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## **Activity Report of the Congress**

(March – September 2022)

### **Communication by the Secretary General of the Congress at the 1444<sup>th</sup> meeting of the Ministers' Deputies**

**27 September 2022**

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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

Communication by Andreas KIEFER, Secretary General of the Congress.....	4
<b>I. POLITICAL AGENDA.....</b>	<b>5</b>
<b>II. ACTIVITIES OF THE CONGRESS BODIES.....</b>	<b>13</b>
A. THE BUREAU.....	13
B. THE SESSION.....	14
C. THE CHAMBERS.....	16
D. THE COMMITTEES.....	17
<b>III. MONITORING OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEMOCRACY.....</b>	<b>19</b>
A. MONITORING ACTIVITIES.....	19
B. OBSERVATION OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL ELECTIONS.....	22
<b>IV. THEMATIC ACTIVITIES.....</b>	<b>25</b>
A. MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES.....	25
B. YOUTH.....	26
C. ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE.....	27
D. CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND GOOD GOVERNANCE.....	28
E. LGBTI people.....	29
F. HUMAN RIGHTS.....	29
G. CULTURAL HERITAGE.....	29
H. EUROPEAN LOCAL DEMOCRACY WEEK (ELDW).....	30
I. WORLD FORUM FOR DEMOCRACY.....	30
J. UNITED NATIONS AGENDA 2030 – IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs).....	31
<b>V. INSTITUTIONAL CO-OPERATION WITHIN THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE.....</b>	<b>32</b>
A. THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL SECTOR.....	32
C. EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR DEMOCRACY THROUGH LAW (VENICE COMMISSION).....	33
D. THE NORTH SOUTH CENTRE.....	33
<b>VI. EXTERNAL CO-OPERATION AND PARTNERSHIPS.....</b>	<b>34</b>
A. THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION.....	34
B. EUROPEAN ASSOCIATIONS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES.....	34
C. NATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES.....	36
<b>VII. CO-OPERATION PROGRAMMES AND ACTION PLANS.....</b>	<b>37</b>
A. ARMENIA.....	38
B. BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA.....	39
C. GEORGIA.....	39
D. UKRAINE.....	40
E. THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA.....	41
F. SOUTH MED PARTNERSHIP.....	42
<b>APPENDICES.....</b>	<b>44</b>

## Communication by Andreas KIEFER, Secretary General of the Congress

This activity report is an overview of the work of the Congress since the last communication of the Secretary General to the Committee of Ministers on 17 March 2022. It covers the key issues of the Congress' work since then.

The text below is based on the oral presentation by Andreas Kiefer, Secretary General of the Congress, to the Committee of Ministers' Deputies on 27 September 2022.

[Previous Activity reports](#)

## **I. POLITICAL AGENDA**

### **A. HIGHLIGHTS**

#### **Statement on International Women’s Day, 8 March 2022**

Congress Spokesperson on Gender Equality, Eirini DOUROU (Greece, SOC/G/PD), declared that gender equality is not a one-day issue but an everyday work to be done by cities and regions, by promoting this equality and combatting sexism and violence against women. Expressing her solidarity with the Ukrainian women and men, she underlined that war is a threat to human rights as a whole - but does impact men and women differently. She recalled the setbacks women's rights have suffered during the pandemic. While some progress has been made on the institutional level, in European societies, sexist stereotypes, domestic violence and femicide are still an everyday reality. To fight these inequalities, the Congress has a long-standing commitment to promoting women’s involvement in local and regional public life. It continues to support this cause through its co-operation activities and by developing concrete tools to help local politicians promote women’s participation, such as its guides on Preventing and Combatting Sexism at the local level in Georgia and in Ukraine.

#### **Antalya Diplomacy Forum – Effective Global Governance, Antalya, 12 March 2022**

During the Forum, the President of the Congress Leendert VERBEEK stressed the importance of multilateralism, based on co-operation and trust, to bring together different interests and come up with concrete solutions. He also underlined the key role of mayors who, as the first point of contact for citizens, have a responsibility to build trust not only between citizens, but also between citizens and institutions.

#### **Statement on so-called “parliamentary elections” held on 12 March 2022 in the Abkhazia region in Georgia, 16 March 2022**

The President declared that by organising these “elections”, the so-called “de facto” authorities of Abkhazia, once again, undermined the principle of the territorial integrity of Georgia forcing this region further into isolation, to the detriment of the local population. He recalled that the Congress has always shown its unrelenting commitment to the territorial integrity of member States within their internationally recognised borders. This principle is all the more important in the current context of the Russian military aggression against Ukraine. He underlined that Illegal recognition of territories of other member States can be only one step ahead of further aggression and war. The “vote” organised in Abkhazia on 12 March, instead of strengthening, further erodes stability in this region and is, moreover, the wrong signal at the wrong time.

#### **Communication to the Ministers' Deputies, 17 March 2022**

The Secretary General, Andreas KIEFER underlined that the Congress has for many years been very active in Ukraine, alongside the associations of cities and local elected representatives, implementing activities to strengthen and consolidate local democracy and that it continues to do so in these difficult times, in particular through the Cities4Cities platform which helps coordinating assistance to local elected representatives and workers active in Ukraine. The Secretary General also presented the recent activities of the Congress in the field of monitoring of local and regional democracy, observation of local and regional elections, co-operation programs in member states and in non-member states with the status of partners in democracy as well as in the field of the SDGs, environmental issues, digitisation and artificial intelligence, fight against fake news, hate speech and discrimination and promotion of gender equality, protection of children and citizen participation.

## **Exchange of views with the Deputies, 6 April 2022**

The President recalled the crucial importance of the values on which the Council of Europe is built and underlined that the Congress will continue to promote and defend these values at each level of governance, to make communities resilient and make the European model of society stronger. He highlighted the work done by Congress members who engage in concrete action, working directly with each other, with central governments, with citizens and civil society and address crucial challenges for democratic societies. The President also underlined the Council of Europe and Congress cooperation activities in Member States which contribute to promote and strengthen democracy, good governance, citizen participation, transparency and gender equality in the field. He stressed that the Council of Europe had taken the only possible and right decision by excluding the Russian Federation but warned that the Council of Europe family must not be weakened by this decision.

## **Meeting with the General Secretary of the Government of the Republic of Moldova, 22 April 2022**

The Secretary General met with the General Secretary (DU) and gave him a brief overview of the Congress work and mandate, the main areas of cooperation with the Republic of Moldova, such as monitoring, post-monitoring and technical cooperation activities. He informed about the preparation of a Congress post-monitoring visit to the Republic of Moldova scheduled on 21 June 2022 and highlighted the importance of implementing Congress cooperation projects within the Action Plan of the Council of Europe. The General Secretary (DU) underscored the Moldovan government commitment to decentralization reforms in cooperation with the country's local authorities. He informed that the government in consultation with CALM is drafting a new decentralization strategy. He also highlighted the close cooperation with CALM with which he set up monthly meetings to discuss the pressing issues and the future reforms.

## **Official visit to Switzerland, 30 April-3 May 2022**

The President accompanied by the Secretary General met in Bern Livia LEU, Secretary of State at the Federal Department of Foreign Affairs (FDFA), in the presence of David ERAY (Switzerland, EPP/CCE), Minister of Environment of the Canton of Jura and President of the Swiss delegation to the Congress. They discussed the situation in Ukrainian cities, the budget and the co-operation programmes implemented by the Council of Europe and the Congress. The President also met the Mayor of Bern, Alec VON GRAFFENRIED to discuss the specific problems of running a large city and the particular status of capital cities. The President recalled that in its particularly positive report on the monitoring of the situation of local and regional democracy in Switzerland in 2017, the Congress noted however "the importance of determining, through legislation, a framework, and arrangements regarding financing for the city of Bern, taking due account of its specific situation".

Furthermore, the President took part in the meeting of the Landsgemeinde of the Canton of Glaris, during which he met federal parliamentarians, state councillors and former presidents of cantonal parliaments. During a meeting with the Union of Swiss Cities (UVS) and the Association of Swiss Municipalities (ACS) he stressed the role of national associations in implementing Congress resolutions, promoting the principles of the Charter and maintaining dialogue with national governments to defend the interests of local and regional authorities. He also addressed the Institute of Federalism in Fribourg, in the presence of Didier CASTELLA (Switzerland, ILDG), State Councillor of the Canton of Fribourg in charge of Institutions and member of the Swiss delegation to the Congress. Discussions focused on the LoGov project with a panel of elected officials on the Grand Fribourg project aimed at merging several Swiss municipalities.

### **Statement on Europe day, 5 May 2022**

The President declared that since its creation in 1949, the Council of Europe has been the major architect of post-war democratic developments in Europe and the herald of fundamental rights, democracy, and the rule of law in the continent and beyond. He stressed that recent developments have further threatened the unity and peace of the European continent and highlighted the importance of safeguarding peace and protecting European fundamental values. He ensured that the Congress would continue to help and support communities now and in the aftermath of the rises, to make societies stronger, more inclusive and more resilient.

### **Statement on the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOT), 17 May 2022**

The Congress Rapporteur on LGBTI issues, Andrew BOFF (United Kingdom, ILDG) warned that LGBTI organisations are increasingly under threat, stressing the role of local and regional authorities in supporting them. He stressed the need to go beyond declarations and take concrete action to support and involve LGBTI organisations, for example by appointing local experts on diversity and equality to establish structural consultations with LGBTI. The Congress has been working on LGBTI issues since 2007, including freedom of assembly and guaranteeing their fundamental rights. In June 2021, it adopted two reports on "Protecting LGBTI persons in the context of rising hate speech and anti-LGBTI discrimination: the role of local and regional authorities" and on "The role of local and regional authorities with regard to the situation and rights of LGBTI people in Poland".

### **132nd Session of the Committee of Ministers, Turin, 20 May 2020**

The President underlined the multiple crises which the European continent is facing and the need to maintain unity in defending common values of democracy, human rights and the rule of law. He highlighted the unique role of the grassroots level of territorial communities in defending, reviving, and reinvigorating democratic processes. The President reiterated the Congress support for the Ukrainian people and communities and referred to the initiative Cities4Cities as a concrete example of local and regional authorities' inter-solidarity. The President called upon the Committee of Ministers to collectively reflect upon the future of the continent and the Council of Europe and to involve all levels of governance in this reflection, noting the unique role of the Congress in the institutional architecture of the Council of Europe. In this respect, he supported the holding a Summit of the Council of Europe Heads of State and Government and expressed the Congress commitment to contribute to its success.

### **10th anniversary of the entry into force of the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority, 1 June 2022**

The President marked this anniversary by urging States that have not yet done so to sign and ratify this key legal instrument. Since its adoption in 2009 and entry into force in 2012, the Additional Protocol complements the text of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and brings within the scope of the Charter the right of any person to participate in the affairs of a local authority. He underlined that the Protocol guarantees the protection of the citizens' rights and is crucial to promote citizen participation at the local level.

### **Statement on the World Environment Day, 5 June 2022**

Cemal BAS (Turkey, EPP), Congress Spokesperson on Environment and Climate Change, stressed that almost 70% of the decisions taken at the European level are implemented by local and regional authorities which means without involving local authorities combatting climate change is impossible. He stated that to resolve this world-wide crisis, it is necessary

to act locally with the support, and especially financial means, from the central governments. The Congress is convinced that environmental protection is part of good governance at all levels and that a clean and healthy environment is essential for the enjoyment of human rights. The Congress is currently preparing a Human Rights Handbook with best practices giving local and regional officials tools to protect the environment and prevent climate change and highlighting the human rights dimension of combatting climate change.

### **Statement on the World Refugee Day, 20 June 2022**

Congress Rapporteurs on women and children refugees Bernd VÖHRINGER (Germany, EPP/CCE), President of the Chamber of Local Authorities, and Annika VAIKLA (Estonia, ILDG) underlined the crucial role of local and regional authorities in the reception, protection and integration of refugees and the responsibility to provide arriving refugees with access to essential public services, especially housing, medical care and education. They recalled however that refugees are not a homogenous group, which means that cities and regions constantly have to develop and adapt reception policies according to changing realities and demographics thus needing support from central governments. They stressed that as a result of the war in Ukraine, almost 90% of refugees arriving in Europe's towns and regions are women and children, who are especially vulnerable and need to be protected. To support cities and regions and provide guidance, the Congress is currently preparing a report on the issue.

### **Meeting of the Congress President with the Greek President, 22 June 2022**

The President met the President of Greece, H.E. Mrs Katerina SAKELLAROPOULOU during her official visit to the Council of Europe. The two Presidents stressed the importance of the local dimension of the Council of Europe's work in the field of human rights, democracy, and the rule of law. They also referred to the 4th Summit of Heads of State and Government on the future of the Council of Europe, the success of which will depend on "solid preparation and the definition of clear objectives". The Congress actively contributes to the reflection group for the preparation of this Summit.

### **Meeting of the Congress President with H.M. the King of the Netherlands, 23 June 2022**

The President met His Majesty King WILLEM-ALEXANDER of the Netherlands, on the occasion of his official visit to the Council of Europe. He presented the work of the Congress and the role of local and regional authorities in the defence of democracy, the rule of law and human rights. He mentioned the situation in Ukraine and the concrete support that can be provided directly between cities notably via the Cities4cities platform sponsored by the Congress.

### **5th Forum of Local and Regional Governments, United Nations, New York, 13 July 2022**

The President participated in the session devoted to the localization of the SDGs and stressed that the Congress advocates for engaging local and regional authorities in the design and implementation of national action plans on SDGs and for their contribution to Voluntary National Reviews. Recalling that more than two-thirds of the SDG targets can only be implemented at local or regional level, he called for local and regional authorities and their national associations to be involved in structured and regular consultation with central governments and parliaments. The Congress welcomed the inclusion of Mayors in the preparation and presentation of the Voluntary National Reviews of the Council of Europe member States this year.

This event was preceded by a visit by the President to Washington, accompanied by the Secretary General on 11 July, during which he held meetings with representatives of the United States Conference of Mayors, the German Marshall Funds of the United States and of



the National Democratic Institute. Activities to support rebuilding a democratic Ukraine were in the center of their discussions.

### **2022 High Level Political Forum, United Nations, New York, 14 July 2022**

At the High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development at the United Nations Headquarters, the President stressed the need to give local and regional authorities the financial means and decision-making autonomy to carry out their missions in response to crisis situations. During the session on "Regional action and leveraging regional frameworks to support countries on the road to recovery and rebuilding from the devastating impacts of the pandemic", he stressed that from the war in Ukraine, to the Covid-19 pandemic, to climate change, to economic slowdown, local and regional authorities are on the front line. Underlining that it is the responsibility of local and regional decision-makers to implement policies in response to crises, the President stressed the importance of taking into account their practical experience in designing these policies. He concluded that giving local decision-makers more responsibility and resources helps to increase the resilience of communities and thus of societies as a whole.

### **Statement on the UN resolution declaring access to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as a universal human right, 9 August 2022**

Following the resolution adopted by the United Nations General Assembly, the Congress spokesperson on human rights Harald BERGMANN (The Netherlands, ILDG), welcomed this historic decision and said it was a landmark development which demonstrates the urgency of collective action, at all levels of governance, to preserve environment and fight climate change. Being convinced that a safe and healthy environment is a precondition for the enjoyment of human rights and that this is a shared responsibility, the Congress is currently drawing up a report on a "green reading" of the European Charter of Local Self Government which guarantees an interpretation of the Charter's provisions from the point of view of environmental protection, as well as the strengthening of the position of local and regional authorities in environmental decision-making.

### **International Youth Day, 12 August 2022**

Congress Spokesperson on Youth Laura LAURO (Italy, EPP/CCE) expressed her support for this year's theme: "Intergenerational solidarity" and stressed the need to develop strong intergenerational connections to build more inclusive and democratic societies. She underlined that young and old can best interact, learn from each other, and work together at the local level and mentioned some examples, in particular in northern Italy, where young people came together to deliver food to families and elderly people in need, during the height of the Covid pandemic. Furthermore, the spokesperson recalled that intergenerational solidarity must be built both ways. She encouraged all local and regional representatives to implement this principle in their communities, for example by setting up youth councils or a mentoring programme for younger politicians in their local or regional council.

### **International Day of Democracy, 15 September 2022**

The President underlined that the International Democracy Day is marked this year as societies find themselves under enormous strain from multiple crises affecting them – the consequences of the pandemic, the war in Ukraine, continued threat of climate change and environmental degradation, migration, social and economic problems and growing polarisation of our societies. He said these crises bring to the fore the urgent need for building stronger democratic resilience of societies, the need for upholding democratic values and pursuing work of strengthening democratic institutions and processes at all levels of governance, and for engaging citizens in order to regain their trust in these institutions. He recalled that these

crises are also a stark reminder that the work of democracy building is never finished. The Congress is convinced that this work must be pursued in the communities, to embed democratic values and anchor democracy at the level closest to the citizens. Democratic resilience is built from the bottom up, for the level of territorial communities, and strong local democracy translates into stronger democracy at all levels. Multi-level governance provides the responses to crises most tailored to citizens' needs and expectations, and therefore local and regional authorities must be equipped with the necessary resources and freedom to act, as laid down by the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

## **B. The war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine**

### **Statement on abduction of Mayors and pressure on local and regional authorities in Ukraine, 15 March 2022**

The President of the Congress strongly condemned the abduction of the mayors of Melitopol and Dniprorudne, Zaporizhya oblast and the pressure on local elected representatives in occupied territories and called for their immediate release. He paid tribute to local leaders for their key role in addressing the daily challenges of citizens in their cities, towns and villages. He urged the Russian authorities to immediately cease the hostilities, withdraw their troops and stop the abuse of human rights and violations of international law. Existing infrastructure must be preserved, and humanitarian corridors must be maintained for safe evacuation of all settlements under siege.

### **Launching of the Cities4Cities platform, Strasbourg, 22 March 2022**

A new matchmaking platform, Cities4Cities, developed to help Ukrainian cities was launched during the Congress session on 22 March 2022. The platform is a free online exchange tool; it allows local authorities in Ukraine and in the rest of Europe to share their needs and offers related to local infrastructure and get in direct contact to receive practical help. The platform was launched at the initiative of the President of the Chamber of Local Authorities of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, and Mayor of the city of Sindelfingen, with the support of the Congress. Bernd VÖHRINGER explained that the need for co-ordination of support action coming from the local level became very clear to him after the visit in the end of March to the Polish twin city of Sindelfingen, Chełm, situated near the Ukrainian border where he saw first-hand the "urgent need for material, financial and human resources support". The Secretary General of the Congress, said that the Congress welcomes the efforts of local and regional authorities of the member States of the Council of Europe and their associations in support for their Ukrainian counterparts and citizens, and the Cities4Cities initiative is an example of such result-oriented solidarity action at the local level. Ambassador Borys TARASYUK, Permanent Representative of Ukraine to the Council of Europe, stressed that the initiative will serve well the purpose of providing practical assistance to the most vulnerable, amidst the immense human tragedy and challenges, and will complement the political support and solidarity expressed by the Congress as a whole.

### **Meeting of the European Committee of the Regions' Working Group on Ukraine, Brussels, 30 March 2022**

The meeting brought together representatives of local and regional authorities and their national associations, members of the Committee of the Regions and international stakeholders as well as Deputy Minister of Communities and Territorial Development of Ukraine Viacheslav NEHODA, Mayor of Kyiv Vitaly KLITSCHKO, and Mayor of Lviv Andriy SADOVYI. The President saluted the courage of the Ukrainian people and authorities in the face of the brutal war waged by Russia against Ukraine and their fortitude in the battle against the invasion. He said the Congress was proud of the immediate response by numerous local

and regional authorities and their associations in other European countries providing aid to their Ukrainian counterparts and hosting refugees from Ukraine and referred to the Cities4Cities platform aimed at coordinating these efforts (see above). The President also referred to the Declaration adopted unanimously by the Congress during its session on 22 March 2022.

### **Statement on the crimes against Ukrainian citizens and elected local leaders, 6 April 2022**

The President condemned the brutal murders in villages and towns around the capital city of Kyiv, in Boucha, Irpyn, Vorzel or Motyzhyn as well as the abduction or intimidation of mayors and local councillors who stand by their fellow citizens and refuse to submit to the invader. He declared he was confident that international justice will be carried out and those responsible for the crimes committed in Ukraine will be held accountable. He paid tribute to democratically elected local leaders in Ukraine who play a key role in addressing the daily challenges of citizens in their martyr cities, towns, and villages.

### **Meeting with a delegation of representatives of the Kyiv City Council, Strasbourg, 28 April 2022**

The President accompanied by the Secretary General held an exchange of views on the situation of Ukrainian cities and local authorities with members of the Kyiv City Council who stressed the importance of the Congress' contribution to the post-war period and to the reconstruction of the functioning of democratic institutions, in particular at the territorial level. They also welcomed the initiative of the Cities4cities platform launched, with the support of the Congress, to help Ukrainian cities. The President recalled the position of the Congress expressed in several statements since the beginning of the war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine and strongly condemning the crimes against citizens and the kidnapping of Ukrainian mayors. He stressed the crucial role played by mayors during the war, as elected representatives closest to the citizens and on the front line to meet their needs.

### **Visit to Ukraine, 1 – 4 June 2022**

The visit of the President, accompanied by the Secretary General took place at the invitation of the Association of Ukrainian Municipalities (AUC). The President and Vitali KLITSCHKO, Chair of the Association of Ukrainian Cities (AUC) and Mayor of Kyiv, signed a joint declaration calling for the reconstruction of Ukrainian communities and the restoration of the functioning of local authorities in line with the European Charter of Local Self-Government (see APPENDIX 4).

At the opening of the Forum of Ukrainian Municipalities "reVIVED Ukraine - reVIVED communities", organised the same day by the AUC, the President called for intensified efforts to preserve the Council of Europe's common European values: human rights, the rule of law and democracy.

He also held bilateral meetings with the Chairperson of the Kyiv City Council, the Minister for Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine, the Chairperson of the Committee on Organization of state power, local self-government, regional development and urban planning of the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, the Secretary of the Presidium of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities under the President of Ukraine and the Head of the Ukrainian Delegation to the Congress.

The programme also included visits to the Kyiv Oblast to examine the situation on the ground. The Congress delegation meet the mayors of Bucha and Zhytomyr - two cities which are part of the Cities4Cities platform - as well as Fastiv and Chelm, Poland.

### **Forum for the Reconstruction of Ukraine, Rotterdam, 17 June 2022**

The one-day Business Forum for the Reconstruction of Ukraine was organized by the Embassy of Ukraine in the Kingdom of the Netherlands with the support of Rotterdam City Hall and Stichting OpenDoorUkraine. The President stressed the role of local and regional authorities in the reconstruction of Ukraine and the important cooperation and mutual support between Ukrainian local communities and other European cities, facilitated by the Cities4cities platform. The President also referred to the joint declaration he signed with the Chair of the Association of Ukrainian Cities, calling for the reconstruction of Ukrainian communities and the restoration of the functioning of local authorities in line with the European Charter of Local Self- Government. He declared that the mayors and local councillors are a vivid example of the courage and resilience of Ukrainian people and local authorities in defending the country and democratic values, underlining that their resistance also comes from the long-lasting work of embedding fundamental democratic values in the local communities.

### **Statement on the abduction of Mayors in Ukraine, 30 June 2022**

The President strongly condemned the continued abduction of local officials in Ukraine, most recently of the mayor of Kherson, Ihor KOLYKHAYEV, and called for his immediate release. He stressed that the pressure and continuous offenses that the local elected representatives are suffering in the illegally occupied territories of Ukraine are intolerable. They are targeted for their key role in protecting their citizens and communities, and he wanted to pay tribute for their fierce resistance in defending Ukraine, Europe and democracy.

### **Statements on so-called Russian "referendums" in Ukrainian territories, 1 September 2022**

Against the background of mounting indications of possible "pseudo-referendums" in Ukrainian territories currently occupied by Russia, the President urged the Russian authorities to refrain from such plans. As part of the regional elections scheduled for 11 September in the Russian Federation, according to the analysis of international NGOs, so-called "referendums" could be organised in Ukrainian areas currently occupied by Moscow, notably Kherson and Zaporizhzhia as well as in the Donetsk and Luhansk oblasts. The Congress has always spoken out loud and clear in favour of preserving the territorial integrity of Council of Europe member countries. A recommendation on holding referendums at the local level, adopted by the Congress in 2021, contains clear guidance on how referenda should be organised at the local and regional level - and what should be avoided. The President stressed that if Russia uses the referendum, a valuable democratic instrument in itself, to further intensify its aggressive policy vis-à-vis the Council of Europe member State Ukraine, this is an abuse of this instrument and a further attempt to destroy democracy and the rule of law. He underlined that if Russia sticks to the plans for such fictitious referendums in Ukrainian territories, the results will be null and void for the Congress.

### **Statement on the continuing abduction of Ukrainian local elected representatives, 5 September 2022**

In light of the continuing abduction of Ukrainian of local elected representatives, the President, endorsing the statement made by Council of Europe Commissioner for Human Rights Dunja MIJATOVIĆ on the occasion of the International Day of Victims of Enforced Disappearances, demanded the immediate and unconditional release of all local public officials in Ukraine and condemned the abhorrent practice of abduction and detention. He stated that mayors, as

leaders in local communities, are particularly targeted for their role as the main pillar of fierce resistance against the occupation. Their enforced detention constitutes a serious violation of human rights and international humanitarian law. Attacks on local leaders are attacks on the community. Since the beginning of the war, more than 50 local elected representatives, including 34 mayors from different regions of Ukraine, have been abducted by Russian forces. He stressed that this is an obvious attempt to intimidate the civilian population and suppress its resistance in the occupied territories and recalled that to date, the mayors of Dniprorudne (Zaporizhzhia region), Vilkhivka (Kharkiv region), Hola Prystan, Kherson, Hornostaivka, Zelenyi Pid, Verkhni Rohachyk (Kherson oblast) remain in captivity.

## **II. ACTIVITIES OF THE CONGRESS BODIES**

### **A. THE BUREAU**

#### **Strasbourg, 21 March 2022**

The Bureau pursued its discussion on the situation in Ukraine and took note of the decisions of the Committee of Ministers that the Russian Federation is no longer a member State of the Council of Europe. It further noted that a special debate would be held on the first day of the session during which the Bureau declaration would be presented by the President for adoption by the Congress. The Bureau decided to mobilise its network and contacts to support local and regional authorities in Ukraine and to develop on its website a section on the situation in Ukraine to enable members and associations to publish initiatives for assistance to Ukrainian towns and cities.

The Bureau took note of the information on the implementation of the budget for 2022. It took note of the non-payment, by the Russian Federation, of its contribution and reiterated its call for member States to ensure the budgetary sustainability of the Organisation and to prevent the Council of Europe from suffering any financial damage.

The Bureau continued its discussions on the functioning and working methods of the Congress, in light of the contribution by national delegations to the Congress, national associations and political groups and agreed to resume consideration of this issue with a view to drawing conclusions at the Bureau meeting in June.

The Bureau took note also of the request for Partner for Local Democracy status with the Congress by the Kyrgyz Republic, held an exchange of views on this request and decided to pursue its consideration at its next meeting.

#### **Tralee, Ireland, 14 June 2022**

The Bureau met in the context of Ireland's Presidency of the Committee of Ministers and had an exchange of views with Irish councillors, including members of the Irish delegation to the Congress, on local self-government in Ireland as well as the local dimension of the Irish Committee of Ministers' priorities. The Bureau shared concerns regarding the situation in Ukraine and took stock of the Cities4cities platform operations and encouraged further support to Ukrainian municipalities.

The Bureau expressed concern at the situation described in the statement issued on 4 November 2021 by the Council of Europe's Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT) on Bulgaria and called on the

Bulgarian authorities to take urgent action to remedy the situation and provide the competent territorial authorities with the necessary resources.

The Bureau also expressed concern about the situation in Türkiye, where opposition politicians are in long-term detention – including Nurhayat Altun and Leyla Güven, two former Congress members.

The Bureau debated Congress activities, agreed on the candidates for Congress Secretary General and adopted the agenda of the next Congress session to be held in October 2022.

## **B. THE SESSION**

The Congress held its 42nd Session from 22 to 24 March 2022, in Strasbourg.

A debate on the situation in Ukraine took place and the Ukrainian Minister for Communities and Territories Development, Oleksiy CHERNYSHOV, the Mayor of Kyiv, Vitali KLITSCHKO, and the Mayor of Mykolaiv City, Oleksandr SENKEVYCH addressed Congress members remotely. The Congress adopted a Declaration condemning the Russian Federation's war against Ukraine as a blatant breach of international law (see APPENDIX 2).

A new matchmaking online platform, Cities4Cities, developed to help Ukrainian cities was launched during the session (see I. POLITICAL AGENDA)

A debate on "Fake news, threats and violence - pressures on mayors in the current crises in Europe" took place in the Chamber of Local Authorities (see C. THE CHAMBERS)

Two debates on democratic pluralism in regional governance and regions and diaspora took part in the Chamber of Regions (see C. THE CHAMBERS)

The Congress also adopted three thematic reports:

The report on rural youth and the role of local and regional authorities presented by co-rapporteurs Aida JALILZADE (Azerbaijan, ECR) and Jimmy MOLONEY (Ireland, ILDG) shows that limited access to education, employment and affordable housing, but also to digital connectivity and public services result in young people moving away from rural areas. Rural youth also have less opportunities than their urban peers to participate in public and political life. The Congress encourages rural authorities to promote youth participation via structures such as youth councils, in order to ensure the vitality and future of local democracy.

The report on the situation of independent candidates and the opposition calls on local, regional and state authorities to address undue obstacles to the participation of independent and opposition candidates in elections at different stages of the electoral process. Presented by Vladimir PREBILIČ (Slovenia, SOC/V/DP), the report stresses that although some proportionate measures to limit the number of candidates is admissible in order to prevent extreme fragmentation, national legislations should avoid overly restrictive requirements to safeguard the right of every citizen to run for public office without discrimination.

The report on the use of deliberative methods in European municipalities and regions presented by Karl-Heinz LAMBERTZ (Belgium, SOC/V/DP), underlined that deliberative methods have become one of the most innovative ways of deepening citizens' participation in political decision-making and contribute to strengthening public trust in the political process. Indeed, these forms of non-electoral citizen participation allow a randomly selected group of citizens to formulate proposals to the authorities. They correspond to the principles outlined in the 2009 Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in local affairs, which marked its 10th anniversary of entry into effect on 1 June

2022. The report offers guidelines for municipalities and regions, illustrated by case studies at the local and regional levels: Mostar (Bosnia-Herzegovina), Oud-Heverlee (Belgium), Scottish Climate Assembly (UK) and Ostbelgien (Belgium). The Mayor of the City of Mostar Mario KORDIĆ participated in this debate.

Lastly, the Congress held a debate on involving children in sustainable development and examined guidelines for local and regional authorities, seeking to raise children's awareness of the Sustainable development Goals (SDGs) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda (see IV. THEMATIC ACTIVITIES)

Also, on the agenda of the session were reports on the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Germany, Luxembourg, Turkey and the United Kingdom (see III. MONITORING OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEMOCRACY). Taina BOFFERDING, Minister of the Interior and Minister of Equality between Women and Men of Luxembourg, and Neil O'BRIEN, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State and Minister for Levelling Up, The Union and Constitution of the United Kingdom took part in the debate.

The Congress members considered reports on the observation of the latest local elections in Armenia and Georgia, and local and regional elections in Denmark, and Morocco (see III. MONITORING OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEMOCRACY).

In addition, as at every session since the launch of the Congress' "Rejuvenating Politics" initiative in 2014, youth delegates participated in the session.

Among the invited personalities were Mariastella GELMINI, Minister of Regional Affairs and Autonomy, on behalf of the Italian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, Tiny KOX, President of the Parliamentary Assembly, Marija PEJČINOVIĆ-BURIĆ, Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Apostolos TZITZIKOSTAS, President of the European Committee of the Regions, Jean-Claude MARCOURT, President of the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE), and President of the Walloon Parliament, Belgium, and Stefano BONACCINI, President of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)

**The Minister for Regional Affairs and Autonomy**, on behalf of the Italian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers, pointed out that, further to the decision of the Committee of Ministers, the Russian Federation had ceased to be a member state of the Council of Europe on 16 March. She stressed the urgent needs of the millions of Ukrainian refugees and urged local and regional authorities to provide support and assistance.

**The Council of Europe Secretary General** praised the courage and loyalty of Ukrainian mayors and local officials and reiterated the important role of local and regional governments in making a democratic culture based on human rights take hold.

**The President of the Parliamentary Assembly** welcomed the Congress Declaration on the Russian Federation's war against Ukraine. He deplored the fact that Russian citizens will no longer be protected by the ECHR and underlined the need to support human rights defenders, democratic forces, free media and independent civil society in the Russian Federation. He also called for a 4th Summit of the Council of Europe Heads of States and governments with the input of the Congress. He said he has always strongly believed that democracy begins at local and regional levels.

**The President of the European Committee of the Regions** referred to the fact that 3000 regional and local leaders, from 240 regions and 90000 municipalities across Europe, in the recent Marseille Summit of Regions and Cities condemned the invasion ordered by a ruthless Russian regime and expressed their solidarity with their peers and the people of Ukraine. He

also underlined that disinformation, fake news, and propaganda are one of the biggest threats against democratic societies.

## **C. THE CHAMBERS**

### **The Chamber of Local Authorities**

A debate on "Fake news, threats and violence - pressures on mayors in the current crises in Europe" took place in the Chamber of Local Authorities which highlighted local and regional politicians, mayors and councillor are increasingly exposed to hate speech and online disinformation, but also verbal or physical threats, especially during election campaigns. This phenomenon has been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic, and more recently by Russia's war on Ukraine and has a paralysing effect on democracies and political life at local and regional levels.

Ahead of the thematic debate, an inter-university study on this very topic, entitled "COUNTERFAKE - A scientific basis for a policy against fake news and hate speech", has been published and was presented during the session. Its findings, based on the experiences of local and regional politicians in Council of Europe member States, will be incorporated into a new report, currently under preparation.

The Chamber also debated and adopted reports on the observation of local elections in Georgia (October 2021) and the partial local elections in Armenia (December 2021) as well as a report on the Monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-government in Luxembourg (see III. MONITORING OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEMOCRACY)

### **The Chamber of Regions**

On 23 March 2022, during the 42<sup>nd</sup> session, the Chamber held a debate on democratic pluralism in regional governance. It underlined that in all democratic life implies a majority and an opposition and the rapport between the two groups must be based on a constructive dialogue rather than on a permanent confrontation. The debate showed that some countries have developed original approaches to facilitate cooperation between majorities and oppositions, but also to improve their representativeness to citizens. Through several examples, such as some Swiss cantons or regional parliaments in Germany, it was recalled during the debate that the dialogue between the majority and the opposition constitutes, in itself, an indicator of the quality of democracy and pluralism. Some members also expressed concern about the growing importance of "Fake News" in the media's treatment of political life and felt that the increase in the number of independent candidates should not lead to populism or the "fragmentation of the political system".

The political representation of foreign diasporas in their host regions, as well as those of their own diasporas in other regions or countries of Europe was the subject of a second debate in the Chamber. The experiences of Azores and of networks such as the "Parliamentary Network on Diaspora Policies" or the "Tyrol International" network were presented to the members of the Chamber who, during several interventions, underlined the contribution of the diasporas and the need to facilitate their participation in the political life of their host country. The young Italian delegate Sharon AMADI presented the situation and expectations of the more than 4.4 million people from sub-Saharan Africa living in Western Europe and pleaded for better consideration of young people from the diasporas, both in host countries and in those of departure. Hanna ZAMAZIEIEVA (Ukraine, ILDG) addressed the particularly dramatic situation of national minorities, and in particular the Greek diaspora, in the under-siege cities of Mariupol and Odessa, and paid tribute to the Greek government for the help it gives them.



The President of the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE) and President of the Walloon Parliament, Jean-Claude MARCOURT addressed the Chamber and stressed the importance of vigorously reaffirming the European values, embodied by the European Convention on Human Rights. He also advocated the adoption of strict sanctions against the Russian Federation while showing solidarity with partners and the people of Ukraine.

## D. THE COMMITTEES

### The Monitoring Committee

The Monitoring Committee met on 30 June 2022, in Istanbul in the presence of Ekrem IMAMOĞLU, Mayor of Istanbul, and Hasan AKGÜN, Mayor of Büyükçekmece. Before the opening, an exchange of views took place between the mayors, the Chair of the Monitoring Committee, Gudrun MOSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM (Austria SOC/V/DP), the rapporteurs on local democracy in Türkiye and the spokesperson on the observation of local and regional elections. The Mayor of Istanbul stressed the role of city diplomacy and new networks of municipalities in Europe in strengthening democracy and dialogue and presented the latest initiatives of his city in this regard.

The Committee held discussions on the situation of local democracy in Türkiye including the removal of elected representatives, their replacement by State trustees and mayors in prison. The issues on the consequences of recent legal electoral amendments in Türkiye on forthcoming elections including at the local level in 2024 and the position of the opposition in this respect were also on the agenda.

The Committee examined a draft report for adoption on the monitoring of the application of European Charter of Local Self-Government in the Czech Republic. It also discussed reports being prepared on Belgium, Denmark and Sweden. In addition, members were informed of the results of the Congress' post-monitoring visit on the situation of local and regional democracy in the Republic of Moldova.

The agenda also included the adoption of the reports on the observation of the local by-elections in Albania (6 March 2022) and the municipal elections in the Netherlands (16 March 2022) as well as the local elections in Belgrade and several other municipalities in Serbia (3 April 2022). All these reports will be debated for adoption at the 43rd Session.

The Committee also endorsed the third volume of the Human Rights Handbook on the Environment, adopting a preliminary draft resolution encouraging the dissemination of the Handbook. Furthermore, it adopted a report and approved draft recommendations and resolutions on "*A fundamental right to environment: a matter for local and regional authorities. Towards a green reading of the European Charter of Local Self-Government*".

Moreover, the Committee had an exchange of views on the current situation in Ukraine's municipalities and regions as well as a debate on recurring issues based on assessments resulting from monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

The Committee met remotely on 14 September 2022 and was opened by its Chair Gudrun MOSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM. It adopted draft reports on the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Belgium, Sweden and Denmark. The rapporteurs presented recent developments regarding local and regional self-government in these three countries and an analysis of the implementation of the Charter, article by article. These reports will be debated for adoption at the 43rd Session.

Furthermore, the Committee held an exchange of views and adopted a preliminary draft resolution to endorse the revised Code of Good Practice on Referendums, adopted by the Venice Commission and the Council for Democratic Elections. This resolution encourages the authorities to implement the guidelines and good practices as defined by the Venice Commission, which are also reflected in the Congress report on referendums at local level adopted in 2021.

Also on the agenda was an exchange on the situation of local and regional democracy in the Republic of Moldova in the context of the implementation of the roadmap and the post-monitoring political dialogue between the Congress and the Moldovan authorities.

### **The Governance Committee**

The Governance Committee chaired by 4th Vice-Chair Benoît PILET (France, ILDG) met on 4 July 2022 in Strasbourg and online.

The Committee approved three draft reports which will be submitted for adoption at the 43rd Session of the Congress. The first on “Hate speech and fake news: the impact on the working conditions of local and regional elected representatives” covering also possible remedies against these phenomena was presented by co-rapporteurs Wilma Delissen VAN TONGERLO (Netherlands, ILDG) and Kristoffer TAMSONS (Sweden, PPE/CCE). The second on “Regional identities: promoting dialogue and diversity in unity” was presented by rapporteur Karl-Heinz LAMBERTZ (Belgium, SOC/G/PD). It addresses means and tools to inspire and ensure positive approaches to regional identities. The third report on “Smart Cities and Smart Regions – prospects of a human rights-based governance approach” promotes the human-centered use of digitalisation and artificial intelligence to build inclusive, sustainable and resilient communities. It was presented by co-rapporteurs Jan MARKINK (Netherlands, ILDG) and Tony BUCHANAN (United Kingdom, PAP-NPA).

Additionally, the members debated on the revision of “The European Urban Charter II – Manifesto for a new urbanity” and appointed Anne COLGAN (Ireland, ILDG) as rapporteur. They also exchanged views with Paul ROWSELL, Chair of the European Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG), on the current work of the CDDG and potential cooperation.

Lastly, the members elected their 5th Vice-Chair Linda GILLHAM (United Kingdom, ILDG).

### **The Current Affairs Committee**

At its meeting on 10 June 2022, the Current Affairs Committee discussed the role of local and regional media in grassroots democracy, in the light of the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers' recommendation on principles of media and communication governance. The Committee decided to prepare a report on this topic for adoption at a forthcoming Congress session.

Following the adoption of the report on the future of rural youth at the previous Congress session, the Committee also discussed "New models for innovative, democratic and sustainable rural societies" with the participation of the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Bjorn BERGE. In view of the challenges facing rural areas, such as an ageing population or declining investment, the Deputy Secretary General highlighted the opportunities offered by digitalisation for the economic sector and the provision of services. On this occasion, the Committee also heard a presentation from the Duved Cluster initiative on how it aims to bring democratic innovation to rural areas in Sweden.

In addition, members expressed their concern about the situation of persons placed in social care homes in Bulgaria, following the statement of the Committee for the Prevention of Torture and Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment (CPT). They shared their experience on the role and competences of local and regional authorities in protecting the human rights of persons placed in social welfare institutions.

The agenda also included a debate on the reception of refugee women and children in European cities and regions. As part of the report being prepared on this topic, co-rapporteurs Bernd VÖHRINGER and Annika VAIKLA, decided to carry out a field mission to Poland on 4 and 5 July 2022.

The Committee also heard a presentation on the inclusion of diasporas and the responsibilities of local and regional authorities by Paulo PISCO (Portugal), Rapporteur of the Parliamentary Assembly.

The Committee heard a delegation from the Kyrgyz Republic, observing the meeting as part of a study visit to the Congress, on the state of decentralisation and local self-government in Kyrgyzstan, which is applying for Partner for Local Democracy status with the Congress.

Finally, the members elected Jimmy MOLONEY, as 5th Vice-President.

The Committee met remotely on 14 September 2022. On the agenda was a report on " the reception of women and children refugees in Europe's cities and regions", which follows a Congress visit to Poland in July 2022. The report examines the specific needs of women and children on the run, the role of local authorities and regions in the reception processes, as well as challenges and best practices in this regard.

It also approved a preliminary draft recommendation and resolution on a fundamental right to the environment, drawn up jointly with the Congress Monitoring Committee, which proposes the elaboration of an additional protocol on environmental matters to the European Charter of Local Self-Government. These texts will be debated for adoption during the 43rd Session of the Congress.

Furthermore, the Committee discussed the terms of reference for a report on "Local and regional media as watchdogs of democracy". It also examined a proposal to draw up specific recommendations for local and regional authorities on how to be resilient and to rebuild after major crises.

### **III. MONITORING OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEMOCRACY**

#### **A. MONITORING ACTIVITIES**

*The core mission of the Congress 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 and ratified by the 46 Member States of the Council of Europe.*

#### **Monitoring visits**

##### **Belgium, 8-10 March and 10-12 May 2022**

A Congress delegation composed of rapporteurs Matthias GYSIN (Switzerland, ILDG) and Magnus BERNTSSON (Sweden, EPP/CCE) carried out a first part of the monitoring visit in

March 2022 to assess the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government since the previous monitoring report adopted by the Congress in 2014.

The rapporteurs held exchanges of views on the latest developments in the field of local self-government in Belgium with the representatives of local and regional authorities, including some institutions in Brussels. Meetings were scheduled with the First chair of the Council of State, with the representatives of the Constitutional Court as well as with the Ombudsman of Wallonia and the Wallonia-Brussels Federation, the Ombudsman of Flanders, the Ombudswoman of German-speaking Community and with the Ombudswoman of Brussels-Capital Region.

Meetings were also held with the President of Parliament of Flanders, the President of Walloon-Brussels federation/French Community Parliament as well as with the Mayor of Brussels, the Mayor of Sint-Genesius-Rode, members of the city Council of Namur and the Mayor of Genk and President of the Association of Flemish Cities and Municipalities (VVSG).

The Congress delegation met also the members of Belgium national delegation to the Congress and Presidents of the Association of the city and the municipalities of the Brussels-capital region, Cities and the municipalities of Wallonia (UVCW) and of Walloon provinces (APW).

The delegation carried out the second part of the visit to Brussels, Eupen, and Genk from 10 to 12 May 2022.

The rapporteurs held exchanges of views with the Minister-President of the Government of the Brussels-Capital Region, the Vice-Minister-President of the Government of Flanders, as well as with the Walloon Minister for Housing, Local Authorities and the City and the Minister-President of the German-speaking Community, Minister for Local Authorities and Finance.

Meetings were also held with the President of the Brussels Parliament, the President of the Walloon Parliament and the President of the Parliament of the German-speaking Community.

The Congress delegation further met the Mayor of Eupen, the Mayor of Liège and the Mayor of Genk.

### **Sweden, 5 - 7 April 2022**

A delegation composed of rapporteurs Harald BERGMANN and Matija KOVAC (Serbia, EPP/CCE) conducted a visit to Stockholm, Uppsala and Östhammar to assess the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Sweden since the previous monitoring report adopted by the Congress in 2014.

The rapporteurs exchanged views on the latest developments with the Minister for Public Administration, the Parliamentary Ombudsman, as well as with the Deputy President of the Supreme Court. In Parliament, the delegation met with the President of the Riksdag. Meetings were also held with the Mayor of Stockholm and representatives of the municipalities of Uppsala and Östhammar. Furthermore, the Congress delegation met the members of the Swedish national delegation to the Congress as well as the President of the national delegation and President of the Association of Local Authorities and Regions (SALAR).

### **Denmark, 3 – 5 May 2022**

A delegation composed of rapporteurs Xavier CADORET (France, SOC/G/PD) and Carla DEJONGHE (Belgium, ILDG) conducted a monitoring visit to Copenhagen, Vejle and Nyborg to assess the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Denmark since the previous monitoring report adopted by the Congress in 2013.

The rapporteurs exchanged views on the latest developments in the field of local and regional self-government in Denmark with the Minister of the Interior and Housing, the President of the Supreme Court, members of Parliament, representatives of the Ministry of Finance and representatives of the Parliamentary Ombudsman.

Meetings were also held with local authorities in Nyborg and Vejle, and with representatives of the region of Southern Denmark and from Greenland and the Faroe Islands, as well as with representatives of the national associations Local Government Denmark (LGDK) and Danish Regions, and with members of the Danish national delegation to the Congress.

### **Republic of Moldova, 21 June 2022**

The delegation headed by rapporteurs Gunn Marit HELGESEN (Norway, EPP/CCE) and Marc COOLS (Belgium, ILDG) examined the situation of local and regional democracy in the country in the light of the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, ratified in 1997.

They focused on the developments in the field of local and regional democracy that occurred since the adoption of the last Congress report in April 2019 and the corresponding roadmap signed in April 2021. The last post-monitoring visit was held online in February 2022.

The delegation met the Secretary General of the Government, the Minister of Finance, and the Chairperson of the Parliamentary Committee for Public Administration.

Bilateral discussions were also held with the President of the Moldovan national delegation to the Congress, the CALM President and the CALM Executive Director.

### **Adopted recommendations (42nd Session – March 2022)**

#### **Germany, 22 March 2022**

The report and Recommendation 469 adopted during the 42nd session welcome "high standards" of local democracy and a "sophisticated legal framework" covering all aspects of local self-government in Germany. The report highlights, in particular, the strong level of judicial protection and the wide range of responsibilities and organisational autonomy enjoyed by German local authorities.

However, co-rapporteurs Konstantinos KOUKAS (Greece, EPP/CCE) and Jani KOKKO (Finland, SOC/G/PD) draw attention to the reduced financial autonomy of local authorities due to the increasing needs in the social sector, the need to strengthen counties' (Kreise) taxation powers and the lack of diversification and flexibility of their revenue system. They call on the German authorities to provide local authorities with adequate financial means that would give them the freedom to spend these resources and to revise the financial status of counties. The adoption of concrete standards and criteria for the implementation of the commensurability principle would ensure transparency in the whole financial calculation and planning process.

The Congress also calls for the strengthening of the participation and consultation rights of local government associations at federal level and invites the German authorities to sign and ratify the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of local authorities.

#### **Luxemburg, 22 March 2022**

The report and Recommendation 470 welcome the fact that the principle of local self-government, as laid down in the Charter ratified by Luxembourg in 1987, is fully enshrined in the Constitution, recognised by the legislature and the courts and respected. They also highlight that the legal protection of local self-government is fully complied and that the Communal Law reform launched in 2020 is aimed at relaxing the administrative supervision of communes.

However, co-rapporteurs Marjorie CROVETTO (Monaco, NR) and Christine CHEVALLEY (Switzerland, ILDG) expressed concern on the unclear delimitation of powers between the State and the communes and called on the national authorities to clarify this issue. They also encouraged the government to press ahead with the communal reform and create a framework within which local self-government can be exercised and develop fully.

Luxembourg is also asked to formally enshrine in law the procedure for government consultation of local authorities and to sign and ratify the Additional Protocol to the Charter on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority.

### **Turkey, 23 March 2022**

In its latest report and Recommendation 471 on Turkey's application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, the Congress welcomes the impressive turnout (over 84%) in local elections in 2019 – one of the highest rates across the Council of Europe, demonstrating a strong interest in local self-government.

However, co-rapporteurs Vladimir PREBILIČ and David ERAY reported a “generally degrading situation” with regard to local democracy in Turkey and expressed particular concerns on a number of issues, including the fact that the government continues to suspend mayors when a criminal investigation is opened against them – based on an overly-broad definition of terrorism – and replace them with non-elected officials. This seriously undermines the democratic choice of Turkish citizens, according to the Congress, and impedes the proper functioning of local democracy in Turkey.

Among other things, the Recommendation calls on the Council of Europe's Committee of Ministers to ask the Turkish authorities to modify the definition of terrorism in the current domestic legislation, in a way not allowing for overly broad interpretation, to stop suspending mayors without court decisions and to ensure that winning candidates can effectively carry out their mandate.

### **United Kingdom, 24 March 2022**

The report and Recommendation 474 underline that the capacity of the United Kingdom local authorities to perform their tasks effectively is limited by over-regulation, “rather heavy” supervision by higher-level authorities and issues related to funding.

The report welcomes the UK's adoption of the Cities and Local Government Devolution Act 2016, allowing for the introduction of directly elected mayors in some English regions. It also welcomes the government's Levelling Up White Paper and initiatives by the Scottish Parliament to incorporate the Charter into Scottish law.

At the same time, the Congress notes that several shortcomings identified in 2014 have yet to be addressed and expresses concern over a number of issues. Although local authorities have general competences set out in law, in practice over-regulation narrows their scope for action and there is significant dependence on national funding. Local authorities are also limited in their ability to raise and spend financial resources freely. They lack adequate and commensurate funding, and the “financial equalisation mechanism” is not sufficiently transparent and predictable.

The Congress recommends a reform of local government funding to bring the situation in line with the Charter. The UK should also extend the application of the Charter to include the Greater London Authority and local authorities in Northern Ireland.

In addition, the Congress considers that the UK should ratify the Additional Protocol to the Charter – signed in 2009 – on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority.

## **B. OBSERVATION OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL ELECTIONS**

*The Congress' election observation missions are conducted further to the invitation of the national authorities or competent electoral bodies, and they complement the political monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. Assistance in following-up to Congress' recommendations prepared further to observation missions can be provided through a post-electoral dialogue.*

## **Election observation missions**

### **Albania, 6 March 2022**

A 9-member delegation from the Congress including Gunn-Marit HELGESEN, Randi MONDORF (Denmark, ILDG), Vladimir PREBILIČ, Stewart DICKSON (United Kingdom, ILDG), and Pavel PSEJA, an expert in electoral matters conducted a remote observation of the partial local elections held in six municipalities which had been headed by acting mayors, namely Dibër, Durrës, Lushnjë, Rogozhinë, Shkodër, and Vorë. These by-elections were significant as they covered major urban centres accounting for about 20% of the national electorate. They were also seen as an important test for the upcoming nationwide general elections due to be held in 2023. As part of the remote observation, delegates assessed the legal framework, media environment and met virtually with various interlocutors.

The Congress delegation noted that certain improvements to the electoral process in Albania are warranted, especially regarding long-standing recommendations by the Venice Commission which still remain to be addressed. In particular, the Congress delegation encourages electoral subjects to promote the participation of women candidates in mayoral elections. Further, it also called on state authorities to change legislation regarding defamation in order to prevent self-censorship in the media.

The election observation report including propositions to the authorities will be debated at the October Session of the Congress.

### **The Netherlands, 16 March 2022**

The delegation was composed of 11 members Gunn Marit HELGESEN and Vladimir PREBILIČ, Gudrun MOSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM, David ERAY, Carla DEJONGHE, and Jana FISCHEROVA (Czech Republic, ECR) and Brid QUINN, member of the Group of Independent Experts, as expert. The on-site visit was preceded by preparatory meetings organised remotely, on 10 and 11 March, to meet representatives from the Ministry of the Interior and Kingdom Relations, the Electoral Council (Kiesraad), as well as national and international NGOs and the media. This provided insight into the highly decentralised election administration of the country but also issues such as the under-regulation of campaign finance at local level and the situation of local media being in decline.

On Election Day, five Congress teams visited around 70 polling stations in municipalities in most of the 12 Dutch provinces and observed calm, efficiently managed and inclusive elections, due to the density of polling stations and the possibility for voters to cast their ballot in any polling station within their municipality.

Despite the high accessibility of polls, in particular for voters with disabilities, the turnout reached 50.9 per cent, compared to 54.1 per cent from previous municipal elections which is significantly less than at national level. Most of the candidates elected are from the local and regional political parties, while mandate gains of national parties fell behind.

The Congress observers noticed also the Dutch tradition of “proxy voting” wherein any voter can vote on behalf of another two voters within the same municipality where these voters are registered. According to observations made on Election Day, this practice - the challenges of which had been discussed in the country before - accounted to approximately 10 per cent of the votes cast. The observers also pointed to the longstanding recommendation by the Congress to replace the appointment of mayors by democratic elections in order to ensure the citizens’ right to participate in the conduct of local public affairs and comply with fundamental principles of democracy.

The election observation report including propositions to the authorities will be debated at the October Session of the Congress.

### **Serbia, 3 April 2022**

The Congress deployed a 15-member delegation from 11 Council of Europe member states to observe local elections held in Belgrade and 12 other municipalities. Overall, concerns over an uneven level playing field were raised by domestic and international observers as the line between ruling party and State institutions seemed repeatedly blurred during the campaign.

A strong advantage was provided to lists representing the Government, in the media or by access to more economic and public resources. At the same time, media coverage specifically of the local elections was limited as they were overshadowed by campaigning at the national level. As stated in previous reports, the holding of local elections concurrently with presidential and parliamentary elections, diminishes the significance given to the local elections and reduced media and public interest. Therefore, the Congress delegation reiterated its recommendation that a separate Election Day should be dedicated to local self-government to avoid the overshadowing of local democracy by national concerns.

The election observation report including propositions to the authorities will be debated at the October Session of the Congress.

### **Adopted recommendations (42nd Plenary Session)**

#### **Georgia, 23 March 2022**

The Congress adopted Recommendation 477 on local elections in Georgia (2 October 2021) following an election observation mission deployed by the Congress from 29 September to 3 October 2021. The Congress delegation expressed satisfaction with orderly Election Day procedures, in particular against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Rapporteur David ERAY welcomed a technically well organised and generally calm Election Day and an election legislation generally conducive to holding democratic elections. However, the rapporteur highlighted observed irregularities that, to some extent, affected the quality of the election process. In the recommendation, the Congress regrets an unnecessarily complex election legislation, widespread allegations of intimidation, vote-buying as well as of pressure on candidates and voters. Regrettably, the elections were also marked by an unlevel playing field, emanating from the dominance of the ruling party which largely benefited from the advantage of incumbency.

In light of these observations, the adopted recommendation invites the authorities of Georgia to implement measures to step up the effectiveness of all legal provisions to ensure a more even level-playing field, to increase participation of women, and to prevent the misuse of administrative resources. It recommends strengthening the regulatory framework to ensure accountability and transparency of campaign finances. Lastly, the report encourages national authorities to consider introducing effective measures to fight online fake news and hate speech to tackle polarisation of the society.

#### **Armenia, 23 March 2022**

The Congress adopted an information report the partial local elections in Armenia which took place on 5 December 2021 in 38 municipalities. The observation was conducted remotely, following an invitation from the Armenian authorities.



The report, presented by Stewart DICKSON welcomed the competitive nature of the partial elections and the overall transparency of the vote. These elections took place in a difficult political context coupled with the Covid-19 crisis and a recent amalgamation reform in the country. In comparison with past elections observed by the Congress, positive steps towards transparent, fair and competitive elections have been taken and allegations of fraud or violence were rather limited. At the same time, the rapporteur expressed concern about the overly complicated voting procedures and short timeframes for training, campaigning and registering. The application of quotas led to significant increase in the proportion of women in community councils and this is welcomed by the Congress. The report invites the Armenian authorities to strengthen the participation of women in politics as heads of lists and mayors and to reinforce the regulation of campaign finances and prevent the misuse of administrative resources.

#### **Morocco, 24 March 2022**

The Congress adopted an information report on municipal and regional elections held in Morocco on 8 September 2021. The observation was conducted on-site in several regions of the country, following online preliminary meetings with various interlocutors. This was the first election observation mission of the Congress in the country, which obtained the “Partner for Local Democracy” status in 2019.

The report, presented by Vladimir PREBILIĆ commended the calm and transparent way the Election Day unfolded, as well as the general competitive political climate. At the same time, the rapporteur suggested considering measures to ensure the campaign provided enough time and focus on municipal and regional issues for voters to become more familiar with programmes of a wide range of political actors.

The report invites the authorities to pursue the efforts made to increase the participation of women in politics at municipal level, as well as reinforce the measures to regulate campaign finances, including online campaigns. Lastly, the report encourages the authorities to continue working towards facilitating the exercise of the right to vote, in particular for persons still excluded from the electoral register and improving accessibility of polling stations and readability of ballot papers.

## **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 its partners at European level as well as to the Sustainable Development Goals of the 2030 Agenda of the United Nations.*

### **A. MIGRANTS AND REFUGEES**

**Joint statement by Congress rapporteurs on women and children refugees Bernd VÖHRINGER and Annika VAIKLA (Estonia, ILDG) on World Refugee Day, 20 June 2022 (see I. POLITICAL AGENDA)**

## **Visit by a Congress delegation to Poland, 4 - 5 July 2022**

A delegation headed by Thomas ANDERSSON (Sweden, ILDG) carried out this visit to collect experiences of Polish cities in taking care of Ukrainian refugees. The delegation met with a wide range of stakeholders and visited temporary accommodation centres in Warsaw and Lublin to prepare a report for the Congress. Poland has received more Ukrainian refugees than any other member State, more than 90% of whom are women and children. The rapporteurs said local NGOs and local administrations worked together very well to protect vulnerable people and stressed that building trust between civil society and local authorities takes time and effort, but it is crucial in situations like these. Witnessing their efforts to provide not only a temporary home, but also support and psychological help to Ukrainian women and children, they noted that Polish Cities have shown determination and commitment to face this challenge.

The report on “the reception of women and children refugees in Europe’s cities and regions” that will be presented for adoption at the 43rd session aims at providing Local and regional authorities across Europe with support and guidance to ensure that every woman and child on the run - regardless of their background or country of origin - can be safely received in Europe’s towns, cities and regions.

## **B. YOUTH**

### **International youth online conference “Save Ukraine – save Europe”, 8 April 2022**

Thomas ANDERSSON and the Secretary General of the Congress addressed youth from the City of Fastiv and more than 20 Congress youth delegates, during the international youth online conference “Save Ukraine – save Europe” organised by the City of Fastiv. The conference concluded that youth participation is crucial in defending and rebuilding democracy, especially in times of war when they are witnessing unspeakable atrocities that can indeed shake their faith in humanity. It strongly condemned the brutal war waged by Russia against Ukraine in which youth represent the population disproportionately affected by war. Exchanges between young people from Fastiv and Congress youth delegates continued throughout the conference, focusing on psychosocial impact of conflict on youth, as well as on possible support which will meet the immediate, practical needs of Ukrainian youth while laying groundwork for post-war reconstruction and peace.

### **10th InterCity Youth Conference, Ljubljana, 28 June 2022**

The President addressed the participants during his keynote speech on “Youthwork and participation – two words, one meaning”. He stated that young people deserve a say – a seat at the table – especially on issues that concern them directly, such as youth work and insisted on the importance of youth participation in building modern and democratic communities. He also insisted that local and regional authorities should give young people opportunities for meaningful participation.

The President encouraged elected officials to use the Revised European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life which offers concrete tools that can be used to strengthen youth participation. The 10th InterCity Youth Conference (IYC) was organized by Intercity Youth and the European network of local departments for youth work in line with the declaration of the 3rd European Youth Work Convention and as an important contribution to the Bonn process.

### **Youth Action Week, Strasbourg, 1 July 2022**

Thomas ANDERSSON participated in the closing plenary of the Week and stressed the crucial role of local and regional elected officials in ensuring the participation of young people and the

revival of democracy in Europe's cities, towns and regions. The Youth Action Week, organised under the patronage of the Irish Presidency of the Committee of Ministers and in partnership with the City of Strasbourg, brought together 400 young people from Council of Europe member states. They discussed revitalising democracy and links with human rights, meaningful youth participation, digitalisation, and peace.

The Congress is active in promoting youth participation at local and regional levels of governance in member states, notably with the adoption in 1992 of the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local Life. But also, by opening its doors to young people and inviting them to be youth delegates through the "Rejuvenating Politics" initiative.

### **21st edition of the University on Youth and Development (UYD), Molina, 12 September 2022**

At the opening of the event organised by the North-South Centre, Jimmy MOLONEY, Congress Rapporteur on rural youth, underlined the importance "of making the younger generation part of governance" in line with the values and standards of the Council of Europe and of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. He presented the Congress activities in this field, including the "Rejuvenating Politics" initiative, that allows youth delegates from the 46 member States to participate in Congress sessions and meetings. He also presented the report on the future of youth in rural areas and shared some of the specific battles that young people in rural areas have to fight such as access to education and employment, service provision, and less opportunities than urban peers to participate in public and political life.

The Congress also adopted a report on youth work, as well as guidelines encouraging local and regional authorities to get young people involved in the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

## **C. ENVIRONMENT AND CLIMATE CHANGE**

### **Statement by Congress Spokesperson on Environment and Climate Change Cemal BAS (Türkiye, EPP) on the World Environment Day, 5 June (see I. POLITICAL AGENDA)**

### **Central European Initiative (CEI) on "Local and regional authorities in post-crisis Europe: prospects for a sustainable and resilient future", Sofia, 7-8 June 2022**

Bernd VÖHRINGER shared his city's experience on "How to achieve resilient societies in the context of multi-level governance, deliberative democracy and ecological transition". He highlighted the threats that tend to overshadow the urgency of action against climate change and for biodiversity: war in Ukraine, consequences of the Covid-19 crisis, polarisation of societies or spread of infoxes. He underlined that environmental protection is a central issue at all levels of governance, but it is the local and regional authorities which are key actors in implementing measures and applying laws, calling for local authorities to be given the necessary competences and to be included in the legislative process through a structured and regular consultation with the government.

The Secretary General of the Congress stressed the importance of creating networks to strengthen multi-level governance and proposed holding coordination meetings of the CEI countries Congress members in the framework of Congress sessions. He underlined the importance of integrating the local dimension in the institutional setup of the CEI to complement the governmental and parliamentary structures. The Congress is currently preparing a draft report to propose a "green reading" of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and to strengthen the position of local and regional authorities vis-à-vis state

authorities in environmental decision-making. The report, together with a Human Rights Handbook containing good practices, is expected to be presented to the 43<sup>rd</sup> session.

**Statement by the Congress spokesperson on human rights Harald BERGMANN on the UN resolution declaring access to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment as a universal human right, 9 August 2022 (see I. POLITICAL AGENDA)**

## **D. CITIZEN PARTICIPATION AND GOOD GOVERNANCE**

**Conference on the “Importance of Governance for Local Authorities”, Venice, 11 April 2022**

At the conference to promote the European Label of Governance Excellence (ELoGE), Gunn-Marit HELGESEN stressed that regular monitoring, by the Congress of the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and its additional protocol, as well as the observation of local and regional elections, help to ensure that the 12 principles of Good Democratic Governance are respected at local level. She stated that the recommendations addressed to the member states contribute to improving the principles further through an essential political dialogue. She also underlined the importance of the principles of human rights and rule of law as pillars of the Council of Europe’s activity to achieve greater unity between our states. The conference, “Importance of Governance for Local Authorities”, was organised in the framework of the National Conference for the promotion of the ELoGE Italy Project and co-hosted by the Italian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe and the Italian Association for the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (AICCRE).

**Round table on governance in intercommunal bodies, Strasbourg, 30 May 2022**

Thibaut GUIGNARD (France, EPP/DC), President of the French Delegation to the Congress, stressed that consultation with the elected representatives of the member municipalities of an intercommunal body and with the citizens is the key to good governance. He said greater political consensus and genuine inter-municipal cooperation will be needed to face the growing distance between citizens, elected representatives and inter-municipalities. The round table was organised on the national launch conference of the ELoGE 2022-2023 campaign. The European Label of Excellence in Governance (ELoGE) is awarded to municipalities that have achieved a high level of good governance, based on the 12 Principles of Good Democratic Governance.

**Statement by the President on the 10th anniversary of the entry into force of the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority, 1 June 2022 (see I. POLITICAL AGENDA)**

**Launching of an online platform to promote civil participation, 22 July 2022**

The Congress, the Conference of International NGOs and the Council of Europe’s Division of Elections and Participatory Democracy, have developed the BePART forum which provides a space where local and regional authorities, as well as civil society organisations can share examples of civil participation and exchange lessons learned. The project is a follow-up to the Revised Code of Good Practice for Civil Participation in the Decision-Making Process, adopted by the Congress and the Conference of International NGOs in 2019. The website will be officially presented during a side event in the context of the 43<sup>rd</sup> Congress Session.

## **E. LGBTI people**

**Statement by the Congress Rapporteur on LGBTI issues Andrew BOFF on the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia and Biphobia (IDAHOT) (see I. POLITICAL AGENDA)**

**First meeting of the PACE Parliamentary Platform for the rights of LGBTI people in Europe, Strasbourg, 20 June 2022**

Andrew BOFF participated in this meeting and highlighted the important and successful cooperation between PACE and Congress to protect the rights of LGBTI people. He stressed that national level representatives can vote laws to improve the situation when mayors, city councillors and regional representatives can ensure the safety and respect for LGBTI citizens on the ground. He underlined that when some national governments are backsliding on rights of LGBTI people, cities and regions are the first line of defence for the protection of LGBTI rights, and they often go beyond national standards to do so.

The Congress has been working on LGBTI issues since 2007, including freedom of assembly and expression. In June 2021, the Congress adopted the report "Protecting LGBTI persons in the context of rising hate speech and anti-LGBTI discrimination: the role of local and regional authorities". In addition, it carried out an online fact-finding mission on the situation of LGBTI rights at local and regional level in Poland, the findings of which were used to prepare a report on "The role of local and regional authorities with regard to the situation and rights of LGBTI people in Poland".

## **F. HUMAN RIGHTS**

**3rd European Conference on Democracy and Human Rights, Kristiansand, 5 May 2022**

Gunn Marit HELGESEN underlined the importance of defending human rights, in particular against the backdrop of Russia's war against Ukraine shaking Europe's order. She pointed to the specific role of local authorities, mentioning that mayors and councillors are responsible for a variety of public services related to education, health, housing, infrastructure, among other things which entail their obligations to comply with a variety of human rights.

This third European Conference was organized jointly with the Council of Europe, the University of Agder, Kilden Performing Arts Centre, Sørlandets Kunstmuseum (SKMU), Arkivet Peace and Human Rights Centre, Cultiva Foundation, and Agder County Council.

## **G. CULTURAL HERITAGE**

**Conference of Ministers of Culture in Strasbourg, France, on 1 April 2022**

Barbara TOCE (Italy, SOC/G/PD), Rapporteur of the Congress on Cultural Heritage Management, stressed that sustainable management of cultural heritage can bring Europeans together, while celebrating their diversity. She mentioned the recent Congress report on "Culture without borders", which highlights the role of cultural heritage as a bridge between peoples and communities. This report shows that municipalities and regions can use cultural heritage as a means to promote the values that are essential for democracy: solidarity, dialogue, mutual acceptance and respect for human rights and the rule of law. It also gives them tools for developing sustainable cultural heritage management, for example by protecting intangible cultural heritage and combating over-tourism. However, she stressed the fragility of cultural heritage, especially in times of crisis, such as the Covid-19 pandemic or more recently in the context of the war in Ukraine: destruction of cultural sites, drop in the number of visitors and lack of resources are all challenges that require measures to preserve cultural heritage.



The Conference was organised in the framework of the Italian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe under the theme "Creating our future: creativity and cultural heritage as strategic resources for a diverse and democratic Europe".

## **H. EUROPEAN LOCAL DEMOCRACY WEEK (ELDW)**

The Congress has been organising the European Local Democracy Week since 2007. The ELDW has been a key Congress initiative that has brought together, over more than ten years, thousands of citizens and local authorities to debate the most pressing issues of the day, celebrate democracy in their home communities and promote implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government which opened for signature on 15 October 1985.

The themes of the ELDW have been biennial since the 2015 edition. They have been following the evolution of European societies, reflecting the main challenges and priorities faced by member state governments and territorial communities. For example, the 2015 and 2016 ELDW editions focused on "Living together in multicultural societies: respect, dialogue, interaction", reflecting the burning issues of multiculturalism, radicalisation and extremism that local and regional authorities still have to face today.

In 2017, for its 10th anniversary edition, the ELDW theme was "Citizen Participation, consultation and commitment: for a thriving local democracy", reflecting the need to strengthen citizen participation and in particular the role of youth in building a democratic society. More recently, the theme of the 2021 and 2022 editions of the ELDW was "Protecting the environment: local communities take action", focusing on local action to prevent environmental degradation, fight climate change, strengthen resilience and work towards achieving Sustainable Development Goals 11 (building resilient communities) and 13 (climate action) of the United Nations Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development.

Over the last 10 years, more than 200 local and regional authorities and their associations from around 20 countries organised the ELDW annually and reported a record-breaking number of 611 activities in 2021.

## **I. WORLD FORUM FOR DEMOCRACY**

Since 2012, when the Council of Europe held its first Forum for Democracy, the Congress has been regularly participating in the event, sponsoring specific Forum labs to promote democracy at the local and regional level. Congress members and spokespersons have actively contributed to discussion in different sessions, debating solutions to key challenges for democracies worldwide. For example, in 2018, when the Forum focused on gender equality and when the MeToo movement was in the wake of becoming global, President of the Chamber of Regions, Gunn Marit HELGESEN, spoke of the pressing need to increase the number of women in high positions to represent local and regional interests. This followed the initiative of the Congress to pursue gender equality in its own ranks. Indeed, in 2008, it revisited its requirements and made it mandatory for national delegations to have at least 30% of the under-represented sex in them. Most of the Forum's projects on local democracy involve important participation from citizens, reflecting the will of the Congress to include citizens and especially young people at the heart of its initiatives to build stronger and more resilient democracies. Since 2021, Congress Youth Delegates are also participating in the Forum as part of the Congress delegation. The Forum is celebrating its 10th anniversary this year, with the topic: "Democracy: a new hope?". Over 400 applications for 'Democracy Innovation Award' have been received, presenting innovative initiatives, aimed at enhancing democracy and reversing democratic decline around the world. Several such initiatives will be presented during the Lab on "Polarisation and Democratic Engagement", sponsored by the Congress.

## **J. UNITED NATIONS AGENDA 2030 – IMPLEMENTATION OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs)**

*The United Nations Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development lists 17 objectives to be achieved to build a socially inclusive, environmentally sustainable and economically prosperous society. The Council of Europe contributes to its implementation through a human rights-based approach stemming from its pan-European dimension, institutions, normative framework and capacity for action.*

*The Congress views the concept of sustainability in a broad sense, as democratic, social and economic sustainability built on a number of key principles: Achieving SDGs is a shared responsibility for all levels of government - Local and regional authorities must have proper competences and financial autonomy - Citizens must always remain at the heart of the action. The Congress' work focuses on 12 of the 17 objectives defined in the Agenda.*

*The co-operation programmes and projects of the Congress contribute in particular to the Sustainable Development Goals 5 (Gender equality), 10 (Reduced inequalities), 11 (Sustainable cities and communities), 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions) and 17 (Partnership for the goals) respectively.*

*In order to implement the SDGs successfully, the Congress cooperates with a wide range of actors: its institutional partners within the Council of Europe, in particular, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Office of the Directorate General of Programmes; international organisations representing local and regional authorities, such as United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG); European institutions, such as the European Committee of the Regions, the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE), the Assembly of European Regions (AER), the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR).*

### **Launching of the booklet on “How to make your town a better place”, 22 March 2022**

This booklet is aimed at helping children aged 6 to 11 understand the UN Sustainable Development Goals and is completed with guidelines for local and regional authorities. It was presented during a debate on involving children in sustainable development held during the Congress session in March 2022. Participating in the debate, Grace O'HAGAN of the United Kingdom, a 10-year-old member of the advisory group of children that helped to produce the booklet stressed that adults who think children cannot do this type of work or should not get involved need to know that children want to understand the world around them and be able to help. In her contribution to the debate, the Rapporteur of the Parliamentary Assembly Baroness Doreen E. MASSEY, welcomed the Congress initiative, which was in keeping with the PACE's strategy. She pointed out that children's rights were closely interlinked with the work of local and national public bodies and that there were many initiatives being carried out between parliamentarians, local and regional authorities, mayors, teachers, youth workers and children.

### **Round table on SDG 5: “Accelerators of gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic”, 7 April 2022, Geneva**

Eirini DOUROU, Congress Spokesperson on Gender Equality, presented Congress recommendations in promoting gender equality: adoption of electoral laws requiring the parity of women and men on candidate lists, introduction of the system of “pairing” women and men appointed to elected seats from party lists following the elections, and implementation of quotas for candidates in elections, to guarantee the minimum representation. She indicated that the Congress introduced since 2007 a 30% minimum requirement of women in national delegations, which has led in practice to the actual representation of 42% today – from 12% back in 1994 when the Congress was established. She also highlighted the Congress

recommendation of 2016 which placed emphasis on several key factors to accelerate women's political participation and representation at local and regional levels. The round table was organised as part of the UN ECE Regional Forum on Sustainable Development, exchanged on how governments can promote gender equality and women's empowerment as part of the COVID-19 recovery process, considering gender-differentiated impacts of the pandemic.

### **High-level Launching Conference for the new Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027), Rome, 7-8 April 2022.**

Brigitte VAN DEN BERG (Netherlands, ILDG), Congress rapporteur on Children and Sustainable Cities, participated with a video message highlighting the booklet developed by the Congress together with children on "How to make your town a better place" to help children aged 6 to 11 understand the UN Sustainable Development Goals and completed with guidelines for local and regional authorities. The Congress rapporteur also highlighted the importance of the Additional Protocol to the European Charter of Local Self-Government on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority.

The High-Level Conference, "Beyond the horizon: a new era for the rights of the child", was organised in the framework of and hosted by the Italian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, to launch the Council of Europe Strategy for the Rights of the Child (2022-2027) as a European instrument guiding the Council of Europe and its member states in protecting and promoting the rights of the child.

## **V. INSTITUTIONAL CO-OPERATION WITHIN THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE**

### **A. THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL SECTOR**

#### **The Committee of Ministers**

The Secretary General of the Congress made his communication to the Ministers' Deputies on 17 March 2022 (See I. POLITICAL AGENDA)

The President of the Congress held an exchange of views with the Minister's Deputies on 6 April 2022 (See I. POLITICAL AGENDA)

Vice-president Gunn-Marit HELGESEN took part in the conference on "Importance of Governance for Local Authorities", co-hosted by the Italian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers in Venice on 11 April 2022 (see IV. THEMATIC ACTIVITIES D. citizen participation and good governance)

The President of the Congress participated in the 132nd Session of the Committee of Ministers in Turin on 20 May 2020 (see I. POLITICAL AGENDA)

#### **The European Committee on Democracy and Governance (CDDG)**

The Chair of the Congress Governance Committee, Jelena DRENJANIN (Sweden, PPE/CCE) took part in the 15<sup>th</sup> Plenary Meeting of the CDDG on 22 April 2022. She presented, in particular, the report on the use of deliberative methods in European municipalities and regions, adopted by the Congress in March 2022, which provides practical guidance and concrete examples to municipalities and regions and could serve as a useful contribution to the CDDG's current reflection on deliberative democracy. She highlighted other potential



areas for cooperation between the Congress and the CDDG such as good democratic governance, multi-level governance, green public administration, cross-border cooperation, and Covid-19 crisis. She also mentioned three thematic reports being prepared by the Governance Committee in view of their adoption by the Congress in October 2022, which could be of interest to the CDDG: “Regional identities: improving dialogue to reduce regional tensions”, “The impact of hate speech and fake news on the working conditions of local and regional elected representatives”, and “Smart cities and smart regions”.

On 4 July, the Chair of the CDDG Paul ROWSELL had an exchange of views with the Governance Committee on the current work of the CDDG and potential cooperation.

## **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 initiatives and campaigns.*

The President of PACE Tiny KOX addressed the Congress session on 23 March 2022 (see II. ACTIVITIES OF THE CONGRESS BODIES)

PACE Rapporteur on children, Baroness Doreen E. MASSEY, participated in the debate on involving children in sustainable development held at the Congress session on 22 March 2022 and welcomed the Congress initiative to produce the booklet on “How to make your town a better place” (see IV. THEMATIC ACTIVITIES)

Congress rapporteur on LGBTI issues, Andrew BOFF, participated in the first meeting of the PACE Parliamentary Platform for the rights of LGBTI people in Europe on 20 June 2022 in Strasbourg (see IV. THEMATIC ACTIVITIES)

## **C. 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.*

*Members of the Congress on the Council for Democratic Elections are currently the thematic Spokespersons on the Observation of Local and Regional Elections, Jakob WIENEN, Stewart DICKSON, Vladimir PREBILIC and Rosaleen O’GRADY*

*The Congress regularly participates in the meetings and activities of the Venice Commission and asks occasionally for opinions.*

## **D. THE NORTH SOUTH CENTRE**

*In the framework of the South-Med Partnership, the Congress also contributes to the activities of the North-South Centre of the Council of Europe as part of its quadrilogue governance which brings together representatives from governments, national parliaments, local and regional authorities and civil society.*

Congress Rapporteur on rural youth Jimmy MOLONEY participated in the 21st edition of the University on Youth and Development (UYD) in Mollina on 12 September 2022 (see IV. THEMATIC ACTIVITIES)

## VI. EXTERNAL CO-OPERATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

### A. THE COMMITTEE OF THE REGIONS OF THE EUROPEAN UNION

*The Congress and the European Committee of the Regions (CoR) of the European Union maintain close co-operation and working relations, both at the political level and the level of the respective secretariats, based on the Co-operation Agreement, revised most recently in March 2018. This co-operation is based on the commonality of the objective of reinforcing local and regional democracy, devolution and self-government in Europe, and on the complementarity of action.*

*Co-operation is steered by the Congress/CoR High-Level Group (HLG) which includes the Congress President and its two Chamber Presidents, and the CoR President, First Vice-President and President of the CIVEX Commission, assisted by the respective Secretaries General. The HLG meets at the beginning of the year to compare the political agendas, set priority areas of co-operation and identify potential for joint action.*

*The respective Presidents address a plenary session of the other's institution at least once during their mandate.*

*In practical terms, co-operation includes regular exchange of information and documents, contribution to the preparation of reports and to debates in committees and working groups, exchanges of views with rapporteurs, participation in each other's events and statutory meetings, and organisation of joint activities.*

#### **European Committee of the Regions**

The President of the European Committee of the Regions Apostolos TZITZIKOSTAS addressed the Congress session in March 2022 (see II. ACTIVITIES OF THE CONGRESS BODIES)

The President and the Secretary General of the Congress attended the meeting of the European Committee of the Regions' Working Group on Ukraine, Brussels, 30 March 2022 (see I. POLITICAL AGENDA)

### B. EUROPEAN ASSOCIATIONS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

#### **Assembly of European Regions (AER)**

Bernd VÖHRINGER participated in an online webinar on "Ukraine: Regional and local initiatives for support and exchanges" organised by the AER on 17 June 2022. He emphasised that Ukraine today needs coherent and co-ordinated action at all levels of governance, as well as a dialogue between the different levels for rebuilding and revival of the country and its communities. He said that local and regional authorities are key actors in supporting the war effort and that their partnerships and networking contribute greatly to the resistance and resilience in Ukraine. He presented the Cities4Cities platform, launched in March 2022 under the patronage of the Congress, as a place to match the needs of Ukrainian local and regional authorities with the capacity, know-how and supply of cities and regions from other European countries.

The Secretary General attended the opening of the AER Summer Academy, in Letterkenny, Ireland, on 30 August 2022. He stressed that in the face of the current crises, democratic institutions need to be "reinvented" with citizens' and youth involvement, to make sure that they have constant access to governance, not limited to elections alone. Youth participation has been promoted by the Congress for decades, notably through the European Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life and through several reports. The

Congress is also the only international organisation to allow young people to sit in a European assembly alongside local and regional elected representatives. Developed in the framework of its "Rejuvenating Politics" strategy, this initiative offers youth delegates from the 46 Council of Europe member states the opportunity to contribute to debates during Congress sessions and committee meetings. Congress Youth Delegate Leonard WILKS (Switzerland) took part in the debate on "Youth and regional government" which focused on how regions can better promote youth engagement and get young people truly involved in decision-making processes within their communities, from youth councils to entrepreneurship and other forms of civic activism.

### **European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA)**

Vice-President Martine DIESCHBURG-NICKELS (Luxembourg, ILDG) addressed the General Assembly of ALDA in Strasbourg on 6 May 2022 on the topic of supporting local democracy, peace and community resilience. "We are currently living in a very special moment, characterised by multiple crises on the European continent and worldwide," she stressed at the opening of the General Assembly of the.

Referring to the Covid-19 pandemic, Russia's war against Ukraine, but also to climate change threatening the planet and the increasing polarisation of societies, she stressed that these crises we are facing today bring to the forefront the resilience of our communities, both to prevent the consequences of the crisis, to resist or adapt to them, but also to bounce back quickly after their impact.

The Vice-President recalled that, in the face of these many crises, the work of the Congress, like that of ALDA, in strengthening local democracy and citizen engagement, serves to increase the resilience of cities and regions. She also highlighted the crucial importance of promoting and defending the Council of Europe's democratic values at every level of governance. "The work of our institutions contributes to strengthening the foundations of our democratic societies. This is fundamental because a society built on solid foundations will withstand any crisis," concluded Vice-President DIESCHBURG-NICKELS.

### **The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)**

The Secretary General of the Congress took part in the PLATFORMA Political Council meeting jointly organised by the Congress and the Council of European Municipalities in Strasbourg, on 9 March 2022. Introducing the thematic debate "Are our cities and regions equipped to respond to the multiple crises they face?" he underlined the multiple challenges facing the world and in particular the COVID-19 pandemic. Referring to the Congress report on "Ensuring respect for the European Charter of Local Self-Government in situations of major crisis", he said that climate change and energy, migration, social media, digitization and artificial intelligence, environmental degradation, polarisation of society and defence of social cohesion are all challenges that will force local and regional authorities to act, as they put at stake the resilience and sustainability of cities and regions and call for responses that must be found at all levels of governance.

Speakers in the debate raised several among the many challenges local and regional elected representatives are facing. According to Xavier CADORET, Mayor of the city of Saint-Gerand-le-Puy, the local level must be given the confidence and necessary means by central governments to be able to renew the democratic link with their citizens. Sevdia UGREKHELIDZE (Georgia, PPE/DC), Member of the Municipal Assembly of Mtskheta, underlined that strong coordination, dialogue and consultation are essential for the good functioning of any democratic society and especially so in times of crisis, as shown by the COVID-19 pandemic. Belinda GOTTARDI (Italy, SOC/G/DP), Mayor of Castel Maggiore, stressed that implementing and localising the Sustainable Development Goals is a way of

containing the harmful effects of crises on citizens and making societies more resistant and resilient.

## **C. NATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES**

### **National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG)**

The Congress supported the organisation of the VII National Congress of NALAG on 9 March 2022, which was opened by Bernd VÖHRINGER, President of the Chamber of Local Authorities. He highlighted the key role of national associations in the consultation mechanisms but also as a platform of exchange bringing together elected representatives from all political backgrounds with a pluralistic and open approach.

### **Network of Associations of Local Authorities from South-East Europe (NALAS)**

On 12 May 2022, Vice-President Aleksandra MALETIC represented the Congress in the XVII General Assembly of NALAS. She pointed to the crucial need for strengthening the resilience and sustainability of municipalities and cities to respond better to crises, referring in this regard to the work undertaken by the Congress and networks such as NALAS, particularly to strengthen decentralisation and local democracy, within a system of multi-level governance.

### **Central European Initiative (CEI)**

The Congress participated in the event "Local and regional authorities in post-crisis Europe: prospects for a sustainable and resilient future", organised by the Central European Initiative (CEI), in Sofia, on 7-8 June 2022. Bernd VÖHRINGER, shared his city's experience on "How to achieve resilient societies in the context of multi-level governance, deliberative democracy and ecological transition". He highlighted the threats that tend to overshadow the urgency of action against climate change and for biodiversity - war in Ukraine, consequences of the Covid-19 crisis, polarisation of societies or spread of infoxes – and called for local authorities to be given the necessary competences and to be included in the legislative process through a structured and regular consultation with the government. The Secretary General of the Congress stressed the importance of creating networks to strengthen multi-level governance and proposed holding coordination meetings of the Congress members from CEI countries in the framework of Congress sessions. He underlined the importance of integrating the local dimension in the institutional setup of the CEI to complement the governmental and parliamentary structures.

### **Association of Irish Local Government (AILG)**

Bernd VÖHRINGER attended the AILG Autumn Seminar on "Celebrating Local Government", held 14 and 15 September 2022 in Trim and underlined that it is essential to give local and regional elected representatives all the support they need to carry out their missions in response to everyday challenges and crisis situations.

Addressing the theme "Local Government - Leading out in Challenging times", he stressed that the key to efficient multi-level governance and resilient and strong societies was a well-functioning local democracy which requires strong local authorities and strong structures to represent them at all levels of governance. Recalling the many challenges democratic societies have been facing over the last years, in particular the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, he underlined that local and regional authorities are the ones which are on the frontline, responding to the citizens' daily needs, expectations and grievances in all circumstances. He praised the Congress for playing a central role in supporting them in this regard.

The seminar was organised as part of the Irish Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. Irish Minister for local Government and Planning, Peter Burke and the Lord Mayor of Dublin Caroline Conroy will participate in the 43rd session on 25 October 2022.

## VII. CO-OPERATION PROGRAMMES AND ACTION PLANS

*The Congress provides practical support by means of co-operation projects to address shortcomings of local democracy identified during the monitoring and post-monitoring of the Charter and the observation of local and regional elections. The Guidelines for co-operation activities<sup>1</sup> further specify the framework and the principles of Congress co-operation activities, whose importance was reiterated in the Priorities of the Congress 2021-2026.<sup>2</sup>*

*These projects take place within the Council of Europe country-specific Action Plans or within the policy towards neighbouring regions. They are carried out by the Congress secretariat in close co-operation and synergy with the other entities of the Organisation.*

*Currently, the Congress has projects under implementation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. The project in Armenia has come to an end in June 2022, while those in Kosovo<sup>3</sup>, Morocco, and Tunisia ended in December 2021. Since 2011, those activities amount to over twelve million EUR, funded by voluntary contributions from member States and the European Union.*

*The co-operation activities are designed to inspire mayors and local councillors to lead the change in their municipalities, in order to strengthen transparency, accountability and citizen participation in their decision-making and promote human rights at local level. In addition, the Congress supports them to commonly defend their interests vis-à-vis central authorities, in close co-ordination with their associations.*

*The prevention of corruption is central to political and operational activities. To support action in this area, the Congress has produced a set of handbooks on open government and public ethics for local authorities in Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, and Kosovo\*. In addition, since 2021, the bE-Open online tool provides quick and easy access to relevant international standards and local context, legislation, examples of case law related to corruption, guidelines and good practices in open local government and public ethics. This set of tools is complemented by capacity development activities.*

*Stronger gender equality and human rights perspectives are implemented in all activities to foster gender equality and promote the participation and representation of women in local political life. The support to gender mainstreaming, as well as to the fight against sexism and the participation and inclusion of under-represented groups, especially internally displaced persons, and minorities at local level, is thereby intensified.*

*The co-operation activities contribute to the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development – to achieving Sustainable Development Goals 3 (Good health and well-being), 5 (Gender equality), 10 (Reduce inequality within and among*

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<sup>1</sup> Improving the impact of Congress recommendations, Guidelines for co-operation activities in Council of Europe member States, CG/BUR/2015(27)31, March 2015, available at <https://rm.coe.int/168071a684>

<sup>2</sup> 2021-2026 Priorities of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities, CG (2021)40-05, March 2021, available at <https://rm.coe.int/2021-2026-priorities-of-the-congress-of-local-and-regional-authorities/1680a1b0bd>

<sup>3</sup> (\*) All reference to Kosovo, whether to the territory, institutions or population, in this text shall be understood in full compliance with United Nations Security Council Resolution 1244 and without prejudice to the status of Kosovo.

*countries), 11 (Sustainable cities and communities), 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions), and 17 (Partnership for the goals).*

## **A. ARMENIA**

In Armenia, the Congress continued its close co-operation with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure (MTAI), in particular in the follow-up to the finalisation of the Territorial Administrative Reform in Armenia (TARA).

The Congress provided direct support to local elected representatives and civil servants in six newly formed communities to better manage state affairs and deal with increased level of delegated authorities. Building on the previous work carried out jointly with the MTAI and the Corruption Prevention Commission (CPC), the Congress organised on-the-job trainings to strengthen institutional capacity and organisational performance of six pilot local authorities, focusing on the implementation of the anti-corruption policy and on developing and maintaining registers of administrative acts, bylaws and proceedings. As a result of this close co-operation, the CPC developed the model Code of conduct for public officials in Armenia, based on the principles of the European Code of Conduct for all Persons Involved in Local and Regional Governance adopted by the Congress.

The Congress experts carried out a comprehensive legal-financial analysis of a number of legal acts relevant to the functioning of Armenian local authorities<sup>4</sup>. They have identified potential corruption risks in the financial and budgetary processes stemming from the “powers” of local self-government bodies, as well as local elected and appointed representatives. In line with findings and the results of abovementioned analysis, legislative proposals were developed to address identified shortcomings. Moreover, Congress experts developed Guidelines on the necessary tools (hardware and software), financial resources and municipal staff capacity development needs to address the corruption risks.

The e-learning on “Fraud Awareness and Prevention” and “Ethics” was developed in response to the request from MTAI and the needs voiced by local authorities. These short, yet effective and practical e-courses are developed in close co-operation with the Directorate of Internal Oversight of the Council of Europe with the aim of having it available on the MTAI e-learning platform for all 79 Armenian municipalities, their elected representatives and appointed officials.

The International Conference on “Decentralisation in Armenia: a new agenda in the post-TARA environment” was organised on 28 June jointly with MTAI to take stock of the current challenges facing the Government and local authorities of Armenia. Conference participants addressed institutional questions related to the role of stakeholders in the decentralisation process and interaction between them in formulating and implementing a decentralisation strategy and action plan. Bernd VÖHRINGER, President of Chamber of Local Authorities, Bryony RUDKIN, Congress Rapporteur on Local Democracy in Armenia, and Vladimir PREBILIČ, Congress Spokesperson on Ethics and Prevention of Corruption, took part in the Conference.

The Community of Practice on Public Integrity and Ethics in Local Governance in Armenia (CoP), established under the project in March 2020, continued to serve as a platform of exchange and coordination of work between 23 Armenian municipalities and key government stakeholders. Also with Congress support, the City of Yerevan and Municipality of Armavir became two additional local authorities to be endorsed as partners of Open Government Partnership (OGP) Local Programme in May 2022. This global partnership of local

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<sup>4</sup> Laws on: “Local self-government”, “Local self-government in the City of Yerevan” and “Territorial administration”, “Local duties and payments”, “Financial equalisation” and “The Budget system”



governments and civil society organisations was enlarged by 30 local and regional authorities worldwide, which will, plan, design and implement open government reforms and co-create open government action plans jointly with local civil society organisations, thus advancing citizens' engagement at all levels of decision-making.

The Congress supported the Communities Association of Armenia (CAA) in the revision of its Charter following the decrease in the number of communities from 502 to 79 in December 2021 as a result of the finalisation of TARA. The Congress also supported the development of CAA's new Strategic Plan for next five years, adopted in June 2022.

## **B. BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA**

The Congress continued co-operation with the City of Mostar in the framework of the project "Innovating democratic participation at local level in Bosnia and Herzegovina" (January 2022 to June 2024) and has expanded its activities to other local authorities and their associations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as part of the Council of Europe Action Plan for 2022-2025. This project aims to enhance the quality of local democracy and create opportunities for citizens to engage in innovative deliberative processes in Mostar and in Bosnia and Herzegovina, and to promote new democratic approaches, open government, public ethics, transparent and inclusive local policy making in the country.

In March 2022, Mayor of Mostar Mario KORDIC addressed the Congress session, taking stock of successful co-operation within previous Congress action in the country, focusing on results and prospects stemming from the first deliberative process in the city, the Mostar Citizens' Assembly, which was presented as one of the case studies in the Congress report on use of deliberative methods at local and regional level (adopted at the session)."

In May 2022, a Grant Agreement was signed with the City of Mostar to support the implementation of the recommendations emerging from the first Citizens' Assembly, organised in July 2021 as part of the previous Congress intervention. All activities envisaged under the Agreement will contribute to strengthening capacities of the City of Mostar, and to fostering openness, co-creation and increased citizen participation in the local policies

In May 2022, The Platform of Exchange among municipalities and cities across Bosnia and Herzegovina on open government for transparent, inclusive and citizen-oriented local policy making was established, following a public call for expression of interest. The Platform, which is composed of 23 local authorities, also supports strategic interests of the Association of Municipalities and Cities of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Association of Municipalities and Cities of Republic of Srpska. It held its first meeting on 23 May 2022 with participation of Jelena DRENJANIN, Chair of the Governance Committee of the Congress and Jimmy MOLONEY, Head of Delegation of Ireland to the Congress.

In July 2022, Congress organised the event "Open, inclusive and transparent local policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina" for the members of the Platform of Exchange, with participation of Vladimir PREBILIĆ, Congress Spokesperson on Ethics and Prevention of Corruption, and Amelie TARSCHYS INGRE (Sweden, ILDG) Congress Rapporteur on making public procurement transparent at local and regional level.

## **C. GEORGIA**

In Georgia, the Congress is implementing a project on "Strengthening participatory democracy and human rights at local level" jointly with the Directorate General of Democracy of the Council of Europe.

In March 2022, the Forum of Exchange on human rights at local level, the unique platform of 13 local authorities established in cooperation with the National Association of Local Authorities (NALAG), held its first meeting to exchange about human rights-based policymaking at the local level. On this occasion, a baseline assessment exercise was launched in order to identify the local authorities' capacities, challenges, and needs for effective human rights implementation.

Following the priorities set by the Forum, in April 2022 two intensive workshops on gender equality mainstreaming for effective human rights-based local governance were carried out, with the participation of the Congress Spokesperson on Gender Equality Eirini DOUROU. The workshops strengthened the capacities of more than 50 local elected representatives and senior officials, and led to the official commitment of the municipality of Marneuli to sign the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life.

In May 2022, a grant agreement with NALAG was signed providing the Association with the tools and expertise necessary to mainstream human rights standards in national and local policies and actions, to establish peer-to-peer exchanges among member municipalities, and to strengthen its advocacy capacities to promote consultations between local and central authorities in the field of human rights. Within these efforts, the Congress is actively supporting NALAG's efforts for the development of a multilevel platform of dialogue and consultations of local authorities.

In June 2022, the Congress organised the first-ever roundtable meeting between NALAG's members and the Public Defender's Office to discuss the recommendations addressed to local authorities within the Public Defender's report on the situation of human rights and freedoms in Georgia for 2021. The roundtable was a first important achievement within the process of strengthening dialogue and relations between local authorities and the PDO as a fundamental actor of human rights governance.

In June 2022, a three-day innovative Spring School on Human Rights Data and Evidence-Based Policy Making at the Local Level was held with the participation (online) of the Congress spokesperson on Human Rights Harald BERGMANN. Georgian local authorities developed a rationale and checklist for concrete steps to apply an evidence-based approach in their policy making. The baseline assessment underway will contribute to mainstream such an approach and enhance the advocacy and dialogue with central authorities.

## **D. UKRAINE**

In Ukraine, the Congress continues co-operation through the project "Strengthening local democratic governance in Ukraine" (October 2021- December 2022) to ensure continued support to local and central authorities in their regular dialogue, and in their efforts to promote ethical decision making and more citizen-oriented, inclusive, responsive and transparent local governance. The project was adapted in May 2022 to match the humanitarian and social needs of local and regional authorities during the war in Ukraine.

The platform Cities4Cities launched during the 42nd Session, on the initiative of the President of the Chamber of Local Authorities, Bernd VÖHRINGER and under the patronage of the Congress, currently counts almost 200 registered authorities. The Congress Secretariat continues to act as a liaison between the City of Sindelfingen and Ukrainian counterparts, through the support of the Association of Ukrainian Cities (AUC), and regularly contributes to the improvement of the platform and its functions.

In May 2022, 200 representatives of local authorities and youth NGOs shared new practices of youth engagement developed and introduced in their municipalities during the war in the



online workshop organised jointly with the AUC as part of the Open Government Partnership Week 2022.

At the invitation of the Association of Ukrainian Cities (AUC), the Congress President Leendert VERBEEK and Secretary General Andreas KIEFER visited Ukraine in June where they participated in the Forum "reVIVED Ukraine - reVIVED communities" organised jointly with other international stakeholders and which gathered together more than 200 representatives of Ukrainian local authorities. As highlighted in the Joint Declaration signed with the Chair of the AUC and Mayor of Kyiv, Vitali KLITSCHKO, they discussed the reconstruction of Ukraine, the development of shared projects in line with the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the promotion of solidarity with Ukrainian and other European municipalities.

In June 2022, a grant agreement was signed with the AUC to further promote co-operation between Ukrainian local authorities and partnership networks between Ukrainian municipalities and with other European municipalities and associations of local and regional authorities, in particular through the Cities4Cities platform, collecting feedback from their members and contributing to platform's improvement and further development. The grant also enables the AUC to facilitate peer learning and dialogue with the national level on the provision of services to citizens in the times of war and crises, as well as to support the localisation of open government principles.

In July 2022, more than 350 representatives of the Ukrainian local and regional authorities and their national associations gathered together during the online roundtable on collaboration mechanisms of local and regional authorities in times of war. They discussed ways to identify new co-operation mechanisms and improve the existing ones with their peers from other European countries. With interventions from national, regional, local and international stakeholders, as well as from major European associations, joint actions and trust were identified as the main corner stones for Ukraine's revival.

In August 2022, a survey on the needs and priorities of local authorities related for adequate provision of services, in particular to IDPs and underrepresented groups, in times of war and post-war recovery was launched in close co-operation with the AUC. The report will serve as a basis for providing further support to Ukrainian local authorities and their national associations to enhance resilience and support recovery and reconstruction.

## **E. THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA**

The Congress continued co-operation with the Republic of Moldova in the framework of the project "Reinforcing the culture of dialogue and ethical open local governance in the Republic of Moldova" (March 2022 – March 2024). The Congress supports the country to strengthen the dialogue between local and central authorities and to enhance local governance by promoting integrity, corruption prevention, open government, public ethics, and gender equality at local level. The two-fold effort contributes to enhancing the quality of local democracy and ensuring that citizens of the Republic of Moldova benefit from local policies and practices that are ethical, fair, inclusive, and open.

In June 2022, a grant was awarded to the Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova (CALM) to strengthen the institutional capacity of the organisation in evidence-based advocacy, coordination, communication, and monitoring. As a result, CALM will be able to better analyse the local democracy developments in the country, support its members and engage in effective dialogue and policy discussions between the central and local levels of government.

Consultation meetings were held in June 2022 in Chisinau with stakeholders, including representatives of the State Chancellery, the Ministry of Infrastructure and Regional Development, local authorities, including the Mayor of Chisinau, as well as CALM, the Governor of Gagauzia, the People's Assembly of Gagauzia, and development partners.

## F. SOUTH MED PARTNERSHIP

*The historic events in the countries of the southern Mediterranean in 2011 paved the way for far-reaching changes in the region, including the start of processes of opening up and democratisation.*

*Since 2011, the Council of Europe has conducted a new policy towards its immediate neighbourhood, in particular North Africa, with the aim to enable non-members States to benefit from the experience gained in the democratic transition processes in central and Eastern Europe after 1989.*

*It is against this background that the Congress' cooperation activities with neighbouring countries are carried out, in the framework of the South-Med Partnership Programme, launched in February 2017, to meet the objectives of the local and regional democracy component of the Council of Europe's neighbourhood policy.*

*The South-Med Partnership is designed as a framework for privileged cooperation with the countries involved. It is politically supervised by its Rapporteurs Xavier CADORET and Gunn-Marit HELGESEN, as well as Konstantinos KOUKAS and Carla DEJONGHE as Rapporteurs on the South-Mediterranean Partnership appointed in May 2021.*

### **Partner for Local Democracy status**

*Introduced in 2014, the Partner for Local Democracy status<sup>5</sup> allows the establishment of a special framework for dialogue and regular institutional contacts between local and regional elected representatives in Council of Europe neighbourhood countries and their European counterparts.*

*The status is granted at the request of the countries concerned and is designed as a tool for strengthening good governance at local and regional level. Through their participation in the work of the Congress, the delegations from the beneficiary countries help to promote local democracy not only in their own countries but at pan-European level.*

*The Kingdom of Morocco and the Republic of Tunisia were granted the status of Partner for Local Democracy of the Congress on 2 April and 29 October 2019 respectively. Since then, the two delegations participate regularly in the Congress' statutory work (Sessions, remote meetings of its Statutory Forum and of its three Committees). According to the Congress' rules and procedures, the delegations were renewed during the Congress' March 2021 Session.*

### **Morocco**

In March 2022 Morocco nominated a new delegation to the Congress, which includes newly elected presidents of the three Moroccan associations of local, provincial and regional authorities. The delegation, headed by Mbarka BOUAIDA, the only woman President of the region in Morocco, participated actively in the March session of the Congress. The Congress aims to continue its co-operation activities in the future within the current Council of Europe Neighbourhood Partnership with Morocco.

### **Tunisia**

In Tunisia, the Congress continues supporting local self-government by engaging with local and regional elected representatives in the framework of the *Partner for Local Democracy*

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<sup>5</sup> [Resolution 376 \(2014\)](#)

status of the country. The Congress also aims to continue co-operation activities in the future within the current Council of Europe Neighbourhood Partnership with Tunisia.

## APPENDICES

### APPENDIX 1

42nd SESSION – March 2022

[Adopted Resolutions and Recommendations](#)

### APPENDIX 2:

[Declaration condemning the Russian Federation's war against Ukraine](#)

### APPENDIX 3:

[Cities4Cities Platform](#)

### APPENDIX 4:

[Joint declaration on reconstruction of Ukraine](#)

### APPENDIX 5

[Agenda of the 43<sup>rd</sup> session](#)