministers in 1985, in the legal form of a convention, and it came into force in 1988. Adopted in 1992, the European Urban Charter and, more particularly, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages were the other two major achievements of the CLRAE, after which it underwent a radical change in role and structures.

### 1994: from CLRAE to Congress

On 9 October 1993, the Heads of State and Governments of the member states of the Council of Europe, gathered for their first Summit in Vienna (Austria), approved "the creation of a consultative organ genuinely representing both local and regional authorities in Europe". This is the true birth of the Congress, direct heir to the CLRAE. In 1994 the CLRAE became a fully-fledged organ of the Council of Europe, officially responsible for representing local and regional authorities, at which point it was named the "Congress". Its functioning was radically changed, with two Chambers being set

up, one for local authorities and the other for regional authorities, and new tasks were assigned to it. The main ones were to monitor local and regional democracy in those states which had ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government and to observe local and regional elections in member states.

The new Congress had to face up to a far wider range of challenges than its predecessor as the 90s progressed. The former "Eastern bloc countries", almost all of which became members of the Council of Europe over the years from 1991 onwards, were still highly centralised and regarded the Congress as a source of expertise which could be extremely helpful as they changed their structures. The Congress also worked to restore peace in former Yugoslavia, taking action at local level in particular, as it did again a few years later in the southern Caucasus. It set up "Local Democracy Agencies" in the countries concerned and encouraged local elected representatives to engage in dialogue and work together.

From 1997 onwards, the Congress worked on drafting a "Charter of Regional Self-Government", which was, in 2006, renamed "Charter of Regional Democracy" and was based on a similar model to the European Charter of Local Self-Government. In 2009, the draft, which the Committee of Ministers did not adopt, was ultimately given the form of a "Reference Framework on Regional Democracy", of a less binding nature and without monitoring mechanisms. The Reference Framework nevertheless makes it possible for the Congress to continue to support regional development in Europe, as it also does through various initiatives, including the creation of "Euroregions"

and increased co-operation with the Committee of the Regions of the European Union.

### The Congress, a driving force in democracy at local level

Over the first decade of the new millennium, the Congress encouraged democracy at local level and the strengthening of links between elected representatives and citizens. The introduction by the Congress in 2007 of European Local Democracy Week (ELDW) illustrated its wish to engage in dialogue and work more closely with others, while several texts were drawn up more specifically to encourage foreign residents and young people to play a part in local political life. The Congress put into practice at local level the fundamental values of the Council of Europe, particularly human rights and the prevention of racism and exclusion. It now urges local authorities and regions to work on the basis of Council of Europe programmes, such as the campaigns to prevent violence against women and the sexual abuse of children.

Between 2009 and 2010, reform of its structures and method of operation brought a new focus on its fields of excellence, first and foremost the monitoring of local democracy, with more monitoring missions being made, on a more frequent basis, and with local elections being observed. That reform has enabled it to ensure that its recommendations are better applied in the states concerned. In addition, since 2012, the post-monitoring and post observation of elections have made it possible for the Congress to meet, in the context of specific objectives, the national authorities of countries which so wish, and to draw up with them a timetable for future action.



**Thorbjørn Jagland,**  
Secretary General  
of the Council of  
Europe, addressing  
the 25th Congress  
Session on  
29 October 2013

*“The ratification by San Marino of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 2013 means that all 47 Member States of the Council of Europe are now covered by the provisions of the Charter. Twenty years after the establishment of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities we now have one single legal space for local self-government in Europe. I welcome the steps taken by the Congress to broaden its political dialogue with Member States at national, regional and local levels, and to support authorities with the implementation of its recommendations.”*



## Anne Brasseur

The creation of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities was made possible by the establishment in 1953 of a “special committee on municipal and regional affairs” within the Council of Europe’s Consultative Assembly – now the Parliamentary Assembly. This recognition by national parliaments of the role played by local and regional authorities has enabled the Congress to become the guarantor of the principles of local democracy in Europe. Anne Brasseur (Luxembourg), President of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, stresses the importance of the link between local and regional policies and the national and European levels.



## “The consolidation of the European values depends on local policies”

**For a long time you were a local elected official in your home city of Luxembourg: what did you learn from that experience?**

**A. Brasseur:** Being in local politics means dealing with people’s everyday problems while at the same time looking to the general interest. It is also the best school of politics. Unlike national elected representatives, local politicians quickly see the results of their work. Furthermore, I have always been convinced that consolidation of the great European values, such as democracy, human rights and the rule of law, depends on local policies.

**The Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress have stepped up their co-operation over the last few years: what tangible effects has this had?**

**A. Brasseur:** In 2012, the Assembly appointed a permanent Rapporteur, Sir Alan Meale (United Kingdom, SOC), to monitor local and regional issues, and we have regular exchanges with the Congress. We are working together on the integration of immigrants

and the inclusion of Roma and, in 2013, the President of the Parliamentary Assembly and the President of the Congress issued a joint declaration on the financial crisis. We must also step up our efforts to combat corruption. The important thing is to jointly ensure that local and regional authorities have effective tools and resources at their disposal to implement these policies and, in the social field, help citizens in need.

The Congress is also able to carry out co-operation programmes with governments in order to consolidate local democracy in their countries. Thus several projects have been started, including one in Albania to facilitate exchanges between local and regional elected representatives, another in Armenia to reinforce the leadership capacities of the country’s local elected representatives, and another in Ukraine to train young political leaders with a view to the 2015 local elections. The Congress will also contribute to the Council of Europe action plans for Georgia and the Republic of Moldova, and to the ones now under discussion for Azerbaijan and Bosnia and Herzegovina.

However, the Congress also takes action in respect of major topical issues.

In reaction to the global economic and financial crisis, it has, since 2009, undertaken, together with cities and regions, to seek new economic models and to promote sustainable development. It made that objective the main theme of both of its 2013 sessions.

Similarly, it has, since 2012, been making a contribution to the drafting of an action plan with a view to the inclusion of vulnerable groups at local level, and it has adopted several texts promoting the integration of migrants through entrepreneurship and access to employment. It has also taken the initiative of setting up the “European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion”, in which over 120 cities and regions from 27 countries are now involved. Since the end of 2013, the

Alliance has been carrying out its activities in the framework of the joint Council of Europe / European Commission ROMACT programme.

Since first being set up, the CLRAE and its successor, the Congress, have on many occasions managed to anticipate, and then provide support for, the main developments in local and regional politics, such as the rebirth of local self-government, the affirmation of regions and the promotion of human values and social dialogue at local level. In the years ahead, the Congress will continue to place its expertise at the service of local and regional elected representatives, particularly in dealing with the major issues thrown up by ongoing regional development, and their consequences both for states and for Europe.

12 January 1957:

# First sitting of the European Conference of Local Authorities



Jacques Chaban-Delmas chairs the first session of the Conference of Local Authorities, the precursor of the Congress.

The first sitting was opened on Saturday, 12 January 1957 at 10.10 am, with Mr Jacques Chaban-Delmas, Chairman of the Special Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs, in the Chair.

## 1. OPENING OF THE SESSION

### THE PRESIDENT (Translation)

The Sitting is open.

In virtue of Resolution 76 of 14th October 1955 of the Consultative Assembly of the Council of Europe and in accordance with Rule 9 of the Rules of Procedure of

the Conference "at the beginning of each session the Chairman of the Special Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs shall preside until a President is elected.

I accordingly declare open the first session of the European Conference of Local Authorities.



## 2. PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

### THE PRESIDENT (Translation)

Ladies and Gentlemen

No one here can fail to realise the significance of this occasion. In the name of the Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs I have the greatest pleasure in welcoming the Representatives of local authorities from the Member States of the Council of Europe, and I do so, on behalf of the whole Consultative Assembly as well as of the Committee. I am glad to be able to announce that Mr Dehousse, President of the Consultative Assembly, has himself agreed to address the Conference.

Our meeting today represents the crowning achievement of many years devoted to the cause of Europe both by the Council of Europe itself and by associations such as yours whose whole-hearted response to our appeal has made this Conference so fully representative of European local authorities.

### Creation of a Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs

The first result of our efforts was the creation in Strasbourg in 1952 of a new specialised Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs. Even at that time, our main object was to try to counter the lack of public interest shown by the various Member States, a lack of interest that resulted as we realised from lack of information, but which nevertheless was depriving our work for European unification of the necessary driving force that could only come from public pressure exerted upon the governments of the democratic countries to induce them to work for a united Europe that would include as many countries as possible and be based on a system approved by the majority.

From this point of view, we have no more numerous and efficient adherents than the local authorities, Mayors, municipal councilors and, generally speaking, all local officials, whether in cities, towns, villages or the most widely scattered country districts, form one huge group, several million strong, representing all the European Member States, which is characterised above all by devotion to the interests of its fellow citizens and by the personal confidence reposed by the latter in its members.

At a moment when the building of Europe's threatened to founder in a bog

of controversy, learned no doubt but none the less sterile, the triple aim of awakening the interest of the local authorities in the European idea, gaining their allegiance for it and entrusting them with the task of instructing their fellow citizens, appeared the essential one to pursue.

After careful consideration, the Consultative Assembly recognised the justice of this claim, in spite of certain very natural reservations of principle on the part of some who feared that members of local authorities who owed their election above all to their administrative ability might be led away from their appointed task of administration into political controversy which did not seem to be their function.

From the moment when the Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs was first set up, therefore, it was strictly laid down that, while every effort would be made to propagate the European idea both among and by many means of the local authorities, these authorities would in no circumstances be themselves invited to take any part in the inevitable political controversies as to the choice to be made by national parliaments and governments between the various European institutions or organisations.

### Visionary politicians

This fundamental undertaking has always been scrupulously observed by our Committee and by the Consultative Assembly, irrespective of the nationality or political party of any individual. That is how it is that our Committee, which began in a very small way both as regards numbers and terms of reference, has gradually won for itself a high place in the Council of Europe. Since 1952, the Presidents of the Consultative Assembly, first Mr de Menthon, then Mr Guy Mollet and finally Mr Dehousse, have never failed to show the greatest sympathy for our work and their example has been followed by the eminent representatives of the Assembly.

Before I turn to the organisation of the Conference, I should like to pay a well-deserved tribute to a devoted statesman who has always realised the essential value of our work, I mean the former Burgomaster of Antwerp, Mr van Cauwelaert, without whose active help, as Chairman of the Committee on Rules and Privileges, the Committee on Municipal and Regional Affairs would never have seen the light of day, and hence without whom the European Conference of Local Authorities would not now be meeting (Applause).

After marking its way through a hitherto unexplored field in which each step constituted a new departure requiring a constant display both of boldness and of prudence, and on the basis of wide preliminary studies the new Committee set to work to discover how to provide local authorities with the information and means necessary to solve the problems raised by the inauguration of the first European organisations.

The other day, for instance, the problems were those raised by the founding of the European Coal and Steel Community; doubtless, tomorrow, other new organisations will raise other problems.

I feel sure that this conference will be able to shed a great deal of light on the best means of carrying out its task. [...]

### A first in the history of local democracy

Lastly, I must mention the side of your work which undoubtedly shows most plainly the unusual, I am almost tempted to say sensational, nature of this meeting. You have been invited here to discover, if not a path, at least a signpost towards some procedure that will enable local authorities to take a direct part in building Europe, even perhaps to have their representatives as full members of future European organisations, even though it may not be our business here and now to define the form these organisations should take.

So far as I know, this is the first time in the history of democracies that representatives of the local authorities have been invited by representatives of the national parliaments, with the consent of their governments, to give their opinion as to how they might participate in the organisations now in process of being set up. This is the vital fact about the present meeting.

This innovation is a memorable one. In the first place, it is a recognition, even if a small and belated one, of the respect due to the whole body of magistrates and elected local officials, a body of men who are mostly little known but who represent an indispensable element in human society. In the second place, it is an expression of our desire to prevent a united Europe of the future from falling into the snare of over-centralisation with its thousand resulting ills that are sometimes a veritable scourge in the life of a nation.

# Decentralised democracy must be embedded in European governance

by Herwig van Staa

*President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe*

The future of the Congress, much as its past and present, is inseparable from the evolution of local and regional democracy in Europe. The Congress was conceived in 1957 as a Conference of Local Authorities of Europe to give a voice to territorial communities and their authorities in European construction. It was established in 1994, as the “Congress of Local and Regional Authorities”.

Over the past six decades, local and regional politicians have led step by step a spectacular advance of local and regional democracy, which has become a landmark of European democratic development. The Congress itself evolved together with Europe’s territorial dimension, becoming strong with its experience in monitoring local and regional democracy and observing elections in member states, improving governance of our communities through its policy proposals, and serving as a platform of co-operation and a forum for experience-sharing between grassroots elected representatives from across Europe.

This evolution, boosted by Congress reform in 2008-2010, has turned this assembly into what it is today: a consultative, monitoring and operational body of the Council of Europe, fully engaged with the intergovernmental sector and other partners in raising the



quality of governance of our communities and therefore the quality of life of our citizens.

## A true recognition of local and regional democracy

We have seen success in convincing national governments that local and regional authorities today are much more than mere service providers, responsible for the delivery of public services to citizens. Empowered through decentralisation with a wide range of competences, they are fully involved in policy-making and policy implementation in their communities, and make a crucial contribution, from their experience on the ground, to shaping national and European policies.

We have seen success in advocating the role of local and regional authorities in promoting and implementing human rights in their communities, in creating conditions for their full exercise at the grassroots – something that had been regarded before as a prerogative of national governments alone.

We have seen success in putting forward an agenda for enhancing citizen participation in democracy, starting at the grassroots, and we are contributing to the debate on the future model of European democracy, amid the current crisis of public confidence in democratic institutions – a model centred on the citizen.

We also have seen success in reasserting ourselves as equal partners of national governments and parliaments in an emergent system of multi-level governance,

based on shared responsibilities and clearly defined competences and roles for each stakeholder.

While we have much to celebrate, we cannot ignore that decentralisation – local and regional democracy – has reached a crossroads, challenged by the current many and increasing threats to the European democratic model, aggravated by the severe economic crisis. Governments are using economic arguments to recentralise and to claw back competences, squeezing local budgets and restricting the freedom of local authorities to raise income through taxation and to decide how to allocate and spend their resources. Corruption and lack of transparency remain serious impediments to good governance.

### Monitoring local democracy: recurrent common issues

Regular assessments by the Congress of the situation in member States have revealed such recurrent common issues as a lack of local competences or of the clarity in attributing responsibilities, insufficiency of financial resources and disproportional allocation of financial burdens to local governments, a lack of consultations with local authorities and excessive supervision by higher levels, difficulties in exercising the right to appeal higher levels' decisions in court, ineffective co-ordination mechanisms in central/local government relations, and a lack of citizen participation in local public affairs.

These shortcomings are set against the background of a crisis of confidence in public authorities and democratic institutions from a lack of citizens' access to governance and their participation in democratic decision making. At the same time, the growing cultural diversity of Europe and integration pressures compel us to work towards building a truly intercultural and

inclusive society, to change people's perceptions and attitudes and to promote diversity advantages through intercultural education and community action.

Local and regional authorities are at the forefront of responding to these challenges, and the future of the Congress depends on its ability to lead in this action. To be successful, we must work to embed a culture of decentralised democracy in European governance. We must convince national governments that it is dangerous and short-sighted to roll back democracy and participation, by seeking to make short-term financial savings on a pretext of greater efficiency. Democracy, the right to choose and the right to participate, has to be at the heart of governance – which is to say that citizens must be at the heart of governance.

### Explore new models for better governance

We must explore better governing models in our communities, seizing opportunities provided by new information technologies and e-democracy, and citizens' calls for direct democracy and greater involvement. In this new reality of changing times, the Congress can no longer confine itself to setting standards – we must pursue their practical application that yield tangible results reaching all levels of governance and our citizens at the grassroots. Through stronger partnerships with other stakeholders, the Congress must become an actor on the ground, action-driven and result-oriented.

This is why we have re-oriented Congress activities to rest on three pillars:

- firstly, to pursue our core activities and to continue improving procedures and the effectiveness of our monitoring and election observation;
- secondly, to develop post-monitoring and post-election observation dialogue with

national governments, addressing the existing problems and helping with the implementation of our recommendations;

- and finally, when it is necessary, to develop co-operation activities based on the results of our monitoring and post-monitoring dialogue.

To become more efficient, our focus today is on creating a “virtuous cycle” of monitoring – post-monitoring – co-operation activities, translating the results of our monitoring and election observation into concrete improvements.

Despite the current multiple crises, the future of local and regional democracy, the future of the Congress, can be bright. We are witnessing today new participatory models, new partnerships, new forms of dialogue and consultation. New technologies are giving us unprecedented possibilities for involving our citizens directly in the processes of local government. Never before has there been so much recognition of the importance of grassroots action, giving us a truly historic opportunity to engage in concrete dialogue with national governments, whose successive chairmanships of the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers over the past two years have made enhancing local and regional democracy their priority.

Local and regional democracy remains the foundation of any democratic system. Building democratic governance from the bottom up has always been the *raison d'être* of the Congress, and the challenge for the future is to transform our towns, cities and regions into genuine intercultural communities governed through the participation of all their residents, of all citizens. I am convinced that the Congress will rise to this challenge.

*“The quality of democracy and governance at the grassroots level continues to figure on the agenda of the Austrian Chairmanship, after those of Andorra and Armenia. The priorities presented by Austria emphasise the role of the Congress as a political assembly which, since 1994, promotes and strengthens local and regional democracy, inter-territorial and cross-border co-operation, as well as active citizenship and social inclusion in towns and regions. The commitment of elected representatives to ethical conduct and the fight against corruption at local and regional level are of topical interest in this respect.”*



**Sebastian Kurz,**  
Federal Minister for  
Europe, Integration and  
Foreign Affairs,  
Chairmanship of the  
Committee of Ministers of  
the Council of Europe.





## “The Congress has created a European framework for regionalisation”

### Herwig van Staa

President of the Congress again since 2012, Herwig van Staa (Austria, EPP/CCE) had previously held the post from 2002 to 2004, and has also twice held office as President of the Chamber of Local Authorities and once as President of the Chamber of Regions, as well as representing the cities and regions of Europe in several other international bodies.



**You first took up a seat in the Congress in 1996, and on several occasions since then you have held the highest offices in the Congress. How did you first become interested in Europe?**

**H. van Staa:** I moved towards Europe partly through tradition, and partly by chance. Innsbruck, the city of which I was Mayor from 1994 until 2002, has a very open attitude to Europe, and my predecessor, Alois Lugger, made it a truly European city. I therefore carried on that tradition, and at the same time I was given responsibility for municipal policy, firstly within the Austrian People's Party (ÖVP), and then within the European People's Party (EPP), thereby entering European political life, including that of the Congress.

**What do you consider to be the best things the Congress has done?**

**H. van Staa:** The very best is the European Charter of Local Self-Government, but mention should also be made of the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, as well as the development of regionalisation and the putting into practice of the subsidiarity principle. We have provided a European framework for regional democracy, although I regret that we were unable to secure a charter on regional self-government with the same binding force as the Charter of Local Self-Government.

**How do you see the future of regionalisation in Europe, now that certain major regions are even wondering about the possibility of independence?**

**H. van Staa:** In my view, it is not really in the interest of either states or regions to alter the present-day map of Europe. On the other hand, some regions are geographically, historically or culturally very different from the rest of the state to which they belong. The Congress urges the countries and regions concerned to adopt special legal arrangements, so as to take such specific features better into account while forestalling separatist inclinations. Furthermore, account needs to be taken of all European regions' wish to have greater control over matters of concern to them, in agreement with the other tiers of government. For that reason, we support the European Charter on Multilevel Governance proposed by the Committee of the Regions for the European Union which should have a binding character in the future. This text shall lead to a greater involvement of local and regional authorities in the development and implementation of European and national policies and standards.

**What other developments might be imagined?**

**H. van Staa:** Tomorrow's regions will work more closely together, and will be able to group together in "macro-regions" and "Euroregions". Regions, like municipalities, will have to be more inclusive and closer to citizens in order to make possible greater public participation in their functioning. What is more, local and regional authorities, particularly municipalities, will have to work more closely with each other, or even to group together. Such moves need to be made on a voluntary and co-ordinated basis, and the Congress is currently drawing up a report concerning the extent of the consultation of local and regional authorities.



## CHAMBER OF LOCAL AUTHORITIES

**“The local political level will move forward, but it must be done in the context of strong regions”**

### Jean-Claude Frécon

After first joining the Congress in 1994, the year of its foundation, Jean-Claude Frécon (France, SOC) took part in its opening session, and he has subsequently held several key posts, currently as President of the Chamber of Local Authorities.



**What can you remember about your early days in the Congress?**

**J.C. Frécon:** I first came to the Congress as Mayor of Pouilly-les-Feurs, having been proposed for membership by the Association of French Mayors. I found myself surrounded by local elected representatives celebrating the fact that the CLRAE, with its exclusively advisory role, had at last been superseded by the Congress. They were describing it as the third pillar of the Council of Europe and regarding the change as an outstanding step forward for Europe's local and regional authorities.

**The Congress is celebrating. How do you judge the first 20 years and how do you see the Europe of cities and regions 20 years from now?**

**J.C. Frécon:** To my mind, the European Charter of Local Self-Government is the Congress's greatest achievement. I believe that the local political level will continue to advance, but it can only do so if there are strong regions. This is one of the reasons why the structure of the Congress, with its division into two Chambers, seems to be right for all the different tasks which lie ahead.

*To read the full interview, flash the QR Code with your smartphone.*



## CHAMBER OF REGIONS

**“We have to regain citizens' trust and participation”**

### Nataliya Romanova

After first joining the Congress in 2007, Nataliya Romanova (Ukraine; ILDG) has subsequently held several key posts, currently as President of the Chamber of Regions.



**The Chamber of Regions was born 20 years ago, together with the new Congress. What are the assets of this Chamber since it was created?**

**N. Romanova:** I consider that the texts aiming at guaranteeing regional democracy and protecting regional identities represent an important asset of the Chamber. The Reference Framework for Regional Democracy, the European Charter for Regional or Minority Languages, are the most relevant examples.

**On regionalisation what is its future in Europe, and which are the main priorities of the Chamber of Regions today?**

**N. Romanova:** Actually I would say that we deal with the future and also the present! Regionalisation in Europe is growing slowly but constantly. During these years, also the traditionally centralised states introduced, step by step, intermediate levels of authority, democratically elected, whose competencies progressively grew. I believe that we have to regain citizens' trust and participation, by improving good governance and transparency in local and regional administrations. Regionalisation will also remain one of our major priorities.

*To read the full interview, flash the QR Code with your smartphone.*



## Alexander Tchernoff

(Netherlands) | President from 1994 to 1995

Working to strengthen the position of the Congress as the third pillar of the Council of Europe and contributing to the integration of various countries, such as Russia and Ukraine... These are the defining initiatives of my term of office as first President of the Congress. Despite a strong Western European orientation at the start of its history, the Congress asserted itself from the outset as a pan-European organisation. Did that make it representative of pan-European democracy? As was to be expected, big differences were apparent between Western and Eastern Europe in terms of the development of local and regional democracy. Has the gap narrowed since that time? The economic unification of Europe has resulted in increasing uniformity, but Europe also draws its strength from diversity. The Congress derives its exceptional legitimacy from the permanent dialogue with and between its members. Recommendations, resolutions and charters are the outcome of this process. Looking afresh at contemporary models of democracy tailored to a diverse Europe while taking into account the influence of the social media: this is one of the challenges which will need to be taken up by the Congress as it celebrates its 20th anniversary!

## Llibert Cuatrecasas

(Spain) | President from 2000 to 2001

I remember especially the first Conference of Presidents of Regions with Legislative Power held in Barcelona on 23 and 24 November 2000, at which no less than 28 regions were represented. This conference was the culmination of a lengthy effort to establish a joint working platform where the political needs of these regions could be defended and promoted. It was a success, resulting in a final declaration in which the Presidents called for greater recognition and involvement of their regions in the decision-making process at European level, with an appropriate distribution of responsibilities. The declaration also recommended the promotion of a European identity and respect for regional identity as an asset for Europe, involvement of the regions in the process of globalisation, greater economic and social cohesion and the promotion of inter-regional co-operation. Clearly, much work remains to be done before those goals can be fully achieved, but the regional cohesion of the wider Europe will not be built in a day and the progress already made is plain to see.



## Claude Haegi

(Switzerland) | President from 1996 to 1997

The Council of Europe is acknowledged as being a school for democracy. In this context, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities fulfilled its role at the time of the political changes taking place in Eastern Europe. Our role is not to export our own systems and to give lessons, but to take into account the various cultures and customs and to take as our benchmark the values that these countries subscribed to on their accession to the Council of Europe. Under my presidency, I had the honour of welcoming both Russia and Ukraine at the same time and of playing a part in, following and supporting with my colleagues on the ground, the establishment of structures complying with the rules of our Congress. To this was added our commitment in the Balkans where our modest but numerous initiatives made it possible, in direct relation with local elected representatives in particular, to carry out much appreciated practical activities in close co-operation with the local democracy agencies. An anniversary gives us the opportunity to look back at the past and take pride in certain experiences, but above all it should inspire us for the future. The Congress and its members have a lot of work ahead of them!

## Giovanni di Stasi

(Italy) | President from 2004 to 2005

On 16 and 17 May 2005 in Warsaw, the 3rd Summit of Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe took place. We were gathered in order to pursue a process of reflection and to make a choice for ourselves and for Europe. We knew that the strengthening of the democratic process and the building of a Europe without internal dividing lines were necessary and that both should be supported by European citizens, in concert with their local and regional representatives. In my capacity as President, I drew the attention of the Heads of State and Government to two objectives, paramount for the Congress and fundamental for Europe's future: improving the quality of local and regional governance and ensuring more effective territorial co-operation. I did this on the basis of practical work of great breadth conducted by the Congress through those years, and the message was enthusiastically received, as witness the report drawn up by Jean-Claude Juncker at the request of the Summit. Today the Congress is celebrating its 20th anniversary and has the drive needed to honour the undertakings made in Warsaw.



## Halvdan Skard

(Norway) | **President from 2006 to 2007**

From being a conference of “experts” – a mixture of local politicians and administrators, predominantly men – the Congress has become a purely political body with a better gender balance and added legitimacy. The improved status within the Council follows from the recognition that efficient local government is essential to any democracy. Hence local politicians are important for the legitimacy of the Council of Europe. In turn this has strengthened the Congress’ legitimacy in defending and improving local democracy in Europe, in all its variations and aspects. One important tool and guide is the European Charter of Local Self-Government. The Congress has steadily promoted the recognition and use of this Charter, as a model and an inspiration. Congress has helped “new democracies” to use the Charter as a neutral reference document for their local democracy and for the role of local authorities. Thus the strengthened Congress has given a stronger voice to democracy in Europe.



## Yavuz Mildon

(Turkey) | **President in 2008**

One of the highlights of my period as President of the Congress was a visit to Georgia in September 2008, shortly after the start of the conflict in the Southern Caucasus. I was able to meet officials of the authorities concerned, including some members of the Georgian delegation to the Congress. Already at that time, our concern was to establish how, and to what extent, the Congress and the local and regional authorities of other European countries represented in it could provide rapid and longer-term assistance to their counterparts in the areas affected. Today, with the Crimean autonomous region at the heart of the tensions between Ukraine and the Russian Federation, I remain convinced that the Congress has a vital role to play in contributing to the full restoration of local and regional self-government and in helping to manage this type of conflict and the return to normality.

## Ian Micallef

(Malta) | **President ad interim from 2009 to 2010**

Completing the reflection and consultation process on proposals for the Congress reform was certainly the most important highlight of the almost two years during which I had the privilege of leading the Congress as its acting President. Beyond the reform, I have chosen to devote my energies to strengthening the effectiveness of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and enlarging its geographical application, extending it to cover the whole of the Council of Europe area, so that it can fulfil its vocation as a truly pan-European instrument at the service of our communities. At the same time, we began a campaign for full ratification of the Charter’s provisions by those states that had left some articles non-ratified, starting with my own country, Malta, which announced adherence to the four remaining articles during that period. With the Charter ratified today by all 47 member states, and with more countries adhering to its previously non-ratified provisions, I am proud to have been able to play a part in this process, which is another major highlight of my acting Presidency.



## Keith Whitmore

(United Kingdom) | **President from 2010 to 2012**

The most significant achievement during my presidency was without doubt the reform of the Congress process which although protracted was worthwhile to leave a legacy of the Congress being transformed from a talking shop with little influence into a meaningful relevant pillar of the Council of Europe fit for purpose and able to get involved in practical solutions and to put the European Charter for Local Self-Government at the heart of the mission of the Congress. I was especially honored to be at the helm during the British Presidency and able to work closely with the British Government to promote the Congress. I was particularly pleased to work in partnership with the City of Strasbourg during the presidency and beyond to make sure that the local community knows what we are doing – as a bonus the sight of Strasbourg trams carrying the Union flag was a sight to behold. I was also determined to ensure that the Congress message was understood in national governments and my regular briefing of the ambassadors certainly made a difference to our relevance. Finally I am delighted that my initiative to launch a local democracy week in October has gone from strength to strength.

# 20 YEARS OF THE CONGRESS 1994 - 2014

**The Congress** of Local and Regional Authorities was born out of the conviction that local, and subsequently regional, authorities should be given a chance to have their say as efforts to construct a united Europe began. Starting as a mere committee of the Parliamentary Assembly, it subsequently became the "Standing Conference of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe" and was finally, in 1994, established as the "Congress of Local and Regional Authorities".

**Today**, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities pursues its work as the 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 comprises 636 elected representatives representing more than 200,000 local and regional authorities.



Palais de l'Europe



1993 | Summit of Vienna



2005 | Warsaw Summit



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