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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 3 March 2021. 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 13 October 2021

[Previous Activity reports](#)

I. POLITICAL AGENDA

HIGHLIGHTS

Communication to the Ministers' Deputies, 3 March 2021

Secretary General Andreas KIEFER presented the work of the Congress over the last months and the forecast of work for the coming months to the Ministers' Deputies. He underlined in particular that the Congress has been a pioneer in adapting its working methods to the current sanitary situation notably by introducing remote procedures for the monitoring of the European Charter of Local self-government, the observation of local elections and fact-finding missions, such as the one on the situation of LGBTI in Poland. He stressed that the current situation has well shown the need for more multilateralism and multi-level governance, which the Congress fully promotes in its work.

Signing of a Roadmap with the Government of Moldova, 15 April 2021

The Congress and the Government of Republic of Moldova signed this Roadmap for the implementation of the Congress recommendations aimed at strengthening local and regional democracy in the country. The roadmap was signed by the President of the Congress Leendert VERBEEK and by the Secretary General of the Government of the Republic of Moldova, Liliana IACONI. President Verbeek welcomed the signing of this roadmap and thanked the Congress rapporteurs on the Republic of Moldova, Gunn-Marit HELGESEN (Norway, EPP/CCE) and Marc COOLS (Belgium, ILDG) for their contribution. He underlined that the signing of this roadmap demonstrates the political will and strong commitment of the Moldovan authorities to the development of local and regional democracy in the country in full respect of the principles of the European Charter of Local Self Government.

After the signing ceremony, the President met with the President of the Republic of Moldova, Maia SANDU. They discussed issues of common interest and the participation of the Republic of Moldova in the Council of Europe and in the Congress. The President of the Republic of Moldova highlighted the importance of strengthening co-operation between the Congress and the Congress of the Local Authorities of Moldova (CALM) as well as increasing the financial autonomy of the local communities and building the capacities of the municipalities of Moldova.

Bilateral meeting with the Mayor of Strasbourg, 19 April 2021

The President of the Congress met with Mayor Jeanne BARSEGHIAN to discuss issues of common interest concerning local democracy. The Mayor expressed her support for the work of the Council of Europe and the Congress in particular, and the hope that the Congress members will soon return to Strasbourg for their meetings. The President and the Mayor agreed on the importance of implementing the sustainable development goals at local level and the crucial role of local authorities in building cohesive and sustainable societies.

Bilateral meeting with the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, 20 April 2021

In her meeting with the Congress President, Marija PEJČINOVIĆ BURIĆ underlined the unique role of the Congress in the institutional architecture of the Council of Europe and the paramount importance of the local and regional authorities' grass-root contribution to addressing the challenges faced by the member States of the Council of Europe. She welcomed the priorities adopted by the Congress and reaffirmed her support for the important work of the Congress. She addressed the Congress at the second part of its 40th Session in June (see II. ACTIVITIES OF THE CONGRESS BODIES)

The same day, the President met with the President of the Parliamentary Assembly, Rik DAEMS (see V. INSTITUTIONAL COOPERATION WITHIN THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE)

Exchange of views with the Ministers' Deputies, 31 March 2021

The Congress President presented the Congress priorities for the next five years, adopted during the first part of the 40th Session and underlined that they are fully in line with the Strategic Framework of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe which put the emphasis on environmental and social sustainability, digital revolution, as well as citizen engagement in democracy. Also referring to the

COVID-19 Pandemic, the President expressed concern about the situations where democracy, constitutional values and civil and human rights are at stake. In this regard, the Congress has adopted a recommendation and a resolution on “ensuring respect of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in major crisis situations” during the first part of its 40th Session.

Also, the President expressed concern about the Congress budget, which has been reduced by 15% and its staff resources by nearly 20% over the last years. He underlined that it is essential for the Congress to be provided with the necessary human resources to fulfil its role and in particular that at least one frozen post be unfrozen. A gradual return to a 3% share of the Council of Europe budget would be essential for the Congress to deliver on its statutory mission.

Statement on Europe Day, 5 May 2021

The President recalled that every year, in May Europe Day celebrates peace and unity in Europe and that European construction has enabled to reconcile and make peace with the past. He praised the Council of Europe which 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 since its creation in 1949. He regretted that in recent years, these common values are under strain and too often challenged recalling that the current pandemic has added to the social, economic and political challenges thus amplifying the divide within our societies. He stressed that the Council of Europe and its Congress of Local and Regional Authorities will continue to work to help communities overcome the aftermath of the crises, to make societies stronger, more inclusive and more resilient and to defend the human rights, rule of law and democracy for the current and future generations.

30 years of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Spain, 7 May 2021

The Congress Secretary General participated in a debate with Spanish national, regional and local authorities and scholars organised by the Democracy & Local Government Foundation on the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Spain in the last 3 decades. He highlighted the Congress’ role in monitoring the implementation of the Charter as an early warning mechanism and clearing house for identifying challenges and recurring issues for implementation. He also underlined the lessons learned in ensuring the respect of the Charter in times of crisis. The Spanish Secretary of State for territorial policy and civil service, Victor FRANCOS stressed the importance of the Charter for Spain and the importance of local and regional self-government as a pillar of the Spanish constitutional system.

Statement on the International day against homophobia, transphobia and biphobia, 17 May 2021

The Congress rapporteur on LGBTI Andrew BOFF (United Kingdom, ECR), called on all levels of governance to commit themselves to protect the human rights of all citizens, including LGBTI people. He also invited local and regional authorities to use the “Human Rights handbook for Local and Regional Authorities” as one of the chapters is entirely dedicated to good practices for the inclusion and defence of the rights of LGBTI persons. Examples include the establishment of codes of conduct prohibiting discrimination against LGBTI persons, training of officials, including municipal police officers, and consultation with the LGBTI community in the development of local policies.

Communication to the Committee of Ministers, 21 May 2021

Addressing the Session of the Committee of Ministers in Hamburg, the President stressed the importance of strengthening grassroots democracy in Europe to restore citizens' confidence in democratic processes, which has been weakened by the COVID-19 crisis. He recalled the pivotal role of local and regional elected representatives, who are the closest to the citizens, in responding effectively to the crisis, and underlined the need to place them at the heart of the post-crisis recovery.

As a means of achieving these objectives, the President referred to the new priorities of the Congress for 2021-2026 which focus on contributing to building more resilient, more democratic, and more sustainable societies (See APPENDIX).

On the side-lines of the Committee of Ministers Session, the President met with the First Mayor of Hamburg, the Secretary of State and the Head of the German delegation to the Congress, to discuss the local and regional authorities’ role in promoting democratic stability and security. They agreed on the significant contribution of local and regional authorities in the post-crisis recovery of COVID-19 and

the key role of the Congress in this period of time. They also discussed the outcome of the ministerial meeting.

Working visit to Ukraine, 26-30 July 2021

The Congress Secretary General participated in the XVI Ukrainian Municipal Forum, the Day of “Local Democracy and Open Government: dialogue for sustainable partnerships” and had bilateral meetings with national stakeholders and partners in Odesa, Balta and Mykolaiv including representatives of the Parliament of Ukraine, the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine, the Ministry of Digital Transformation, the Ministry of Communities and Territories Development of Ukraine and mayors from different regions of Ukraine. He discussed among others the additional Congress monitoring mission to Ukraine which will be organised before the end of 2021, the issue of supervision as an important matter that provides a scope for discussion and elaboration of key decisions needed to protect the interests of local authorities and consultation and the role that national associations of local authorities.

Meeting of the Congress Group of Independent Experts on the European Charter of Local Self-Government (GIE), 16 -17 September 2021

The Group held its 2021 annual meeting on in a hybrid format, with members present in Strasbourg as well as connected remotely. Against the background of recent developments in local and regional democracy, key topics were the monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the observation of local and regional elections by the Congress, constitutional and legislative matters as well as on-going and future activities in the framework of the Congress’ political priorities. Special attention was given to the question of legal personality of local public entities in the light of the Charter, the situation of independent candidates and opposition in local and regional elections, the issue of environment and human rights in the local context, deliberative democracy, and smart cities and regions.

Working visit to Hungary, 5 October 2021

The President met with the State Secretary for Security Policy in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the State Secretary and Deputy State Secretary for Local Government in the Ministry of Interior, the Chairman of the Foreign Affairs Committee of the Hungarian National Assembly, Head of the Hungarian PACE delegation, and the Ministerial Commissioner responsible for the fostering of international relations in connection with the priorities set out during Hungary's presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe, Member of the Parliamentary Committee for European Affairs. The discussions focused on the co-operation in areas of common interest, in particular to strengthen local and regional democracy in Hungary. In Visegrád, the President, the Presidents of the Chambers and the Secretary General took part in a roundtable discussion with the President of National Association of Local Municipal Governments, the President of the Alliance of County-Ranked, as well as members of the Hungarian Delegation to the Congress.

POLITICAL STATEMENTS

Turkish withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention - 23 March 2021

In reaction to Turkey's withdrawal from Istanbul Convention, the President and other leaders of the 47-nation Council of Europe expressed their regrets about the decision of the President of Turkey to withdraw his country from this important Convention. They stressed that this move gives the wrong signal and deprives the Turkish society of a vital and much needed tool to counter violence against women. The President made a call on the Turkish authorities to reconsider and remain within the Convention.

Incorporation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government into Scottish domestic law - 24 March 2021

The President welcomed the decision by the Scottish Parliament to incorporate the European Charter of Local Self-Government into Scottish domestic law. The Charter was signed by the United Kingdom in 1997 and ratified the following year but had not yet been incorporated in Scottish domestic law. The President highlighted that the incorporation of the Charter into Scottish domestic law reflects the formal recognition of the principle of local self-government. This is particularly important in times of the Covid-19 pandemic, where the rights enshrined in the Charter have come under pressure in many parts of Europe.

International Day of Democracy - 15 September 2021

In his statement, the President Verbeek desired to draw attention to the situation of local and regional democracy. This democracy of proximity – the first level of democracy – enables citizens to most quickly witness their vote's impact and to take advantage of numerous opportunities for commitment and involvement. However, the President also emphasized the difficulties currently faced by local and regional elected representatives, in particular the fact that local democracy is threatened by the curtailing of freedom of speech and assembly during the COVID-19 pandemic and also sometimes the victim of mistrust on the part of citizens.

That is why he insisted on the need to defend democratic practices at the local level. In this respect, the Congress' activity is essential: The President mentioned the European Charter of Local Self-Government, and the Additional Protocol on the right to participate at public life, which promote citizen participation and cooperation between different levels of governance. Moreover, he stressed the importance of participative initiatives, such as the European Local Democracy Week.

II. ACTIVITIES OF THE CONGRESS BODIES

A. THE BUREAU

Meeting, 24 March 2021 (online)

The Bureau took note of the results of the elections held during the session for the renewal of the Congress leadership.

It agreed to the remote observation of the elections of the deputies to the Popular Assembly of the Territorial Administrative Unit of Gagauzia in the Republic of Moldova, to be held on 16 May 2021. It also approved the meeting schedule of the Second part-session of the 40th Session (15-17 June 2021) and the proposed theme for the 2021-2022 edition of the European Local Democracy Week: "Protecting the environment: local communities take action".

Meeting, 26 May 2021 (online)

Among the items of the agenda on this meeting, was the exchange with Ambassador Mårten EHNBERG, Chair of the Rapporteur Group on Democracy of the Committee (GR-DEM) of Ministers who agreed to enhance the political dialogue between the two institutions. An agenda item also focused on the appointment of the new Bureau rapporteurs and representatives to outside bodies and selected Congress candidates for the North-South Prize 2021.

In addition, Bureau members approved the work programmes of the Monitoring, Governance and Current Affairs Committees for 2021-2022 in the light of the Congress priorities and adopted new terms of reference for future reports as well as the agenda of the Second Part of the 40th Session to be held from 15 to 17 June.

The Bureau examined the working methods of the Congress and decided to introduce a system of abridged reports – items discussed, and decisions taken, to be adopted at the end of each meeting of the Congress bodies, and to hold committee meetings in camera notwithstanding the possibility of organising public hearings as required.

Meeting, 15 June 2021 (online)

The Bureau approved the agenda of the second part of the 40th session and accepted the request from the Dutch Delegation to the Congress to grant honorary member status to former Congress member Jos WIENEN. It also agreed to grant patronage to the Metz Marathon scheduled for 10 October 2021. It welcomed the courtesy measures extended to Congress members to facilitate their access to Strasbourg by the French authorities

Visegrád, 4-5 October 2021

The Bureau held an in-person meeting for the first time since the pandemic, at the invitation of the Hungarian Presidency. It discussed the situation of local and regional democracy in several member states. It expressed concern about the situation in Turkey, where opposition politicians are in long-term detention – including Nurhayat ALTUN and Leyla GÜVEN, two former Congress members. The Bureau also shared its concerns regarding the situation in Belarus, especially regarding the dissolution of the Lev Sapieha Foundation, an organisation of independent experts on local self-government which had enjoyed guest observer status with the Congress since 2001.

The Bureau took note of the reports on the Congress observations of the local and regional elections in Morocco as well as the local elections in Georgia (see III. B. OBSERVATION OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL ELECTIONS). It confirmed the Congress' participation in observing the forthcoming regional elections in Denmark and the elections of the local self-government bodies in Armenia.

The Bureau expressed concern about the fact that the Congress Recommendation on the Budget 2022 - 2023 had not been taken into account in the proposals for the COE draft Programme and Budget. It considered it to be essential that the Congress be provided with the necessary human resources to fulfil its role and in particular that at least one frozen post be unfrozen. The Congress maintains the general objective of progressively returning to 3% percent share of the Ordinary Budget, commensurate with its mandate and the implementation of the priorities.

The Bureau members further held a thematic debate on the Congress activities, resources and working methods.

B. THE SESSION

First part of the 40th Session, 23-24 March 2021 (online)

On 23-24 March 2021, the Congress held the first part of its 40th Session during which it renewed its membership for a five-year term and elected its leadership for a mandate of 2.5 years. Leendert VERBEEK was elected President of the Congress, Bernd VÖHRINGER (Germany, EPP/CCE) was elected President of the Chamber of Local Authorities and Harald SONDEREGGER (Austria, EPP/CCE) was elected President in the Chamber of Regions. Furthermore, Gudrun MOSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM (Austria, SOC/G/PD), former President of the Congress from 2016 to 2018, became the new Chair of the Monitoring Committee, Jelena DRENJANIN ((Sweden, EPP/CCE) was elected Chair of the Governance Committee and Thomas ANDERSSON (Sweden, ILDG) was elected Chair of the Current Affairs Committee. Each Chamber of the Congress also elected its seven vice-presidents, and each statutory committee its five vice-chairs (see in APPENDIX).

During this Session, the Congress also adopted its priorities for 2021-2026, which will focus on promoting resilient, democratic; cohesive, sustainable and digital societies, thus contributing to the UN Sustainable Development Goals and taking into account the strategic framework of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and the priorities of its members States. Co-rapporteurs on the Congress priorities Gunn-Marit HELGESEN and Xavier CADORET (France, SOC/G/PD) highlighted that these areas require a systemic approach, efficient and needs-tailored answers as well as urgent, joint and coordinated action from all levels of governance, civil society and the private sector (See APPENDICES).

The Congress also adopted a recommendation on its budget calling for resources commensurate with its statutory missions and role. Co-rapporteurs Anna MAGYAR (Hungary, EPP/CCE) and Barbara TOCE (Italy, SOC/G/PD) expressed concern about the steady decrease in Congress resources and insisted on the need to have the necessary resources to carry out its missions and priorities.

A Resolution and Recommendation based on the report presented by rapporteur Leendert VERBEEK, the new Congress President, on "Ensuring compliance with the European Charter of Local Self-Government in major crisis situations such as COVID-19" was also adopted. The rapporteur detailed the "negative consequences" of the pandemic on local self-government in general. They include increased administrative oversight and restrictions on local resources and have had a dampening effect on citizens' participation in local and regional politics and on consultations with local and regional authorities in matters concerning them. He also expressed concern at the worsening inequalities between territories, especially urban and rural, with the most touristy regions being particularly hard hit.

On 24 March 2021, German Minister for Europe Michael ROTH addressed the Congress underlying the importance of ensuring Council of Europe values against the background of growing centralisation and human rights violations, including the rights of minority groups. He also expressed concern over the non-implementation of European Court of Human Rights' decisions and the recently announced withdrawal by Turkey of the Istanbul Convention, underlining that the violence against children and women had increased during the current pandemic. The Minister also highlighted the importance of local and regional authorities in addressing such issues as artificial intelligence, hate speech on the Internet, and minority rights violations and stressed that it was crucial to reject the policies entailing violence towards the Roma and the LGBTI people. He called on the Council of Europe and the Congress to promote youth participation saying that a respectable future can only be built if all generations are involved.

Second part of the 40th Session, 15-17 June 2021 (online)

On 16 June 2021, the Congress examined the situation of LGBTI people in Europe based on a report prepared by Andrew BOFF and Yoomi RENSTRÖM (Sweden, SOC/G/PD) on "the role of local and regional authorities on protecting LGBTI people in the context of rising anti-LGBTI hate speech and discrimination". The rapporteurs have asked central governments to develop national action plans reinforcing anti-discriminatory and human rights measures, including LGBTI people. They stressed that rising hate speech is creating divisions between the citizens. Against this, local and regional authorities must strengthen the social rights and well-being of their LGBTI citizens and promote dialogue.

The Congress also adopted a resolution on “the role of local authorities with regard to the situation and rights of LGBTI people in Poland” following a fact-finding mission on November 2020. The Rapporteurs stated that since 2019, more than 90 Polish towns and regions had passed resolutions declaring themselves free from so-called ‘LGBT-ideology’. They recalled that Elected local politicians’ role is not legitimising rejection against LGBTI people and have asked Polish local authorities to annul such resolutions and declarations.

On this occasion the President expressed concerns about the worrying developments on the social and political front. He declared that the rising anti-LGBTI hate speech and discrimination is one of those and it is indeed very worrying to learn about the legislation passed by the Hungarian parliament yesterday, particularly at a time when Hungary presides over the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe.

In the framework of its monitoring activities concerning compliance with the European Charter on Local Self-Government, the Congress adopted reports on Armenia, Azerbaijan and Bulgaria. (see III. A. MONITORING ACTIVITIES)

The Congress also adopted a report on “Recurring issues based on assessments resulting from Congress monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and election observation missions (reference period 2017-2020)”. During the debate, the President highlighted the main persistent problems: the inadequacy of financial resources, the lack of consultation of local government, and the absence of direct applicability of the Charter in domestic legal systems. Co-rapporteur Stewart DICKSON regretted that political discourse increasingly reflects nationalistic attitudes and divides populations along ethnic and political party lines.

The Congress also agreed on guidelines on holding referendums at local level based on a report prepared by Vladimir PREBILIČ (Slovenia, SOC/G/PD).

In addition, the Congress discussed thematic reports on “Culture without borders: Cultural heritage management for local and regional development” and “Home sharing platforms: challenges and opportunities for municipalities”.

The Secretary General of the Council of Europe Marija PEJČINOVIĆ BURIĆ, the Mayor of Budapest Gergely KARÁCSONY and the Mayor of Prague Zdeněk HŘIB participated in the session.

The Secretary General of the Council of Europe in her opening statement put the emphasis on the priorities of the Strategic Framework adopted in March this year for the next four years, recalling that one of the main objectives of the Congress is to help local and regional authorities to contribute to the UN Sustainable Development Goals. She also recalled the priority of protecting vulnerable groups, fighting poverty and inequality, and combating racism, xenophobia and discrimination and welcomed the adoption of the report on the protection of LGBTI people, given the rising tide of discrimination against LGBTI people.

The Mayor of Budapest stressed the principles of decentralisation and subsidiarity, as well as the importance of central governments working with local authorities to preserve democratic values by strengthening and developing local government. He called on much greater importance given to local and regional interests in European decision-making.

The Mayor of Prague shared the strategic policies developed in Prague during the pandemic related to Green Recovery, digitalization, sustainable tourism and affordable housing to innovate, improve resilience and tackle climate change. According to the Mayor, forward-thinking, liberal and data-driven cities that support effective citizen engagement, transparency and digitisation, as well as human rights and sustainability, are well positioned to make a real difference during the recovery from the pandemic

C. THE CHAMBERS

The Chamber of Local Authorities

The Chamber met remotely on 23 March and on 16 June 2021, during the 40th Session of the Congress.

On 23 March it elected Bernd VÖRRINGER as President and elected seven vice-presidents (See APPENDICES).

It adopted a report on the situation of local democracy in Armenia presented by Bryony RUDKIN (UK, SOC/G/PD) and Gunn Marit HELGESEN (see III. A. MONITORING ACTIVITIES).

On 16 June the Chambers held a debate on the post-COVID city and the impact of the coronavirus crisis on socio-political processes in Europe's cities and towns through research, local policies and youth engagement. The debate raised a number of critical questions such as the future of democracy, the urban-rural interplay, the digital divide, the development of new workspaces, infrastructure and public transport, and the impact for city development, spatial planning and environment. In this context, the President of the Chamber proposed to update the "Manifesto for a new urbanity", adopted by the Congress in 2008, taking account of the priorities which the pandemic had highlighted, in particular striking a new balance between urban and rural areas against the background of increased attractiveness of places close to nature, the roll-out of a real digital revolution in local democracy, the swift development of smart, green cities and the reduction of inequalities and the digital divide, in order to focus on urbanity in the new post-pandemic context.

In their statements, the mayor of Prague and the mayor of Haßmersheim (Germany), Michael SALOMO, stressed the importance of green policies in post-Covid recovery strategies. Above all, the crisis had refocused their priorities on reducing inequality in access to housing and on the need for residents' interests to be central to municipal policies. Digitisation of municipal services through residents' portals and e-government were both key challenges, in particular to get young people involved in public life. However, the ambitious policies of towns and cities that had dealt with the crisis at grassroots level often came up against attempts at forced recentralisation by central governments. Many contributions to the debate stressed the need to ensure the political and financial autonomy of towns and cities, which should have more direct access to EU recovery funds.

The Chamber of Regions

The Chamber of Regions met remotely on 23 March and on 17 June 2021, during the 40th Session of the Congress.

On 23 March, the Chamber elected its president Harald SONDERREGGER and seven vice-presidents (See APPENDICES).

On 17 June 2021, the Chamber adopted a report and a recommendation on "Territorial solidarity: the role of regions" asking member states to involve regions in the policies of territorial solidarity by delegating part of the competencies to the regional authorities in order to implement tailored financial equalisation procedures or equivalent measures as the conventional method of assistance for weaker territories. This topic is in line with the new Congress priorities, aimed in particular at reducing inequalities and bridging gaps within territories as well as at ensuring effective multi-level governance and local and regional responses to public health crises.

It also debated the role of regions in ensuring a citizen-centred response to COVID-19 and post-crisis recovery, in particular the issue of stalled decentralization. Having been particularly hard hit on account of their key areas of responsibility (business, health, transport and environmental sectors, cross-border areas and the holding of local and regional elections), regions had often met with a lack of understanding from central authorities. The debates therefore strongly advocated the establishment of more effective multitier governance that was genuinely capable of upholding the principle of solidarity and compliance with the Congress's Charter of Local Self-Government.

Participation by young people in local and regional democratic life was illustrated, in particular, by the contributions of the youth delegates, Léa HATT (Switzerland), Vadim KUZNETSOV (Russia), Krystyna BRAGIEL (Poland) and Elisha WINCKEL (Luxembourg).

The President of the Assembly of European Regions Magnus BERNTSSON advocated to turn the crisis into an opportunity to do better than before as, in his view, building on the optimism of the recovery to implement solutions that had proven effective at regional level would be the best guarantee of success in the future. In particular, he referred to the Catalanian economic recovery plan, which actively combated social inequality, the "House of Digitisation" in Lower Austria, which had networked businesses and government to tackle the crisis more effectively, and the involvement of business and civil society in regional policies during the pandemic in Sweden.

Karl-Heinz LAMBERTZ, President of the Association of European Border Regions, underlined that the hasty decisions by many governments to close borders without taking account of cross-border economies had been very serious mistakes which threatened to cause negative long-term consequences for local economies and also for understanding between citizens in border regions. He believed that the Congress should play a crucial part in quickly building third generation integrated cross-border regions so as to prevent the collapse of democratic achievements.

The President of the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies, Gustavo MATOS EXPOSITO focused on regions boosting public services, in particular in the area of healthcare. In his view, as “nerve connections” which gave shape to the European project, local and regional authorities should be given expanded powers, in particular in terms of implementing European legislation on post-Covid economic recovery.

D. THE COMMITTEES

On 23 March 2021, the three statutory Committees (Monitoring, Governance and Current Affairs) met in margin of the Congress session and elected their respected Chairs and vice-chairs (see APPENDIX).

The Monitoring Committee

In its remote meeting chaired by Gudrun MOSLER-TÖRNSTRÖM on 28 April 2021, the Committee considered the application of the European Charter on Local Self-Government in Bulgaria and in Azerbaijan. It also considered remote monitoring meetings in Spain on 18-20 May 2021 and Germany on 26-28 May 2021 as well as the monitoring reports in preparation concerning Albania, Cyprus, the Netherlands, and North Macedonia. It agreed to prepare a report on the situation of independent candidates and opposition in local and regional elections and a report on human rights and environment.

The Committee also met remotely on 17 September 2021. It adopted the monitoring reports on the application of the European Charter on Local Self-Government in Albania, Cyprus, the Netherlands, North Macedonia and Spain. It took stock of the monitoring visits in preparation concerning Luxembourg, Turkey and Ukraine and held an exchange of views on the 3rd Handbook on human rights at local and regional level on environmental rights.

The Monitoring Committee will hold its next meetings on 10 February 2022 and in March 2022.

The Governance Committee

In its remote meeting on 12 May 2021 the Committee chaired by Jelena DRENJANIN examined a report on “Territorial solidarity: the role regions can play”. The Congress session of June 2021 adopted the related recommendation and resolution (See II. B. THE CHAMBERS)

The Committee has also adopted a report on “The future role of the municipal councillor”. The rapporteur Ebrahim ADIA (United Kingdom, SOC/G/PD) underlined the role played by municipal councillors in local democracy, in increasingly shifting and complex environments affected by centralisation of power, increasing financial constraints and progressive digitalisation.

Moreover, the Committee had an exchange of views on two reports in preparation: “Smart cities and smart regions” as well as “Deliberative democracy at local and regional level”. Finally, the Committee gave its feedback to the Draft Recommendation for the Committee of Ministers on the Democratic Accountability of Elected Representatives and Elected Bodies at Local and Regional Level.

The Committee will hold its next meeting on 19 November 2021.

The Current Affairs Committee

In its remote meeting on 7 May 2021 the Committee chaired by Thomas ANDERSSON approved the draft resolution of the report on "The role of local authorities with regard to the situation and rights of LGBTI people in Poland" calling on Polish local and regional authorities to withdraw their declarations and family charters and to develop policies that will protect the rights of vulnerable groups. The resolution was adopted by the Session in June 2021 (see II. B. THE SESSION)

The members had an exchange of views on "The Future of Youth in Rural Areas" and agreed to develop a report with policy guidelines for local and regional authorities on young people in rural areas. The members also discussed the project for a "Booklet for children on sustainable development in their cities." aimed at raising the awareness of school age children (aged 6-12) about the UN Sustainable Development Goals and about how they can contribute to the sustainable development of their towns and regions. This booklet is being developed with consultation of the Children's Rights Division and the Education Department of the Council of Europe.

The Committee will hold its next meeting on 18 November 2021.

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 47 Member States of the Council of Europe.

Due to the inability to carry out monitoring visits to Member States as a result of COVID-19 related health measures, monitoring of the Netherlands, Bulgaria, Albania Azerbaijan, Ireland, Spain and Germany originally on the work programme of 2020, were first postponed, before the Congress decided to introduce a new format of virtual meetings as a temporary procedure. The first monitoring in this remote format was conducted with Bulgaria and followed by the Netherlands and Azerbaijan.

Monitoring visits

Azerbaijan, 23 – 25 February 2021

Co-rapporteurs Bernd VÖHRINGER and Stewart DICKSON, carried out the monitoring of Azerbaijan's compliance with the European Charter of Local Self-Government since the last monitoring in 2012. They met online with the national delegation of Azerbaijan to the Congress, the national associations of local and regional authorities, the Chairman of the Parliamentary Committee on Regional Relations of the National Assembly, the Constitutional Court, the Court of Auditors and the Commissioner for Human Rights of Azerbaijan as well as the Deputy Minister of Justice, the Head of the Centre for works with Municipalities and the Ministry of Finance, the executive power of Baku and other local authorities.

Albania, 17 – 18 March 2021

Co-rapporteurs Xavier CADORET and Carla DEJONGHE (Belgium, ILDG) met online with local, regional and national authorities of Albania to evaluate the developments since the last monitoring report for the country in 2013. They met with the Albanian Delegation to the Congress, representatives of the Albanian associations of local and regional authorities, the Parliament (Kuvendi), the Ombudsperson, and the Constitutional Court. It also had meetings with the Vice-Minister of the Interior, the Vice-Minister of Finance and Economy, the State Supreme Audit Institution, as well as various local authorities from Tirana, Lezhë and Finiq.

Cyprus, 29 - 30 March 2021

Co-rapporteurs Marc COOLS and Gunn Marit HELGESEN monitored the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Cyprus since the last monitoring report adopted in 2016. Remote meetings were held with the National Delegation of Cyprus to the Congress, national associations of local and regional authorities, the Parliament (House of the Representatives), the Minister of the Interior, the Minister of Finance, the President of the Supreme Court, the Ombudsman and the Audit office as well as the mayors of Nicosia and Pegeia

North Macedonia, 20-21 April 2021

Co-rapporteurs Harald BERGMANN (Netherlands, ILDG) and Zdeněk BROŽ (Czech Republic, ECR) carried out a series of remote meetings to assess the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in North Macedonia. They met the National Delegation of North Macedonia to the Congress, the Association of the Units of Local Self-Government of the Republic of North Macedonia, the Parliament, the State Audit Office, the Ombudsman, the Ministries of Local Self-Government and of Finance and the Constitutional Court and the mayors of Skopje, Vinica and Centar Župa.

Spain, 18 - 20 May 2021

Co-rapporteurs Bryony RUDKIN and David ERAY (Switzerland, EPP/CCE) held online meetings with local and national authorities of Spain to evaluate the implementation of the Charter. They met with the national Delegation of Spain to the Congress, national associations of local and regional authorities, the Parliament, the Ombudsman, the Ministry of Territorial Policy and Public Administration, the Ministry of Finance, the Constitutional Court and the Court of Auditors. They also had meetings with the mayors of Madrid, Ohanes and Valladolid.

Germany, 26 - 28 May 2021

Co-rapporteurs Konstantinos KOUKAS (Greece, EPP/CCE) and Jani KOKKO (Finland, SOC/G/PD) met with local, regional (Länder) and national authorities of Germany to evaluate the implementation of the Charter. They met the National delegation of Germany to the Congress, the members of national associations, the Federal Parliament (Bundestag), the State Secretary of the Federal Ministry of the Interior, Building and Community, the representatives of the Federal Ministry of Finance, the Federal Constitutional Court. They also had meetings, among other interlocutors, with the representatives of the regional authorities of Saxony, Bavaria, Bremen as well as county and municipal authorities.

The United Kingdom, 21-23 June 2021

Co-rapporteurs Vladimir PREBILIČ and Magnus BERNTSSON (Sweden, EPP/CCE) met remotely with local and national authorities of the United Kingdom to evaluate the implementation of the Charter. They had an exchange of views on the latest developments in the field of local government in the United Kingdom with the officials from the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government as well as with the Chair of the Housing, Communities and Local Government Committee from the UK Parliament. Remote meetings were also foreseen with the Statutory Deputy mayor of London and the representatives of Greater London Authority. The delegation had also scheduled remote meetings with the officials from the Scottish Ministry for Social Security and Local Government, Welsh Parliament, Northern Ireland Assembly, the Office of the Secretary of State for Wales, as well as with representatives of local associations.

Adopted recommendations (40th Session – June 2021)

Armenia

On 16 June 2021 the Congress adopted a report and Recommendation 456(2021) on the monitoring of the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Armenia after a country visit in May 2019. The report welcome that Armenia has ratified all the provisions of the Charter. It also welcomes the consolidation of communities and the legislative initiatives by the government regarding local referendums, public hearings and financial assistance to municipalities.

The Congress recommends that the Armenian government should accompany the delegation of tasks by matching financial resources and ensure that local authorities have access to adequate financial resources on their own, further decentralise competences to increase the share of public affairs which are regulated and managed by local authorities and guarantee in law the right of local authorities to be consulted on matters that concern them directly. Besides, “own” competences of municipalities should be revised and clarified, state supervision limited to the control of legality, and working conditions of municipal employees improved.

The rapporteurs characterised as “welcomed steps” the information about some new legislative initiatives prepared by the government in the area of local referendum, public hearings, and financial assistance to municipalities.

Bulgaria

The Congress adopted on 17 June 2021 a report and Recommendation 460(2021) on the monitoring of the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Bulgaria following meetings held in December 2020. This was the first monitoring visit held remotely due the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Congress welcomes the noteworthy progress Bulgaria has achieved in the application of the Charter. It welcomes the implementation of a decentralisation strategy and the devolution of powers and responsibilities to local authorities, especially in the fields of education, public health and social services as well as institutionalising several consultation procedures, the active participation of the National Association of Municipalities of the Republic of Bulgaria in the consultation and ratifying the previously non-ratified provision of the Charter and the Additional Protocol. It also underlines that during the state of emergency declared because of the pandemic, the powers of the municipalities were not limited or recentralised but the crisis headquarters were established and chaired by mayors. However, like in many countries, the pandemic has also posed challenges to Bulgarian local self-government in terms of finances.

The Congress invites the Bulgarian authorities to clarify the responsibilities allocated to different levels of government, enlarge local authorities’ discretion in adapting the exercise of delegated powers to local conditions, reduce local self-government dependency on State financial transfers by increasing the share of local taxes and charges in local revenue, and enhancing local authorities’ taxation powers, in

general while simplifying the rules for local budgeting. It also recommends that local authorities be given right of direct recourse before the Constitutional Court whenever a law violates their constitutional status, the Charter or both.

Azerbaijan

On 17 June 2021, the Congress adopted a report and Recommendation 461(2021) on the monitoring of the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in Azerbaijan prepared on the basis of remote visit carried out in February 2021. The report welcomes some improvements in Azerbaijan such as the ratification of Article 10.3 of the Charter which provides the right to co-operate between municipalities and their counterparts in other States (such cooperation, however, would require a permission by the state authorities of Azerbaijan); the improvement of the quality and transparency of the work of municipalities; the use of the delegation of functions to municipalities for the first time in 2020, and the increased representation of women and young people in municipal councils after the last municipal elections in 2019.

The Congress invites the Azerbaijani authorities, among other things, to unambiguously recognise municipalities as state institutions exercising public power as part of the overall public administration, to amend the relevant legislation to ensure that the powers and duties entrusted to municipalities are full and exclusive, to adopt a law on the status of the capital city and establish a unified and democratically elected municipal government in Baku, to create a legislative framework for consultation of municipalities and their associations in process of drafting legislation relevant to them, to complete the process of repealing from legislation the obligation for municipalities to report to parliament on their activities and adopt a law regulating reporting by municipalities, to reduce financial dependence of municipalities from the state by increasing and making sustainable their own revenues and to ensure that the right to judicial protection of municipalities is guaranteed in practice. Lastly, national authorities are called, in dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic, to make sure that municipalities are involved and that their financial resources are not disproportionately impacted.

The Congress resolved to continue closely following the state of progress of the local and regional democracy in Azerbaijan and undertakes to expand its political dialogue with the Azerbaijani national authorities in the framework of a post-monitoring process, so that they comply with the provisions set out in the European Charter.

B. OBSERVATION OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL ELECTIONS

Over the last 15 years, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities has observed more than 100 local and regional elections in Council of Europe member States and occasionally also beyond. Such 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.

In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Congress had adopted a report on local and regional elections in times of crisis and decided to implement a strategy including alternatives to sending observer delegations to the field replaced by remote observation procedure. Since September 2021, onsite missions have resumed.

Observation missions

Morocco, 7-9 September 2021

A Congress delegation composed of Congress members represented on the Council for Democratic Elections/Venice Commission, including Gunn Marit HELGESEN, Randi MONDORF (Denmark, ILDG), and Vladimir PREBILIČ accompanied by the President of the Chamber of Local Authorities, Bernd VÖHRINGER carried out an electoral assessment mission to the Kingdom of Morocco. The delegation was supported by Professor Tania GROPPi, member of the Group of Independent Experts on the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

On Election Day, 8 September, four teams of Congress observers were deployed to the cities of Rabat and Casablanca and their surroundings, as well as to the two regions. The mission was preceded by remote preparatory meetings with representatives of Moroccan associations of regional and municipal authorities, representatives of the National Human Rights Council of Morocco (CNDH), as well as representatives of the international community, civil society and the media.

The delegation concluded that the Election Day in two Moroccan regions was calm, orderly and transparent overall except some procedural inconsistencies, during the closing of the polling stations and the counting. The increased representation of women in elected bodies, both at regional and municipal level and at all tiers of government was welcomed by the Congress delegation. At the same time, it regrets a slightly lower turnout compared to the last local elections in 2015.

Georgia, 30 September – 2 October 2021

Further to the invitation by the Georgian authorities, the Congress carried out an election observation mission from 29 September to 3 October 2021 and observed the local elections held on 2 October as part of a joint international election observation mission together with the OSCE/ODIHR and the European Parliament. The Congress mission headed by David ERAY comprised 18 members representing 15 Council of Europe countries who observed elections in 9 regions of Georgia, visiting in total some 120 polling stations from the opening until the closing.

The Election Day was overall calm, orderly, transparent and well organised. Except for some inconsistencies, particularly regarding the set-up of polling booths and finger-inking, the Congress observers did not notice major shortcomings during the voting procedures. The delegation, underlined the extremely polarized political environment in the country as well as an increase in verbal aggression, hate speech and fake news on social media during the campaign. It stressed that this polarisation had a paralyzing effect on local democracy which, in fact, has been taken hostage of the overall national political situation and considered that against this background, this poll was a missed opportunity for local democracy in Georgia.

Prior to the Election Day, the Congress delegation held meetings in Tbilisi with various interlocutors, including representatives of the diplomatic corps, domestic and international NGOs, media representatives, the Central Elections Commission and with the Deputy Minister of Justice and Head of Inter-Agency Task Force for Free and Fair Elections, Meetings with representatives from different parties including GD, UNM, For Georgia and European Georgia rounded off the preparatory programme of the Congress. The Congress report will be presented at the next Monitoring Committee meeting and adopted during the 42nd Congress Plenary in March 2022.

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. YOUTH

On International Youth Day, 12 August 2021, the Rapporteur on Youth Thomas ANDERSSON stressed that it is necessary to recognise young people as full citizens who have valuable insights and ideas on how to plan for the future. He said their participation at all levels makes societies more inclusive and resilient. He also said that young people must have a say in the policies that affect them, from the local to the international level. And as the level closest to young people, cities and regions have a particular responsibility to encourage and facilitate this participation.

The rapporteur reminded that since 2014, the Congress invites Youth Delegates from all member States to take part in Congress activities and he praised their contribution to develop the Congress' work on youth-related issues, such as social rights of youth and youth work.

B. GENDER EQUALITY

On 8 March 2021, International Women's Day, the Spokesperson for Gender Equality, Jelena DRENJANIN, stated that while gender equality is an integral part of democratic societies, last year there

was no progress in women's rights, but quite the opposite, an increase in reactionary tendencies and hate speech towards women, which endanger the progress made so far. She also drew attention to the increased sexist and domestic violence during this pandemic, because during lockdown periods, violence becomes less visible. Furthermore, the socio-economic toll of the pandemic is hitting women harder, as they are more likely to hold precarious jobs or be unemployed. She called on local and regional authorities to ensure that mechanisms for reporting abuse and violence are in place and recalled the urgency to uphold the women's rights.

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

On 1st March 2021, Zero Discrimination Day 2021, the Chair of the Current Affairs Committee Gabriele NEFF, drew attention to the deteriorating situation of Roma and Traveller communities across Europe. She stressed that measures to prevent Covid-19 are often hampered by their living and housing conditions. Many settlements don't have decent access to basic services like water and sanitation, threatening the lives of millions of Roma and Travellers. She recalled that it is the duty of local and regional authorities to ensure basic service provision and decent, healthy living conditions for all inhabitants, particularly in this time of crisis and called on all European towns and cities to take a stance against anti-gypsyism and to fulfil their responsibility vis-à-vis the Roma and Travellers communities.

On 8 April 2021, International Roma Day, Congress Rapporteur on Roma and Traveller Issues, John WARMISHAM (UK, SOC/G/PD) stated that the COVID crisis has worsened the situation of Roma and Travellers' communities but is not an excuse to put their interest on the back burner. He underlined that urgent measures must be taken to tackle prejudice and discrimination against them, especially on a local and regional level. Thus, the spokesperson invited mayors and regional representatives throughout Europe to take a stance against the discrimination that they face and to sign the Congress' Declaration against anti-Gypsyism, and to celebrate Roma culture.

At the 11th meeting of the Council of Europe Roma and Travellers Civil Society Dialogue, on 29-30 April 2021, John WARMISHAM declared that local authorities have a key role in protecting their rights and ensuring safe living conditions. He stressed that the adoption in 2017 of a declaration of mayors and local and regional representatives against anti-Gypsyism provides an opportunity for local and regional elected representatives to take a clear stand against anti-Gypsyism and interact effectively with communities. Among other Congress measures in favour of integration, the rapporteur recalled the creation of a European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion, to which more than 130 municipalities and regions have joined, the contribution to the creation of national alliances in collaboration with the Council of Europe and civil society organisations, and a Dosta! Prize awarded to three municipalities working for the integration of Roma and Traveller communities.

D. EUROPEAN LOCAL DEMOCRACY WEEK (ELDW)

On 24 March 2021, the Congress Bureau approved as the ELDW theme for 2021-2022 "Protecting the environment: local communities take action". The theme focuses on local action to protect the environment, 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 and on ways in which territorial authorities could integrate them into their work plans. The Congress committed itself, in its Priorities 2021-2026, to further develop activities designed to provide local responses to environmental and climate challenges.

As of 27 September 2021, 45 participants from 14 countries have registered to take part in the ELDW 2021 and 60 activities have been reported. Out of the 45 registered participants, 42 are local and regional authorities and 3 are associations.

On 8 October 2021 the Congress organised a Webinar with the participation of the Congress Secretary General, ELDW spokespersons, National Coordinators and partners. The aim of the meeting was to inform the participants about new developments regarding the ELDW and engage them in discussions on how communities in Europe can respond on a local level to climate change with the participation of citizens and how to strengthen the protection of both the environment and the population. The webinar included presentations of good practices in organising ELDW activities and engaging citizens during the pandemic and experience sharing on local action to protect the environment.

In addition, the ELDW website is being updated to include new tools and features in order to allow its more effective use by National Coordinators and ELDW participants. The number of designated National Coordinators has been steadily increasing and the ELDW team is committed to establishing new links and raising awareness of the ELDW in countries that have not yet participated or designated a National Coordinator yet.

The secretariat of the ELDW is assured by a secondment from Austria (Land Vorarlberg).

E. WORLD FORUM FOR DEMOCRACY

On 26 April 2021, in the framework of the World Forum for Democracy, the Congress organised a webinar entitled “Let’s talk local: cities and citizens in the fight against climate change”. The participants – local and regional authorities and civil society representatives – presented successful local and regional initiatives for sustainability and green transition, highlighting projects with strong citizen participation. The workshop provided an opportunity to exchange good practices and brainstorm about new opportunities for addressing the climate emergency and solving the concrete problems of citizens and businesses related to environmental, social, and economic consequences of the climate crisis. The webinar was opened by the Congress President and by the Mayor of Strasbourg.

On 25 June 2021, Belinda GOTTARDI (Italy, SOC/G/PD) contributed to an online Forum Talk, stressing that the environmental protection is part of good governance and action taken by cities and regions is crucial for building a liveable future. She also underlined the important role of youth participation in the Congress, through the appointment of Youth Delegates as part of its “rejuvenating politics” strategy.

The Congress will contribute to the World Forum for Democracy on 8-10 November 2021 by sponsoring Lab 4 on “Sustainable cities: When the problem becomes part of the solution”, with the participation of Congress members and Youth Delegates.

F. 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).

On 11 March 2021, Belinda GOTTARDI contributed to a meeting of mayors organised by the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) in the preparation of its Regional Forum on Sustainable Development in Geneva. Speaking in the round table on “Tools and instruments supporting urban recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic and promoting the achievement of SDGs”, she stressed that local and regional governments had been especially affected by the COVID-19 pandemic as they were on the frontline and in closest contact with citizens and provided examples of local action in response to the crisis and in implementing the SDGs.

On 18 March 2021, Congress Vice-President Gunn Marit HELGESEN participated in the UNECE Regional Forum in Geneva, stressing that the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals is a shared responsibility, and that localising the SDGs is therefore a crucial factor for the success of Agenda 2030 since two thirds of the 169 SDG targets can only be achieved through local and regional action. Speaking in the debate on “Experiences from the region with Voluntary National Reviews (VNRs)”, the Vice-President underlined that municipalities and regions across Europe actively contributed to shaping strategies, delivering on the SDG implementation and reporting on progress, adding that Voluntary National Reviews require effective cooperation between all levels of government responsible for putting national policy into practice.

On 8 July 2021, the Congress President took part in the United Nations’ High-Level Political Forum on Sustainable Development (HLPF). The President spoke at the session “Going Local”, focusing on how local authorities can be supported in implementing the SDGs and how to build on Voluntary Local Reviews. This year’s High-Level Political Forum focused on sustainable and resilient recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic.

V. INSTITUTIONAL CO-OPERATION WITHIN THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

A. THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL SECTOR

The Committee of Ministers

The President and the Secretary General of the Congress hold regular exchanges of views and communications with the Ministers’ Deputies. The Congress also contributes actively to the activities of the chairmanships of the Committee of Ministers.

The President held an exchange of views with the Deputies on 31 March 2021 and participated in the session of the Committee of Ministers on 21 May 2021 (See I. POLITICAL AGENDA)

The Bureau held an exchange of views with the Chair of the GR-Dem on 26 May 2021 (See II. A. THE BUREAU)

B. THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

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

The President met with the President of the Parliamentary Assembly, Rik DAEMS on 20 April 2021 who underlined the unique role of the Congress in the institutional architecture of the Council of Europe and the paramount importance of the local and regional authorities’ grass-root contribution to addressing the challenges faced by the member States of the Council of Europe. Both Presidents agreed to enhance the co-operation between the two institutions which play a complementary role in the Council of Europe setting.

C. THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR DEMOCRACY THROUGH LAW

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

D. THE EUROPEAN COURT OF HUMAN RIGHTS

The Congress President met with the President of the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) Robert SPANO on 21 September 2021 to discuss issues of common interest in the area of Human Rights. The two Presidents underlined the importance of the European Convention of Human Rights and the importance of relying on all levels of government to promote and ensure compliance with human rights. Local and regional authorities play a particular part in making human rights a reality at the grassroots level. Indeed, a number of cases brought before the ECHR result from acts and decisions of municipalities, cities and regions. The preventive role of the Congress in raising awareness of mayors and councillors on human rights is thus essential. The Congress has published a "Human Rights Handbook", a practical tool intended to raise awareness among local and regional elected representatives and administrations. President Spano will address the Congress members at one of its forthcoming sessions.

E. THE EUROPEAN COMMISSIONER FOR HUMAN RIGHTS

During their meeting on 20 September 2021 in Strasbourg, the President of the Congress, and Commissioner Dunja MIJATOVIĆ discussed synergies to be developed between the two institutions. They agreed to continue their cooperation on issues of common interest such as social rights, human rights and environment, refugee protection, and the rights of the LGBTI community in particular. The President stressed the transversality of the issue of human rights in terms of governance, as well as the need for an acute awareness of local elected officials and their administrations as actors in a robust democracy. He stressed that the Congress would rely on the Commissioner's first-hand knowledge of the human rights situation in member countries, particularly at the local level.

F. THE CONFERENCE OF INTERNATIONAL NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANISATIONS (INGOs)

The President met with the newly elected President of the Conference, Gerhard ERMISCHER, on 20 May 2021 to enhance co-operation between the Congress and the voluntary sector to promote active citizenship in political decision-making at local and regional level building in particular on the Code of Good Practice on Civil Participation, a set of guidelines for NGO participation in decision-making processes. Both Presidents stressed that, in this period of health crisis and mistrust of democratic institutions cooperation of INGOs and the Congress is more relevant than ever, as local authorities and civil society organisations are at the forefront of promoting democracy and restoring citizens' trust in politics, as they help to bridge the gap between politics and citizens. The Congress President underlined that building democratic societies is one of the main Congress priorities for 2021-2026.

G. THE NORTH-SOUTH CENTRE

Congress representatives in the North-South Centre, Vice-Presidents Xavier CADORET and Gunn-Marit HELGESEN, contributed respectively to the meetings of the Centre's Bureau on 26 March 2021 and its Executive Committee on 2 July 2021.

On 25 March 2021, the Congress and the North-South Centre, in partnership with the EU Delegation to the Council of Europe, launched a joint campaign entitled "Together in distance: Building new solidarity in a changing world". This initiative aimed at showcasing and sharing inspiring stories of those who have faced the COVID-19 crisis, while also launching a reflection on the many changes caused by the pandemic. The physical exhibition was opened on 1 July 2021 by the EU Ambassador, the Ambassador of Spain on behalf of the North South Centre and the Congress Secretary General.

Congress nominations for the North-South Prize 2021 were decided by the Congress Bureau during its meeting on 26 May 2021 and submitted to the Secretariat of the North-South Centre. The vote by the Jury took place on 8 October 2021.

H. THE POMPIDOU GROUP

The Chair of the Current Affairs Committee Thomas ANDERSSON, chair of the Regional Council of Jämtland and Härjedalen, took part in the European Symposium on Drug Consumption Rooms (DCRs) held on 1 July 2021 and co-organised by the City of Strasbourg, the Pompidou Group of the Council of Europe and the Ithaque Association, which manages Strasbourg's Argos Low-Risk Drug Consumption

Room, in partnership with the Interministerial mission to combat drugs and addictive behaviour (Mildeca), the ARS regional health agency for the Grand Est region, The European Forum for Urban Security (EFUS) and the Correlation Network. He stressed that syringe exchange limits the infection and the spread of diseases such as hepatitis C and HIV and help decrease the number of deaths related to drug poisoning. He highlighted efforts made in Sweden to reduce the harm caused by addiction and informed that today 17 of 21 Swedish regions offer syringe exchange services, while exploring trials for health centres with a drug consumption room at the regional level.

VI. EXTERNAL COOPERATION 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 Cooperation 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.

High Level Group Meeting of the Congress and the European Committee of the Regions

The High-Level Group of the Congress and the CoR held an online meeting on 22 April 2021 to discuss the priorities of co-operation in response to the current pandemic and the role of local and regional authorities in the post-crisis recovery.

The Congress presented its reports on holding local and regional elections and on respecting the European Charter of Local Self-Government in times of crisis, as well as its online tools to assess the state of local and regional democracy – CARTA-MONITOR on the Charter's implementation by Council of Europe member States and E-Open on frameworks for transparent and ethical governance, citizen participation and fight against corruption in select countries. The CoR presented its work on the Local and Regional Barometer, an overview of the situation of cities and regions in Europe, and its Adamowicz Award initiative in honour of the assassinated Mayor of Gdansk Paweł Adamowicz and in recognition of everyone who works with courage and integrity against intolerance, radicalisation, hate-speech, oppression and xenophobia.

The Congress was invited to participate in the Adamowicz Award and to contribute to the Conference on the Future of Europe within CoR activities; at its meeting on 26 May, the Congress Bureau responded positively to this invitation.

On 29 June, the Congress President participated in an online conference on "The place of regions in the European Union architecture", organised by the CoR, the Conference of Regional Legislative Assemblies of Europe (CALRE) and the Government of Azores (Portugal). He stressed that the region plays a unique role as a bridge between the European and national levels and local communities and citizens, adding that regions have the primary responsibility for ensuring territorial cohesion, social protection of citizens and their participation in democratic governance. President Verbeek underlined that this special role of regions must be strengthened further through their greater involvement in national and European policy making.

B. EUROPEAN ASSOCIATIONS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Network of Associations of Local authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS)

The President participated online in the General Assembly of NALAS on 13 April 2021 in the presence of the President of the Republic of Moldova Maia SANDU. He praised the excellent co-operation with the Moldovan authorities and the importance of the post-monitoring roadmap to be signed with the authorities. He said that the partnership between the Congress and NALAS plays a key role in discussions on decentralisation and local autonomy in the region of South-East Europe. He also stressed the importance of the European Charter of Local Self-Government to ensure sustainability of local democracy and self-government.

Assembly of European Regions (AER)

On 12 May 2021, the Congress Rapporteur on deliberative democracy Karl-Heinz LAMBERTZ participated in an online debate on “The Future of Democracy in European Regions”, organised by the AER as part of its Bureau meeting. He presented examples of deliberative democracy models increasingly practiced in Europe as a tool for greater engagement of citizens in democratic processes at both regional and local levels, stressing that deliberative processes should be integrated into a future model of European democracy.

The AER President Magnus BERNTSSON participated on 17 June 2021 in a debate on the role of regions in the post-crisis recovery organised by the Chamber of Regions. (see II. B. THE CHAMBERS)

The Congress, in partnership with United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), is also organising a workshop on “How can regions deliver on voluntary reviews?”, to be held on 29 October 2021 in Strasbourg as part of the AER Conference “Agenda 2030: Transforming regions – Changing the World”.

The Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)

On 29 September 2021, the Secretary General participated in an online debate on “Future of Europe: Time for a local shift”, organised by CEMR as part of its annual Retreat.

European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA)

On 25 June 2021, the Congress President participated remotely in the General Assembly of ALDA where he stressed the negative impact of the COVID 19 health crisis on citizens’ participation in political life and their decreasing interest in elections, which was shown during the recent regional elections in France. The President underlined the importance of co-operation between the ALDA and the Congress. Recalling that the network of Local Democracy Agencies was created at the initiative of the Congress, he stressed that it is having a real success in expanding its field of action, multiplying its activities with regard to the needs supported by civil society, and to developing partnerships in support of its projects.

Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)

On 17 June, Karl-Heinz LAMBERTZ, President of the Association of European Border Regions took part in the debate organised by the Chamber of Regions on the role of regions in the post-crisis recovery. (see II. B. THE CHAMBERS)

On 7 October 2021 in Strasbourg, the AEBR signed a co-operation agreement with the “Mission Opérationnelle Transfrontalière” (MOT) of France and the Central European Service for Cross-Border Initiatives (CESCI), in a ceremony organised under the auspices of the Congress. The Congress Secretary General underlined that a third of Europe’s citizens live in border areas and out of the 362 regions registered by the Council of Europe in its 47 member States, more than 140 are transfrontier regions, thus stressing that frontier regions play a crucial role in European integration and cohesion, notably through transborder cooperation.

Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE)

The President of CALRE Gustavo MATOS EXPOSITO, participated in the debate organised by the Chamber of Regions on 16 June 2021 on the regions' role in ensuring an appropriate response to the pandemic (see II. B. THE CHAMBERS)

C. NATIONAL ASSOCIATIONS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Congress Spokesperson on Climate Change and the Environment Vladimir PREBILIČ participated on 13 May 2021 in the Conference on "Innovative Financing of Energy Efficiency Projects" organised by the Central Union of Municipalities of Greece (KEDE). He underlined that local and regional levels are crucial to overcome the challenges posted by climate change and to achieve the energy transition. They are on the front line, facing the worst consequences of the climate crisis. At the core of the exchanges was the question of how to finance local energy transition projects and overcome the obstacles local authorities face on their way towards energy efficiency. National and European policies on energy efficiency, different financing instruments for local authorities and the Council of Europe Development Bank's cooperation with local and regional authorities were also on the agenda.

D. OTHERS

Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean (PAM)

On 3 June 2021, the Congress President addressed the 15th Plenary Session of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Mediterranean. Speaking at the opening of the Session of the third Standing Committee on Dialogue among Civilizations and Human Rights, he highlighted the need to reinforce dialogue and partnerships across the Mediterranean to build a more just, more stable, and more sustainable order on both of its shores.

VII. COOPERATION 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 activities¹ further specify the framework and the principles of Congress co-operation activities, whose importance was reiterated in the Priorities of the Congress 2021-2026.²

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 Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, and Ukraine, as well as in Kosovo^{*3}, Morocco, and Tunisia. Since 2011, those activities amount to approximately 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.

¹ 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>

² 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>

³ (*) 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.

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

A stronger gender and human rights perspective was introduced in all activities to foster gender equality and promote the participation 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– in particular to achieving Sustainable Development Goals 5 (Gender Equality), 10 (Reduce inequality within and among countries), 11 (Sustainable Cities and Communities), 16 (Peace, justice and strong institutions), and 17 (Partnership for the goals).

A. ARMENIA

In Armenia, the Congress contributed to the improvement of local self-governance through a continued support to the Community of Practice on Public Integrity and Ethics in Local Governance in Armenia (CoP). On 30 March 2021, the CoP held its meeting online with the participation of Congress Rapporteur on public procurement Amelie TARSCHYS-INGRE (Sweden, ILDG) who highlighted the experience of the Congress as showing that tackling corruption requires long-term action covering all aspects of governance and accountability. The aim of the meeting was to discuss and identify challenges faced by national and local authorities in Armenia in terms of corruption, public ethics, transparent governance and citizen participation in decision-making processes. General consensus was reached on further actions that need to be taken to improve local open governance and lead towards corruption-free communities.

In order to support them in this endeavour, a series of four thematic workshops⁴ were organised from June to September 2021 and included presentations of relevant European standards and Congress recommendations, examples of good practices, as well as peer exchanges between Armenian municipalities and Congress members Bryony RUDKIN, Vladimir PREBILIĆ, Amelie TARSCHYS-INGRE and Oksana DERKACH (Ukraine, EPP/CCE).

Two meetings of CoP working groups were organised on 23 June and 30 September to identify concrete steps for targeted project support to local authorities in the fight against corruption, the promotion of public integrity and open government, as well as ensuring transparency in public procurement.

Further steps are being undertaken to support the implementation of the National Anti-corruption Strategy and Action Plan for 2019-2022. This includes a corruption risk self-assessment electronic tool which is being developed in close co-operation with MTAI, as well as a model for the introduction of e-government environment with regards to document flow in local administrations, namely in view of the registry of normative legal acts adopted by local self-government bodies.

The Communities Association of Armenia (CAA) was supported in the development of position papers and opinions on amendments to laws related to local self-governance, in particular on the extension of powers of mayors and local councils during emergency situations, martial law or impossibility to hold elections. With the support of the Congress, the Association also developed a legal analysis of the current state of local self-government in Armenia, concentrating on the new electoral system, as well as a strategy on decentralisation of powers of state bodies and equalisation of financial resources.

⁴ Public Integrity (24-25 June), Open government (1-2 July), Anti-corruption policies (8-9 July) and Transparent public procurement (13-14 September)

In order to support the CAA in achieving its sustainability and financial independence, the assessment was conducted on the state of implementation of the CAA 2016-2020 Strategic and Action plan, providing the Association leadership with recommended priorities for the new strategy (2021-2025).

B. BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

The Congress continued co-operation with the newly elected Mayor and local councillors of the City of Mostar in the framework of the project “Building democratic participation in the City of Mostar” which is being implemented until December 2021. The project aims to provide citizens with opportunities to engage in deliberative process and participate in local decision making, with the ultimate goal of restoring citizens’ confidence and trust in public authorities.

In March 2021, the City officials were introduced to deliberative democracy at local level and a tailored, transparent and inclusive process towards holding a Citizens’ Assembly was organised from April to June 2021. The process included the setting up of a governance structure of the deliberative process, development of a specific website dedicated to the Citizens’ Assembly which has been widely consulted (more than twenty thousand page views by around seven thousand individual visitors), as well as the selection of the topic for deliberation and Citizens Assembly participants. The topic of the cleanliness and maintenance of public spaces was chosen following online consultations with citizens, workshops with civil society, academic community and representatives of the City Council and administration.

The first Citizens’ Assembly in Bosnia and Herzegovina took place in July 2021 and was opened by the President of the Chamber of Local Authorities Bernd VÖHRINGER. It brought together a representative group of 47 randomly selected citizens who met during four consecutive weekends to deliberate upon and make recommendations on the cleanliness of the city and maintenance of public spaces in Mostar.

The Assembly meetings included a learning phase with sharing of experience with other cities in the region, and discussion with experts and local stakeholders, as well as representatives of the City Administration and the City Council. The Citizens’ Assembly recommendations were shared with the Mayor and the City Council and will be discussed at a regular City Council session with the participation of citizens representing the Assembly.

In addition, the City Councillors of Mostar participated in a series of peer-to-peer workshops with members of the Congress in June 2021, Andrew BOFF, Heather BRANNAN MCVEY (United Kingdom, SOC/G/PD), Jimmy MOLONEY (Ireland, ILDG) and Vladimir PREBILIĆ. These exchanges aimed to enhance their knowledge on the roles and responsibilities of local councillors as well as on good practices to ensure increased citizen engagement and improved trust towards authorities.

A *Memorandum of co-operation* between the Council of Europe and the City of Mostar was signed by the Mayor and the Head of the Council of Europe Office in Sarajevo in July 2021.

C. GEORGIA

In Georgia, the Congress is implementing a new project on “Strengthening participatory democracy and human rights at local level” jointly with the Directorate General of Democracy of the Council of Europe, under the framework of the Council of Europe Action Plan for Georgia 2020-2023.

The project was presented for the first time at the Kutaisi Second International Forum on “Cities’ challenges and way forward”, with the participation of Nino KAVTARADZE (EPP/CCE), Deputy Head of the Georgian Delegation to the Council of Europe.

The assessment report on “Human Rights at local level in Georgia” was updated with the active involvement of members of the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG) during a consultation meeting in July 2021. The report reflects on the new developments regarding relevant legislation for human rights protection and implementation at the local level and provides an overview of the challenges encountered by local authorities in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as expert recommendations.

Ahead of local elections to be held in Georgia in October 2021, a guide for women and men in local politics on “preventing and combatting sexism at local level in Georgia” was developed and disseminated through an online workshop with the participation of the thematic Spokesperson on

Gender Equality Jelena DRENJANIN. The workshop was attended by more than 20 municipalities, as well as representatives from the Parliament of Georgia, the Public Defender's Office, and civil society organisations.

D. KOSOVO*

In Kosovo*, the project on promoting local democracy aims to improve local self-government and the quality of local democracy by fostering multilevel dialogue and strengthening the capacities of local authorities on political integrity, public ethics and open government principles.

In this context, a study was conducted to evaluate to what degree the local self-government framework in Kosovo* conforms to the European local democracy standards and the principles enshrined in the European Charter of Local Self-Government. Consultation meetings were held in July 2021 with local authorities and the Association of Kosovo Municipalities (AKM), as well as representatives from the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Local Government Administration and the Parliament. The study includes the challenges and ways to overcome or mitigate them.

On 8 and 12 July 2021, elected and appointed representatives of local authorities in Kosovo* participated in capacity development activities on the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

Two workshops on open local government, political integrity and public ethics were organised at the end of September for Chairpersons of Local Assemblies and municipal officers of Kosovo*. Participants learned about innovative approaches to citizens' engagement and shared experiences in addressing challenges on questions of transparency and ethics. They also exchanged experiences with representatives from Albanian municipalities and Congress member Anne COLGAN (Ireland, ILDG). As a result of the workshops, training modules and a training manual on political integrity, public ethics and open government were developed and shared with the Association of Kosovo Municipalities (AKM) to ensure sustainability of knowledge sharing with local authorities through the AKM Training Center.

In addition, in the framework of the project, Jelena DRENJANIN participated in the International Conference on Combatting Sexism which took place in Pristina on 4 October 2021. She highlighted the Congress thematic priorities of reducing inequalities, upholding gender equality and ending sexist behaviour and stressed that the Congress of the Council of Europe works together with local authorities through its resolutions, recommendations, guidelines and co-operation activities to eliminate any form of harassment and sexism at the local level.

E. THE REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Following the signature of a Roadmap for local and regional democracy in the Republic of Moldova on 15 April 2021 the President of the Congress, and the President of the Republic of Moldova, met to discuss issues of common interest (See I. POLITICAL AGENDA).

The ambition of the Republic of Moldova to strengthen local self-government has been supported through by the Congress co-operation project "Reinforcing the culture of dialogue and consultation of local authorities" implemented over one year until June 2021. Thanks to the project, significant steps were made towards strengthening the institutional position of the association of local authorities in the country vis-à-vis central authorities, development partners, mayors and citizens.

On 10 June 2021, CALM adopted its Strategic Plan for 2021-2027 which is the result of an inclusive and participatory process that involved extensive consultations across the country, bringing together more than 200 local leaders from the Northern, Central and Southern regions. The Strategic Plan takes into account the European principles of Local Self-Government and in particular Congress Recommendation 436 (2019) on local and regional democracy in the Republic of Moldova, as well as the Roadmap.

The Congress supported CALM with the review of the concept for local government reform, providing expertise on the best practices and European standards in local self-government. Expertise was also provided by the Congress experts with regards to the platform for dialogue, developed by CALM as a proposal for enhancing dialogue and consultation with the central authorities.

F. UKRAINE

In Ukraine, the Congress project “Strengthening democracy and building trust at local level in Ukraine” launched in July 2018 was successfully finalised in September 2021. The Congress received the funding and launched a new project “Strengthening local democratic governance in Ukraine” on 1 October 2021 to ensure continued support to local and central authorities in regular dialogue, and in their efforts to promote ethical decision making and more citizen-oriented, inclusive, responsive and transparent local governance.

The Congress fostered co-creation and exchange of good practices between the central and local levels on open government policies and new legislation, by supporting the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and the Association of Ukrainian Cities (AUC) in establishing the Platform for national – local dialogue on open government in Ukraine. The first meeting was held in April 2021 to discuss and ensure the involvement of local authorities in the design, implementation and evaluation of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) Action Plans, the Congress supported. To further promote the principles of open government, more than 20 Ukrainian municipalities shared best practices with their peers from all regions in Ukraine, demonstrating progress and innovations in the sphere of open government through inclusive, diverse and gender-balanced initiatives during the online marathon organised as part of the 2021 edition of the Open Gov Week under the motto “Respond. Recover. Renew”.

The consultation process on the legal status of associations of local and regional authorities in Ukraine and the new draft law on local self-government in Ukraine were supported with the contribution of Gunn-Marit HELGESEN and Nikolaos-KOMNINOS CHLEPAS, member of the Group of Independent Experts during the round tables held with the Parliament of Ukraine on 1 March 2021 and 14 June respectively.

To analyse the needs and further support of local authorities in introducing open government policies and practices in Ukraine, the Congress conducted an assessment that maps the landscape of open government practices at local level in Ukraine, identifies synergies with the main open government principles (transparency, citizen participation and accountability) and explores the dynamic and different approaches to open government practices. The recommendations will be used to provide tailored support to local authorities under the new Congress project in Ukraine.

An assessment of the level of respect, protection and fulfilment of human rights standards at local level in Ukraine was conducted for five regions (Dnipropetrovsk, Kharkiv, Kyiv, Lviv and Odesa). The assessment analysed the existing practices and initiatives of local authorities with a view of promotion and inclusion of human rights dimension and standards in their policies and overall management of their communities.

The XVI Ukrainian Municipal Forum was organised in July 2021 jointly with the Association of Ukrainian Cities (AUC) and international partners with the participation of 500 mayors. New governance approaches of Ukrainian municipalities aimed at fostering open government and protection of human rights at local level, as well as higher representation of women in politics were promoted and discussed. This event was used as an opportunity to present the results of the Congress three-years project, while in particular those related to open government were presented by Jelena DRENJANIN who also reflected on the related Congress statutory work. The Congress Secretary General met with the AUC Management Board members and held high level bilateral meetings with representatives of the national and local authorities (See I. POLITICAL AGENDA).

The co-operation with the AUC resulted in the creation of tools for gender-sensitive policymaking, including a new e-learning module on preventing and combatting sexism at the local level, which was launched in June 2021 to complement the e-course on “Gender mainstreaming at local level in Ukraine”. The need to ensure that women and men are equally represented at all stages of governance, policymaking, political as well as social life and to adopt appropriate strategies and solutions at all levels of governance, was underlined by Thomas ANDERSSON during the 5th Ukrainian Women’s Congress held in Kyiv on 16 September 2021.

G. 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 Rapporteurs.

Through the South-Med Partnership, the Congress wishes to provide a particularly valuable platform for exchanges and encounters and enable its partners to benefit from its achievements, expertise and experience of its members in the following areas:

- enhancing political dialogue between European elected representatives and their counterparts from the South and increasing decentralised co-operation between local and regional authorities on the two sides of the Mediterranean, while also promoting the Council of Europe's fundamental values, especially regarding local democracy
- legislative assistance and expertise in the Congress's areas of responsibility, in particular in drafting and implementing legislation relating to decentralisation and local and regional governance
- assisting with the electoral process and, where applicable, observing local and regional elections
- capacity building (especially in terms of leadership) for local and regional elected representatives (and candidates) and their administration through the development of specific awareness-raising and training programmes, with a particular focus on the role of women and young local leaders
- helping to set up or strengthen associations of local and regional authorities
- supporting the development of participatory democracy, with a particular focus on the role of young people, women and civil society.

Partner for Local Democracy status

Introduced in 2014, the Partner for Local Democracy status⁵ 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

The Congress and the Moroccan Association of Presidents of Prefectural and Provincial Councils (AMPCPP) co-organised a national meeting on the "reform of the legislative framework related to competences of prefectures and provinces and their implementation". This meeting featured presentations by the experts of draft legislative amendments to clarify and implement advanced

⁵ [Resolution 376 \(2014\)](#)

regionalisation and the competencies of prefectures and provinces and exchanges between European and Moroccan peers.

At the request of Moroccan authorities, legislative support was provided on the institutional architecture of decentralisation in Morocco. A remote exchange of views was organised on 23 June 2021, with the participation of members of Moroccan associations of territorial authorities and Congress members, including President of the Chamber of Local Authorities Bernd VÖHRINGER, Vice-President and Rapporteur on the South-Med Partnership Xavier CADORET, Chair of the Congress Socialist, Green and Progressive Democrats Group Karl-Heinz LAMBERTZ and Chair of the Congress Independent and Liberal Democrats Group Marc Cools. The participants exchanged on challenges and lessons learned during their respective mandates in the implementation of decentralisation. Emphasis was placed on the principles and mechanisms of interaction between different levels of decentralised territorial governance and the need for own financing of local and regional authorities, clarity in the allocation of competencies, strengthening the status of elected representatives and dialogue with the central government.

Euro-Mediterranean dialogue was promoted during a webinar dedicated to the participation of women in local politics, with participants from Tunisia, Morocco and European countries who exchanged experiences and best practices in implementing gender mainstreaming and engaging in politics at local level. This activity was organised jointly with the Congress' project in Tunisia, in the perspective of the Moroccan local and regional elections on 8 September 2021.

Tunisia

Continued support was provided to the National Federation of Tunisian Communities (FNCT) in the conduct of an evaluation of the decentralisation process in Tunisia from the viewpoint of municipalities. 320 Tunisian municipalities out of a total of 350 took part in this consultation on six priority areas: the status of elected municipal representatives, the stability of municipal councils, relations between elected representatives and the municipal administration, relations between municipalities, the deconcentrated administration and public establishments and enterprises, the financial regime of municipalities and participatory democracy and open governance.

The results of this consultation and recommendations to improve decentralisation were consolidated in a report, which was presented during a press conference on 26 May 2021. The report has been taken into consideration by national authorities in their consultation process on the state of decentralisation.

Euro-Mediterranean dialogue was promoted during a webinar dedicated to the participation of women in local politics with participants from Tunisia, Morocco and European countries who exchanged experiences and best practices in implementing gender mainstreaming and engaging in politics at local level.

Co-operation with the Higher Authority for Local Finances continued through financial support to strengthen the Authority's IT capacity and resources, as well as institutional capacities of its Secretariat. Discussions on revising the legal framework of local taxation are ongoing.

With a view to promoting public ethics and fighting corruption at the local level, a three-day online training on "internal control in the municipalities" was organised on 5-7 July 2021 in close co-operation with Tunisian counterparts, with the participation of elected representatives and administration of Tunisian communities.

Furthermore, the Congress is currently working in close co-operation with both representatives of the FNCT and the Ministry for Local Affairs on the establishment of a consultation mechanism. A draft memorandum on the consultation of local authorities by the central government is currently under discussions with relevant partners.

Regional activities in the Southern Mediterranean – South Programme IV

Building on the achievements and relations established through its bilateral co-operation projects in Morocco and Tunisia, and according to the objectives of reinforcing regional cooperation and building networks of the South Programme IV, the Congress has launched a regional activity in the Middle East

and North Africa (MENA)⁶ region. This initiative will initially be implemented between September and December 2021.

The objective of the proposed project will be to reinforce decentralised democratic governance in the MENA region by fostering exchanges and networking between relevant stakeholders in the region and providing expertise of the Council of Europe Congress and experience by Congress' members.

Two main activities will be implemented in this framework:

- Creation and support to the work of a community of practice, whose work will focus on priority topics identified: participatory democracy, local finances, and status and conditions of office of territorial elected representatives. These four topics will be complemented by two transversal dimensions: implementing the principles of open government and fostering dialogue and consultation between central and territorial authorities.
- Capacity-building and support to women, newly elected territorial representatives in Morocco. This activity will combine theoretical inputs and peer exchanges and is organised in partnership with the "Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie " (OIF) .

⁶ Targeted beneficiaries: Palestine*, Libya, Lebanon, Jordan

*This designation shall not be construed as a designation of a State of Palestine and is without prejudice to the individual positions of Council of Europe member States on this issue.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

40TH SESSION – March 2021

ELECTION OF A NEW LEADERSHIP FOR THE CONGRESS

<https://rm.coe.int/bureau-of-the-congress/1680a1dc2b>

APPENDIX 2:

40TH SESSION – March 2021

CONGRESS PRIORITIES 2021 – 2026 (abridged version)

<https://rm.coe.int/0900001680a2c5ad>

CONGRESS PRIORITIES (website)

<https://www.coe.int/en/web/congress/priorities-of-the-congress>

APPENDIX 3:

COMMUNICATION TO 131st THE SESSION OF THE COMMITTEE OF MINISTERS

A shared responsibility for democratic security in Europe

Hamburg 21 May 2021

<https://rm.coe.int/0900001680a28d0f>

Speech by Leendert VERBEEK, President of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities

Mr President,

Madam Secretary General,

Dear Ministers and authorities of the Council of Europe,

Our continent is facing a situation where fundamental values and rights and democratic stability are at stake. Crises such as the current pandemic have added to the social, economic and political challenges and amplified the divide within our societies.

I would like to thank the Secretary General for her report on the State of Democracy, Human Rights and the Rule of Law, “A democratic renewal for Europe”. And I am pleased to hear that Ministers share the assessment, the diagnosis, how to address the challenges for our societies and to protect our values and re-establish “normality”.

We in the Congress are convinced that the Council of Europe has a central role to play in upholding democracy, restoring social cohesion, and reinforcing the resilience, strength and inclusiveness of our societies, thereby contributing to democratic security in Europe. Now, more than ever, our societies need a genuine democracy of proximity. In order to achieve this, we need a renewed focus on the role of local and regional authorities. It is therefore symbolic that this Ministerial Session is held in the City Hall of Hamburg. Mayors and regional governments are the closest to the people and have the best understanding of the challenges faced by their communities. They can and will reconnect with the citizens and restore confidence in democratic processes and institutions. This has been proven yet again during the pandemic, when mayors and councillors found themselves at the frontline of responding to the crisis and make ends meet. They will also be in the centre of action in the post-crisis recovery and the renewal of the social, political and economic fabric.

This crisis showed the need for more effective co-operation and co-ordinated action both among and within countries at all levels, in a spirit of multilateral co-operation and multi-level governance. I am pleased to hear that we agree on the diagnosis and, with the decisions taken today, also on the way forward, to implement the therapy and to invest in prevention: we all know, prevention is better – and cheaper – than the cure!

The Committee of Ministers and the Council of Europe as a whole must – and I am confident that it will - make the best use of the synergies produced by joining the capacities and forces of the parliaments, national governments, local and regional authorities and civil society.

Dear Ministers,

In March, the Congress adopted its priorities for the coming years. These priorities are fully in line with the Strategic Framework of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and they are a concrete contribution of local and regional authorities to the action of the Council of Europe towards the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Our focus is on contributing to more

resilient, more democratic, more cohesive and more sustainable societies. We want to achieve these goals by providing effective responses to public health crises, enhancing the quality of representative democracy and citizen participation, reducing inequalities, addressing environmental issues and digitalisation as well as artificial intelligence in the local context.

Minister Heiko Maas, on behalf of the Congress I would like to thank the German authorities for their support and the excellent cooperation throughout the German Presidency.

Minister Péter Szijjártó, we look forward to contributing to the implementation of the Hungarian Presidency priorities at local and regional level. We hope to welcome you at our session in October in Strasbourg.

Our co-operation at all levels of governance is more important than ever because our common response to the challenges we face today will shape our future and that of the generations to come.

Thank you for your attention.

APPENDIX 4:

CG(2021)41-OJ <https://rm.coe.int/draft-agenda-of-the-41st-session-of-the-congress/1680a3aab0>

11 October 2021

41st Session of the Congress

Strasbourg, Palais de l'Europe

26-28 October 2021

DRAFT AGENDA

PUBLIC MEETING

Simultaneous interpretation will be provided in the two official languages of the Council of Europe (English and French) and in German, Italian and Russian, except where otherwise indicated.

Information on the provision of additional languages available for sittings (valid on the date shown above) is indicated throughout this agenda and on the timetable of meetings [CG(2021)41-01]

Key:

EN English

FR French

DE German

IT Italian

RU Russian

TR Turkish

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Monday 25 October 2021

Bureaux meetings [EN/FR/DE/IT/RU]

9.00-12.00 Room 9

Bureau of the Congress

Political group meetings - 15.30-18.00

Room 9

European People's Party Group in the Congress (EPP/CCE)
[EN/FR/DE/IT/RU/TR]

Room 8

Socialist Group, Greens and Progressive Democrats (SOC/G/PD)
[EN/FR/DE/IT/RU/TR]

Room 6

Independent and Liberal Democrat Group (ILDG) [EN/FR/DE/IT/RU/TR]

Room 2

European Conservatives and Reformists Group (ECR) [EN/DE/IT/RU/TR]

Secretaries of delegations meeting

15.45-16.30 Room 1




Information meeting

Tuesday 26 October 2021

Plenary sitting [EN/FR/DE/IT/RU/TR]

10.00-13.00, Hemicycle

* *Deadline for tabling amendments: 10.00 Tuesday 19 October 2021*

10.00	Opening of the 41st Session of the Congress by the President Leendert VERBEEK
10.10	Verification of new members' credentials [CG(2021)41-16]  Presentation by the co-rapporteurs: Xavier CADORET, France (L, SOC/G/PD) and Aleksandra MALETIĆ, Serbia (R, EPP/CCE) Debate and vote on the draft resolution [CG(2021)41-02]*
10.20	Adoption of the draft agenda of the second part-session [CG(2021)41-OJ]  Adoption of the draft minutes of the last sitting of the 40th second part-session (17 June 2021) [CG(2021)40-PV-05] Adoption of the composition of Congress committees [CG(2021)41-03]
10.25	Communication by the President
11.00	Presentation of youth delegates' grass-roots projects [CG(2021)41-12] Debate
12.00	Home sharing platforms: challenges and opportunities for municipalities  Presentation by Jelena DRENJANIN, Sweden (L, EPP/CCE) Chair of the Governance Committee Debate and vote on the draft resolution and draft recommendation [CG(2021)41-13*]
13.00	Suspension of the sitting

Tuesday 26 October 2021

Plenary sitting [EN/FR/DE/IT/RU/TR]

14.30-18.30, Hemicycle

* Deadline for tabling amendments: 10.00 Tuesday 19 October 2021

14.30	<p>Monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-government: Spain</p> <p>Presentation by the rapporteur: David ERAY, Switzerland (R, ILDG)</p> <p>Debate and vote on the draft recommendation [CG(2021)41-07]*</p> <p>Statement by Isabel RODRÍGUEZ GARCÍA, Minister of Territorial Policy and government spokesperson, Spain (tbc)</p> <p>Oral reply to questions from the floor</p> 
15.45	<p>Migration: continuing challenges for cities and regions (working title)</p> <p>Statements by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Eirini DOUROU, Congress rapporteur on migration issues• Ambassador Drahošlav ŠTEFÁNEK, Special Representative of the Secretary General on Migration and Refugees <p>Debate</p>
17.15	<p>Monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-government: Netherlands</p> <p>Presentation by the rapporteur: Madimir PREBILIĆ, Slovenia (L, SOC/G/PD)</p> <p>Debate and vote on the draft recommendation [CG(2021)41-05]*</p> <p>Statement by Kajsa OLLONGREN, Deputy Prime Minister, Minister of the Interior and Kingdom Relations the Netherlands</p> <p>Oral reply to questions from the floor</p> 
18.30	<p>End of the sitting</p>

Wednesday 27 October 2021

Chamber of Local Authorities [EN/FR/DE/IT/RU/TR]

9.30-12.00, Hemicycle

* *Deadline for tabling amendments: 10.00 Wednesday 20 October 2021*

9.30	Opening of the chamber session by the President Bernd VÖHRINGER	
9.32	Adoption of the draft agenda of the chamber [CPL(2021)41-OJ]	
9.34	Election of 2 vice-presidents of the chamber <i>[deadline for candidatures: 7.30 Wednesday 27 October 2021]</i>	
9.45	Communication by the President [CPL(2021)41-01]	
10.00	Monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-government: North Macedonia Presentation by the co-rapporteurs: Harald BERGMANN, Netherlands (L, ILDG), and Zdenek BROZ, Czech Republic (L, ECR) Debate and vote on the draft recommendation [CPL(2021)41-02]* Statement by Goran MILEVSKI, Minister of Local Self-Government, North Macedonia (tbc) Oral reply to questions from the floor	
10.30	Thematic debate: Working conditions of local elected representatives in times of hate speech and fake news on the internet The inter-university research project on shaping a scientifically based policy fighting the threats of social media Statement by: Robert MÜLLER-TÖRÖK, Professor, University of Public Administration and Finance Ludwigsburg (HVF), Germany Debate	
11.15	Monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-government: Cyprus Presentation by the co-rapporteurs: Marc COOLS, Belgium (L, ILDG) and Gunn Marit HELGESEN, Norway (R, EPP/CCE) Debate and vote on the draft recommendation [CG(2021)41-04]* Statement by Nicos NOURIS, Minister of the Interior Cyprus Oral reply to questions from the floor	
11.59	Adoption of the abridged report of the session of the chamber [CPL(2021)41-DEC]	
12.00	Close of the session of the chamber by the President	

Meeting between the youth delegates and Congress members

12.00	<i>Venue tbc</i>	Open to youth delegates, Congress members, secretaries of delegations and advisers
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12.45		

Wednesday 27 October 2021

Chamber of Regions [EN/FR/DE/IT/RU/TR]

9.30-12.00, Room 9

* Deadline for tabling amendments: 10.00 Wednesday 20 October 2021

9.30	Opening of the chamber session by the President Harald SONDEREGGER
9.32	Adoption of the draft agenda of the Chamber [CPR(2021)41-OJ]
9.34	Communication by the President [CPR(2021)41-01]
9.45	Inter-regional and cross-border co-operation for better territorial integration in Europe [CPR(2021)41-02] Statements by: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ann-Sofi BACKGREN, First Vice-President of the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR), Member of the Regional Council of Ostrobothnia, Finland• Pavel BRANDA, Chair of the European Committee of the Regions (CoR)'s Interregional Group on Cross-Border Co-operation, Czech Republic (ECR)• Representative of the International Conference of Lake Constance (Internationale Bodensee Konferenz – IBK) (tbc) Debate
10.30	Lifelong education for lifelong employment of young generations: a challenge for the regions Statements by: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Christina PATTERER, Member of the Carinthian State Parliament, Austria• Miriana BUCALOSSI, Leader of the working group for Youth Policies of the European Association of Regional and Local Authorities for Lifelong Learning (EARLALL), Italy (tbc)• 1 youth delegate (tbc) Debate
11.15	Regions and diaspora Statements by: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Paulo PISCO, Rapporteur and Chair of the Subcommittee on Diasporas and Integration of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe, Portugal• Angus ROBERTSON, Member of the Scottish Parliament, Cabinet Secretary for the Constitution, External Affairs and Culture, United Kingdom (tbc)• Alberto NÚÑEZ FEIJÓO, President of the regional government of Galicia, Spain (tbc) Debate
	Date of the next session March 2022
11.59	Adoption of the abridged report of the session of the chamber [CPR(2021)41-DEC] 
12.00	Close of the session of the chamber by the President

Meeting between the youth delegates and Congress members



12.00 - 12.45	<i>Venue tbc</i>	Open to youth delegates, Congress members, secretaries of delegations and advisers
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Wednesday 27 October 2021

Plenary sitting

14.00-17.30, Hemicycle [EN/FR/DE/IT/RU/TR]

* *Deadline for tabling amendments: 10.00 Wednesday 20 October 2021*

14.00	Adoption of the draft minutes of the sitting of the Congress on 26 October 2021 [CG(2021)41-PV-01] 
14.02	Formal adoption of texts approved by the chambers [CG(2021)41-10] 
14.05	Hungarian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe (21 May 2021 - 17 November 2021) Statement by Péter SZIJJÁRTÓ, Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade, on behalf of the Hungarian Presidency of the Committee of Ministers (tbc) Oral reply to questions from the floor
15.00	COVID: the road to recovery? Statements by: Rolf WENZEL, Governor, Council of Europe Development Bank (CEB) Ulrik VESTERGAARD KNUDSEN, Deputy Secretary General of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Debate
17.00	7th Dosta/Congress prize-giving ceremony
17.30	Close of the sitting

Thursday 28 October 2021

Bureau meeting [EN/FR/DE/IT/RU]

8.30-9.15, Room 9



Bureau of the Congress

Thursday 28 October 2021

Plenary sitting [EN/FR/DE/IT/RU/TR]

9.30-12.00, Hemicycle

** Deadline for tabling amendments: 10.00 Thursday 21 October 2021*

9.30	Adoption of the draft minutes of the sessions of the chambers and of the sitting of the Congress on 27 October 2021 <small>[CPL(2021)41-PV], [CPR2021)41-PV] and [CG(2021)41-PV-02]</small>
9.35	Ceremony awarding the Congress medal to an honorary member Jakob WIENEN, Netherlands
10.00	Statement by the President of the Committee of Regions Exchange of views with Congress members
10.40	Monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-government: Albania Presentation by the co-rapporteurs: Xavier CADORET, France (L, SOC/G/PD) and Carla DEJONGHE, Belgium (R, ILDG) Debate and vote on the draft recommendation <small>[CG(2021)41-14]*</small>  Statement by Romina KUKO, Deputy Minister of the Interior, Albania Oral reply to questions from the floor
11.59	Adoption of the abridged report of the 41st Session <small>[CG(2021)41-DEC-01]</small> 
12.00	Close of the 41st Session by the President of the Congress

MEMBERS' ATTENTION IS DRAWN TO:

- Electronic voting will take place in the Hemicycle and in Room 9 via the meeting platform KUDO.
- Participants are reminded that access to the hemicycle is strictly limited to holders of badges which indicate the specific hemicycle symbol.
- Tabling written questions for oral reply (Office 1081) (congress.session@coe.int): each member should limit herself/himself to one question per guest speaker. Please refer to the agenda for the deadlines.
- The conditions and deadlines for tabling amendments (congress.session@coe.int): at the latest at **10.00, 7 days before** the day when the texts to which they refer are to be discussed. Amendments must be signed by 5 delegates from at least two delegations for texts debated in plenary sittings or by five delegates from at least two national delegations sitting in a chamber for texts debated in that chamber.
- Registration for speakers: the form for registration of speakers for the debates, available at the entrance of the hemicycle and Room 1 (plenary sittings and chamber sessions) must be submitted to the Table Office secretariat seated in front of the President's rostrum for sittings in the hemicycle or to the secretariat of the President for the chamber meeting in Room 1.
- **Finance Office:** Offices tbc
- **SPEAKING TIMES APPLIED IN THE DEBATES - Rule 30 paragraphs 6 and 7 of the Rules and Procedures of the Congress**

6. Speaking time for delegates is limited as follows:

- a. Single rapporteurs presenting reports: ten minutes;
- b. Co-rapporteurs presenting reports: six minutes each;
- c. Single rapporteurs replying to debates: five minutes;
- d. Co-rapporteurs replying to debates: three minutes each;
- e. Chairs of committees replying to debates (at their request): three minutes;
- f. Other speakers (except on personal statements; on setting the agenda; on any procedural question or on amendments): three minutes;
- g. Speakers on personal statements; on setting the agenda; on any procedural question or on amendments or sub-amendments: one minute.

7. When sufficient time is not available for all speakers to be heard for the times provided under Rule 30.6, the President may decide that speaking time will be reduced or that not all those who have entered their name in the register may speak.
