

35th SESSION

Report
CG35(2018)25final
7 November 2018

Revision of the Congress Charter: proposals for a sustainable future

Bureau of the Congress

Rapporteurs:¹ Xavier CADORET, France (L, SOC)
Marc COOLS, Belgium (L, ILDG)

Recommendation 425 (2018)..... 2
Explanatory memorandum 11

Summary

Since its reform in 2010 the Congress has continuously been striving to improve its functioning, streamline its procedures and proactively adapt its rules and it has focused its outcome on the core business of the Council of Europe as a whole. The Congress also contributed to the Council of Europe's cuts and savings resulting from the zero-nominal growth policy applied by its member States.

In early 2018 an already difficult financial situation became even more challenging for the Organisation as a whole; the impact upon the Congress, which had seen a gradual substantial decrease in its budget since 2010, was particularly hard as approximately € 650 000, initially allocated in December 2017, was removed from its budget in February 2018, representing a reduction of 9.1 % of its annual budget.

The effect upon its work was immediate and drastic; the staff situation also became increasingly difficult when the freezing of posts within the Congress Secretariat compounded the gradual drop in staff numbers from 47 in 2010 to 37 in 2018.

The Congress Bureau, as a reaction to this challenging financial situation, decided to launch a reflection on the changes needed to secure not only the institutional functioning of the Congress but also its capacity to continue to deliver, to maintain its outreach, to contribute thematically to the work of the Council of Europe and to remain a relevant and visible part of the Organisation.

The proposed changes outlined in the recommendation and reflected in the appended revised Charter, based on the Congress' 25 years of experience, are intended to safeguard the Congress' future and ensure its sustainability by giving the Congress an enhanced capacity to react swiftly and autonomously to future challenges. They consolidate the existing statutory provisions in one text and include qualitative improvements. Changes include the enhancement of the Congress' institutional independence by developing Congress-specific rules of functioning and greater flexibility in the distribution of delegates between chambers allowing national authorities to appoint delegates to the chamber which best corresponds to their internal structure and interests.

1 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

RECOMMENDATION 425 (2018)²

1. The Council of Europe's difficult financial situation in early 2018 was particularly challenging for the Congress as its budget was cut by 9.1 %, which had an immediate impact on its work, and the freezing of posts compounded an already precarious state of affairs with regard to personnel.

2. In the light of the critical situation of the Congress budget and staff in early 2018, the Congress Bureau decided that steps had to be taken to safeguard the Congress's functioning and consequently set up a Strategic Reflection Group tasked with making proposals that would guarantee the Congress' sustainability and enhance its capacity to react swiftly and autonomously to future challenges.

3. The proposals contained in the present recommendation and reflected in the appended revised Charter are those that were selected by the Bureau and are intended to secure not only the institutional functioning of the Congress but its capacity to continue to contribute thematically to the work of the Council of Europe, to deliver, to maintain its outreach and to remain a relevant and visible part of the Organisation.

4. The Congress was entrusted by the Heads of State and Government with representing the interests of the local and regional authorities of the Council's 47 member States, monitoring the European Charter of Local Self-government and its Additional Protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority, developing grass-roots democracy and bringing the local and regional perspective to the Organisation's work. Ensuring its capacity to carry out this mission requires a pragmatic approach which will enable the Congress to react, if necessary in the future, with far-reaching and comprehensive changes.

5. In order to guarantee its ability to fulfil its role sustainably and face the challenging times ahead, based on the experience of 25 years of delivery, political dialogue and in the spirit of qualitative reform, the Congress therefore decides to:

a. generally strengthen the Congress' institutional autonomy by developing Congress-specific rules of functioning which are disassociated, where appropriate, from those of the Parliamentary Assembly;

b. define its own methodology for forming national delegations based on updated population sizes;

c. make no changes to the current size, structure and language diversity of the Congress but retain the possibility to reexamine them, should future circumstances require it. For any reexamination, a transparent engagement and consultation of national delegations has to be guaranteed;

d. allow national authorities, in consultation with their national associations or respective regional co-ordination structures, to appoint delegates to the chamber which best corresponds with their internal territorial structure and interests:

i. a minimum and maximum presence of each delegation within each chamber could be defined in the *Rules and Procedures*;

ii. each delegation's choice of distribution, once made, would last one full mandate and would not be subject to change within that period;

iii. representatives, or duly mandated substitutes, would have full voting rights in their respective chambers;

² Debated and adopted by the Congress on 7 November 2018, 2nd sitting (see Document CG35(2018)25, explanatory memorandum), co-rapporteurs: Xavier CADORET, France (L, SOC), and Marc COOLS, Belgium (L, ILDG).

e. restrict representation in the plenary Bureau to one representative per member State in order to ensure the widest possible geographical representativity;

f. extend the mandate of its representatives and substitutes from 4 to 5 years;

g. extend the mandate of its presidents, vice-presidents and chairs and vice-chairs of committees from 2 to 2.5 years.

6. The Congress thanks the Committee of Ministers for its past support and encouragement and asks it to:

a. safeguard the Congress's autonomy and ability to perform its statutory tasks and thematic activities in order to fulfil its specific role within the Council of Europe and to continue to make a substantial contribution;

b. approve the revision of Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2015)9 relating to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe and the appended Charter of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, adopted by the Committee of Ministers on 8 July 2015, in the light of the proposals contained in this recommendation.

7. The Congress decides to incorporate the amended provisions of the Charter into the *Rules and Procedures* following the adoption of the revised Statutory Resolution and Charter by the Committee of Ministers.

**Statutory Resolution CM/Res
relating to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe
and the revised Charter appended thereto**

(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on XX at the XX meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)

The Committee of Ministers, under the terms of Articles 15.a and 16 of the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Having regard to Statutory Resolution Res(94)3 relating to the setting up of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe;

Having regard to the Statutory Resolution Res(2000)1 relating to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe;

Having regard to Congress Recommendation 162 (2005) on the revision of the Charter of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe;

Having regard to Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2007)6, Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2011)2 and Statutory Resolution CM/Res(2015)9 relating to the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe and the revised Charter appended thereto:

Considering that one of the bases of a democratic society is the existence of a solid and effective local and regional democracy in conformity with the principle of subsidiarity included in the European Charter of Local Self-Government whereby public responsibilities shall be exercised, in preference, by those authorities which are closest to the citizens, having regard to the extent and nature of the public tasks and the requirements of efficiency and economy;

Bearing in mind that the creation of a consultative organ representing both local and regional authorities in Europe was approved by the Heads of State and Government of the Council of Europe at the Vienna Summit;

Having regard to the conclusions of the Warsaw Summit deciding to "pursue, in partnership with the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, intergovernmental co-operation on democracy and good governance at all levels" and stating that "the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe must continue to promote local democracy and decentralisation, taking into account the internal organisation of the countries concerned, so as to reach all levels of European society";

Wishing to enhance and develop the role of the Congress within the institutional structure of the Council of Europe;

Considering that the provisions hereinafter set out are consistent with the Statute of the Council of Europe,

Resolves to approve the revised Charter of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities as appended to this resolution which replaces all previous versions.

Appendix to Statutory Resolution CM/Res

Charter of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe

(Adopted by the Committee of Ministers on XX at the XX meeting of the Ministers' Deputies)

ROLE AND MISSION OF THE CONGRESS

Article 1

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (hereinafter referred to as the Congress) is a consultative organ composed of representatives of local and regional authorities. Its membership and functions are regulated by the Charter of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe adopted by the Committee of Ministers and by the *Rules and Procedures* adopted by the Congress. The Congress shall undertake its activities within the framework of the priorities of the Council of Europe.

Article 2

1. The Congress shall be consulted by the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly on issues which are likely to affect the responsibilities and interests of the local and/or regional authorities which the Congress represents.

2. 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 the effective implementation of the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

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

4. In addition to its consultative and monitoring functions, the Congress 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 defined in Article 1 of the Statute of the Council of Europe, 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 draw up recommendations and guidelines for adoption by the Committee of Ministers wherever there is a local and /or regional dimension;

d. to prepare suggestions, in the form of resolutions, addressed to the Congress or to local and regional authorities and their associations;

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

f. to contribute to the Council of Europe Action Plans and its policy towards neighbouring regions with regard to issues having a local and/or regional dimension;

g. 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;

h. to work in close co-operation, on the one hand with the national 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 European Committee of the Regions of the European Union.

COMPOSITION OF THE CONGRESS

Article 3

The Congress is composed of two chambers: the Chamber of Local Authorities which represents local authorities and the Chamber of Regions which represents regional authorities. In addition to its statutory organs, the Bureau, the Statutory Forum and its committees, it may set up those ad hoc working groups which are necessary to perform its tasks.

Article 4

Delegates may form political groups. The functioning, prerogatives and financing of such groups shall be detailed in the Congress *Rules and Procedures*.

Article 5

1. The Congress shall be composed of 324 representatives and 324 substitutes. This number may, at the request of the Congress, be modified by the Committee of Ministers.

2. The representatives and substitutes shall represent local and regional bodies and either hold a specific local or regional authority mandate resulting from direct elections or be politically accountable to a directly elected assembly. In the latter case, it must be possible to dismiss them individually or following the decision of the aforementioned assembly and that possibility of dismissal must be provided for by law.

3. The membership of each member State's delegation to the Congress shall be such as to ensure, as far as possible:

- a.* a balanced geographical distribution of delegates from the member State's territory;
- b.* equitable representation of the various types of local and regional authorities in the member State;
- c.* equitable representation of the various political forces reflecting either the latest local and regional elections or the effective political distribution within the statutory bodies of local and regional authorities in the member State;
- d.* equitable representation of women and men meaning that all delegations must include delegates of both genders with a minimum participation of at least 30% of the under-represented gender among the representatives and among the substitutes.

4. Representatives and substitutes shall be appointed for a period of five years. The rules and procedures governing the choice of representatives to the Congress shall also apply to substitutes.

5. Representatives and substitutes shall maintain their functions until the opening of the session following the expiration of that period, referred to as renewal session, except in the event of the death or resignation of a representative or substitute, the loss of their specific local or regional mandate or the termination of their Congress mandate following application of the Congress' Code of Conduct. In such a case a replacement shall be chosen, in accordance with the same rules and procedures, for the remainder of his or her predecessor's mandate.

6. A representative or substitute who has lost his or her specific local or regional mandate may not remain a member of the Congress for more than six months after said loss. In the case of local and/or regional elections taking place up to four months prior to a renewal session, the five year mandate provided for in Article 5.4 of the Charter may be extended for a maximum of six months after the election.

Article 6

1. The number of seats allocated to the delegations of each member State shall be approved by the Congress and adopted by the Committee of Ministers. The population-based method to establish this number shall be governed by the *Rules and Procedures*. Each member State sends an equal number of representatives and substitutes.

2. Member States shall distribute their delegates between chambers in accordance with their internal structures and interests. Provisions concerning representation thresholds within each chamber shall be set out in the Congress's *Rules and Procedures*. Each member State, when notifying the Secretary General of the Council of Europe of the composition of its delegation, shall indicate those representatives and substitutes who will be members of the Chamber of Local Authorities and those who will be members of the Chamber of Regions.

3. Representatives and substitutes to the Congress shall be appointed by an official procedure specific to each member State. This procedure shall provide for consultation in each member State of the relevant associations and/or institutional bodies representing local and regional authorities and shall specify the principles to be adhered to in apportioning delegates to the two chambers. Each government shall inform the Secretary General of the Congress of this procedure. Such a procedure shall be approved by the Congress in conformity with the principles contained in this Charter and in its *Rules and Procedures*.

Article 7

1. Whenever representatives and substitutes have been appointed, the Bureau shall check their credentials. Representatives and substitutes whose credentials have been approved by the Bureau may act as Congress members with immediate effect. Their credentials shall be ratified by the Congress at its next session or by the Statutory Forum between sessions.

2. No person whose credentials have not been ratified, or who is member of a national delegation which does not comply with Article 5.3 of the Charter, may vote or receive allowances or reimbursement of expenses as they shall not be considered a member of the Congress with effect from the Congress' vote at the opening of the session.

ORGANISATION OF THE CONGRESS

Article 8

1. The Congress shall meet in session twice a year. Sessions shall be held at the Council of Europe's headquarters, unless otherwise decided, by common consent, by the Congress or its Bureau and the Committee of Ministers.

2. Sessions of the Congress and its chambers and of the Statutory Forum shall be public.

3. For the purposes of verification of credentials, a plenary sitting must be held prior to a chamber session.

4. The political groups of the Congress shall meet principally on the occasion of sessions and Statutory Forum meetings.

5. The Statutory Forum shall act on behalf of the Congress between sessions. In particular, it shall adopt reports, and organise debates and hearings.

6. The Statutory Forum shall be composed of the members of the Bureau and the heads of all national delegations. Chairs of committees and presidents of political groups shall participate, *ex officio*, in the Statutory Forum without voting rights. The Statutory Forum shall be convened upon decision of the Bureau.

Article 9

The Bureau is the executive organ of the Congress, responsible for the preparation of the session of the Congress, the co-ordination of the work of the two chambers, in particular the distribution of topics between the two chambers, the co-ordination of the work of the committees and of the ad hoc working groups. The mandate of the Bureau and its role shall be detailed in the *Rules and Procedures*.

Article 10

1. The Bureau of the Congress is composed of the bureaux of the chambers and the President of the Congress and shall be responsible, in the period between the sessions of the Congress and the meetings of the Statutory Forum, for ensuring the continuity of the Congress's work. Chairs of the committees and presidents of the political groups participate *ex officio* in the Bureau without voting rights.

2. The Congress shall elect its President, from among the delegates who are representatives in their delegations, on an alternating basis from each chamber. The President shall remain in office for two and a half years.

3. Each chamber of the Congress shall elect, from among its members who are representatives in their delegations, a president who shall remain in office for two and a half years.

4. Each chamber shall elect its bureau for a period of two and a half years from among its members who are representatives in their delegations. A chamber bureau shall be composed of the president of the chamber and seven vice-presidents, respecting as far as possible a fair geographical distribution among member States. No member State shall have more than one member in the Bureau. The bureaux of the chambers may only meet on the occasion of a meeting of the Bureau of the Congress.

5. The procedures for election to the bureaux, ensuring implementation of the provisions of the current article, shall be set out in the *Rules and Procedures*.

Article 11

Sessions and meetings of the Statutory Forum and of the Bureau of the Congress shall be presided over by the President of the Congress.

WORK OF THE CONGRESS

Article 12

1. All texts, including those approved by the chambers, shall be formally adopted by the Congress in plenary sitting or by the Statutory Forum. Recommendations and opinions shall be adopted by a majority of two-thirds of the votes cast. Resolutions and other texts shall be adopted by simple majority.

2. Recommendations and opinions of the Congress shall be sent as appropriate to the Committee of Ministers, the Parliamentary Assembly or the relevant member State as well as to European and international organisations and institutions.

3. Resolutions addressed to the local and regional authorities as a whole, and other adopted texts which do not entail action by the Committee of Ministers and/or the Parliamentary Assembly, shall be transmitted to them for their information.

Article 13

Representatives of the Committee of Ministers and the Parliamentary Assembly may participate in the sessions of the Congress and its chambers and in the Statutory Forum as provided for in the Congress' *Rules and Procedures*.

Article 14

The Congress adopts its own *Rules and Procedures* which shall provide for:

- a. the modalities for assessing compliance with the criteria of Articles 5.2 and 5.3 of the Charter;
- b. other provisions complementary to the Charter including the forms and conditions of participation in the Congress' work and in that of its chambers and other bodies, the organisation of elections, voting and ethical conduct.

Article 15

1. The Congress shall elect its Secretary General for a renewable term of five years, although he/she may not exceed the age limit applicable to all Council of Europe staff.
2. The procedure for the election of the Secretary General of the Congress is included in its *Rules and Procedures*.
3. The Secretary General of the Congress is responsible for the management of the human and financial resources of the Congress and its organs and acts under the authority of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe.
4. The Secretary General of the Council of Europe shall appoint a Director of the Congress, following consultation with the Bureau of the Congress.
5. The Secretariat of each chamber shall be provided by the executive secretary of the chamber who is appointed by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe after an informal exchange of views with the president of the chamber concerned, during which he or she shall communicate his or her intentions and the reasons for his or her choice.

Article 16

1. The Congress shall inform the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and the Committee of Ministers of its budgetary needs. Its requests shall be examined in the general context of the draft budget presented by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe.
2. The Committee of Ministers shall adopt the budget of the Congress, as part of the Ordinary Budget of the Council of Europe.
3. This budget shall be designed to cover the expenditure occasioned by the sessions of the Congress and of its two chambers, the meetings of other Congress organs, and by all other expenditure linked to its activities.
4. The rates for Congress members' per diem allowances are fixed by the Committee of Ministers. As regards sessions only the participation costs of representatives or duly mandated substitutes shall be defrayed.
5. The Secretary General of the Congress shall abide by the financial regulations of the Council of Europe and see to it that the necessary funds are earmarked for the functioning of the statutory bodies of the Congress. He or she shall regularly inform the Bureau of the budgetary situation.

6. The Secretary General of the Congress shall implement the Congress' work programme on the basis of the political priorities defined by the Bureau and adopted by the Congress. In this context, he/she shall be responsible for managing the budget of the Congress on the basis of the financial authority and responsibility delegated to him/her by the Secretary General of the Council of Europe.

7. The Congress confirms the Bureau's mission of organising a wide consultation of delegations and national associations with a view to the adoption of its priorities.

EXPLANATORY MEMORANDUM

Introduction

1. The Council of Europe is currently experiencing serious, unprecedented, financial difficulties which are due to a number of recent as well as more long-standing factors: the zero nominal growth policy, in place since 2014, Turkey's reduction by €18.5 million of its contribution to the Ordinary Budget which led directly to a €650,000 cut in the Congress' budget (9.1 % of its annual budget) and the non-payment, since July 2017, of the Russian Federation's contribution to the budget.
2. The share of the Congress in the budget of the Council of Europe has therefore fallen from 2.97% in 2010 to 2.53% in 2018, a reduction of 18%.
3. The effect upon the Congress' work has been a gradual reduction in activities since 2010, with the already demanding financial situation being compounded by the freezing of posts within the Congress Secretariat with staff numbers dropping from 47 in 2010 to 37 in 2018, that is a drop of approximately 22%.
4. In the wake of the substantial cut to its budget in February 2018, the Congress' monitoring programme was significantly impacted, in particular the 5-year rhythm of its monitoring visits, important yearly thematic events such as its conference of mayors on radicalisation and work on integration of Roma through its European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion had to be postponed.
5. Faced with this crisis the Congress Bureau was determined to find a way to ensure not only its long-term institutional functioning but its capacity to continue to deliver and contribute thematically to the work of the Council and to remain a relevant and visible part of the Organisation.
6. The Bureau consequently set up a Strategic Reflection Group tasked with making proposals that would be equal to the problem to be solved.
7. These discussions led to two main realisations; firstly, the Bureau recognised that in order to allow it to react promptly and decisively to future challenges the Congress' governing rules needed to reflect its specificity more accurately. Secondly, the Bureau underlined the main elements it considered essential for the Congress's continued functioning and which should therefore not be changed for as long as possible, namely:
 - a. two sessions a year: the Congress cannot function as an assembly with fewer sessions;
 - b. three committees: the remits of the current committees fully respond to the statutory needs of the Congress and its contribution to the work of the Council of Europe;
 - c. number of committee meetings: the current, very reduced number of meetings is the minimum necessary to ensure their capacity to produce the work which is the Congress' fuel;
 - d. the Bureau's composition: it is essential for committee chairs and presidents of political groups to be able to participate fully in the work of the Bureau together with the elected vice-presidents.

Strengthening the Congress' institutional autonomy

8. An important change proposed by the Bureau is to give the Congress greater institutional autonomy, in other words rules that are specific to the Congress' needs and not an automatic reflection of the Parliamentary Assembly's rules and procedures.

9. The first move in this direction was set in motion in March 2018 when the Congress dissociated its language provisions from those of the Parliamentary Assembly, thus giving its Bureau greater flexibility to take any appropriate decisions that might be required by future financial constraints.

10. Another area of institutional autonomy sought by the Congress concerns its system of representation.

11. Congress delegations are currently structured following the pattern originally devised for the Parliamentary Assembly decades ago with regard to:

- the size of each national delegation;
- the population figures from which the size stems (distribution methodology), and
- the ensuing country bands or groupings this creates.

12. Updating of the data used is urgently required as there have been quite substantial changes in several member States: for example, Ireland's population has risen by 30% and Luxembourg's by 37% while Latvia's has fallen by 21% since 1994. This updating would be done on the basis of the Committee of Ministers' reference document on population.

13. The changes to the Charter would give the Congress the autonomy to establish its own system of representation and distribution methodology reflecting the current population of each member State (rather than that of 1994 as is the case at present). The Bureau would be tasked with proposing a methodology which keeps disparities in representation to a minimum.

14. With regard to national delegations, the Bureau does not propose to change the current size or structure but proposes several changes that will not only enable the Congress to have greater control over every aspect of its structure at present but also make changes if future circumstances should require them.

15. With regard to delegates' mandates, the proposal is to extend their length from the current 4 years to 5, with a consequent increase in the mandates of vice-presidents and chairs of committees from 2 to 2.5 years. This would increase Congress members' ownership and enable them to take full advantage of the experience gained during their mandate, especially given the fact that the Congress only meets in session twice a year.

Giving national authorities greater flexibility when composing delegations

16. The Congress would also like to offer countries more room for manoeuvre and freedom of choice when composing their delegations.

17. A number of countries find the different constraints attached to the creation of a delegation rather difficult to manage. Under the current rules, countries without regions are nevertheless obliged to send a full contingent of delegates without voting rights to the Chamber of Regions while other countries, which consider their national structures to contain regions, cannot send a delegation with voting rights. This could be seen as unfair.

18. The Bureau therefore decided to propose a new, more flexible approach to the distribution of members of a national delegation between chambers.

19. National authorities, in consultation with their national associations or respective regional co-ordination structures, would be free to appoint their delegates to whichever chamber corresponds best with their internal structure and interests. The choice, once made, would last one full 5-year mandate and would not be subject to change within that period.

20. A minimum and maximum presence of each delegation within each chamber could be established by the Bureau, according to which countries with 2 or 3 delegates would be free to decide whether to send a member to the Chamber of Regions or not and others would have a proportional threshold of participation.

21. Representatives in both chambers would be considered full members with full voting rights.

22. While freedom of choice would be somewhat limited for countries obliged to send a minimum representation to the Chamber of Regions, the Bureau nevertheless sees various advantages to this new method of distribution in addition to it being simpler and more flexible for national authorities:

a. there would be no difference between members in the Chamber of Regions – all would have equal voting rights, and

b. delegates would participate fully in chambers which correspond with their mandate.

Conclusion

23. The proposed changes outlined above, many of which are reflected in the revised Charter, are intended to safeguard the Congress' future and ensure its sustainability by giving the Congress greater flexibility and an enhanced capacity to react swiftly and autonomously to future challenges.