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Co-operation activities of the Congress in member States and neighbouring regions

Summary

This document presents the main results of the Congress co-operation activities carried out in member States and neighbouring regions, as part of its new orientation and priorities since 2011.

Through its co-operation activities, the Congress further supports member States and States in neighbouring regions in their aspiration to enhance local and regional democracy and institutional frameworks in line with Council of Europe standards. It encourages the implementation of the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-government (ETS No.122), providing a link between the recommendations and resolutions adopted at the sessions and the situation on the ground.

Through four lines of actions, the co-operation activities contribute to [1] empowering local and regional authorities by fostering dialogue between central government and local and regional authorities and strengthening their associations; [2] building the capacities of local and regional elected representatives as agents of change; [3] making young people aware of the principles of local democracy and engaging them at local level; and [4] learning by doing through involvement in local initiatives to improve the quality of local democracy through the implementation of innovative, participatory, open, transparent, accountable and inclusive approaches at the local level.

Over ten years, the Congress has implemented bilateral projects in Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, as well as in Morocco, Tunisia and Kosovo* and multilateral projects under the European Union – Council of Europe Joint Programmes “Partnership for Good Governance” (PGG) and the South Mediterranean (“South Programme IV”).

Through peer exchanges with members of the Congress, several thousands of mayors, councillors and young local leaders have been inspired to lead the change in their local communities. The partnership with national associations of local and regional authorities has been strengthened and innovative local initiatives have nurtured a renewed approach in addressing citizens’ needs, promoting their engagement in the decision-making process and improving the quality of life in local communities.

The proximity to field work opens new avenues to explore and feeds into the Congress’ work and thematic debates, in particular during the extraordinary contexts, in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic and amidst Russian Federation’s war in Ukraine which have reshaped ways of working, as well as democracy and governance in the European continent and beyond. The key highlights and main developments of the co-operation activities within four lines of action are outlined in this document.

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

Table of contents

INTRODUCTION	3
I. KEY HIGHLIGHTS	4
II. EXTRAORDINARY CRISES AND UNEXPECTED PRIORITIES	5
1. Adapting to the Covid-19 pandemic and lessons learnt	5
2. War of the Russian Federation against Ukraine	6
III. THEMES AND AREAS OF CO-OPERATION	7
1. Empowerment of local and regional authorities and their associations	7
1.1. Dialogue between local and regional authorities and central government	7
1.2. Strengthening associations of local and regional authorities	10
2. Capacity building of local and regional elected representatives as agents of change	13
3. Enhancing the awareness of young people on the principles of local democracy	17
4. Local initiatives: learning by doing	17
IV. CO-OPERATION ACTIVITIES AS PART OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE'S POLICY TOWARDS NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES	20
1. Bilateral projects	20
2. Regional activities in the Southern Mediterranean – South Programme IV	21
CONCLUSION	22
APPENDIX – SUMMARY OF PROJECTS	24
I. Bilateral projects implemented in Council of Europe member countries	24
A. Projects in progress	24
B. Completed projects	28
II. Multilateral projects implemented in the framework of specific partnerships	39
III. Projects implemented in the framework of the Council of Europe's policy towards neighbouring regions	41
A. Completed projects	41

INTRODUCTION

1. In 2011, the Bureau of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities adopted a new orientation² for the Congress' activities contributing to the Council of Europe Action Plans, which support member States and States in neighbouring regions³ in the implementation of legal and institutional reforms, in line with Council of Europe standards. The Guidelines for co-operation activities⁴, adopted in 2015, further specified the framework and the principles of such co-operation activities, whose importance was reiterated in the Priorities of the Congress.⁵

2. Co-operation activities aim to provide practical responses to the shortcomings and problems identified by the various monitoring bodies of the Council of Europe, and with regards to local democracy, and during monitoring visits on the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-government (ETS No.122) (hereinafter "the Charter"). The Congress is the benchmark in local and regional democracy, whose expertise and experience are widely recognised. Due to this expertise, the Congress is in a position to provide local and regional authorities, and their associations, with the assistance and means to acquire new skills and 'know-how', and to strengthen their institutional capacities. The recognition of the Congress' role has led to a substantial increase in the number of Congress co-operation projects. Since October 2012, the total amount contributed by donors has been € 13 105 000.⁶ The activities are based on political dialogue and the monitoring of the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and complement the statutory activities of the Congress, its chambers and committees. They provide a link between the recommendations and resolutions adopted at the sessions and the situation on the ground.

3. The interventions are undertaken in two main directions. First, there are programmes and activities implemented **bilaterally** in the framework of the Council of Europe Action Plans for specific member States, within the Council of Europe Policy towards neighbouring regions or Neighbourhood Partnerships.⁷ Second, there are programmes and activities implemented **multilaterally** in the framework of specific partnerships, such as joint Programmes between the Council of Europe and the European Union. Moreover, the activities organised within the Council of Europe Policy towards neighbouring regions have been implemented following the creation by the Congress of the status of Partner for Local Democracy in 2014.⁸

4. Over ten years, the Congress has implemented bilateral projects in Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, as well as in Morocco, Tunisia and Kosovo* and multilateral projects under the European Union – Council of Europe Joint Programmes "Partnership for Good Governance" (PGG) and for the South Mediterranean Partnership ("South Programme IV").

5. Currently, the Congress has projects under implementation in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine. Project proposals have been submitted for funding under relevant action plans and co-operation documents for Armenia, Ukraine, Kosovo*, Morocco, Tunisia, and for a multilateral project aimed at strengthening resilience in local and regional authorities facing migration challenges in Czech Republic, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania and Slovak Republic.

6. Peer exchanges are the main element of the Congress' intervention, for which members of the Congress have a key role to play. Since 2011, more than 100 local and regional elected representatives, members of the Congress, from around 30 member states have taken part in co-operation projects implemented by the Congress. Where necessary, their contribution and the work of the Congress Secretariat are complemented by members of the Group of Independent Experts on the European Charter of Local Self-Government, and experts from the beneficiary countries or other European countries.

7. This document presents the main results that the Congress has attained in partnership with the beneficiaries; it outlines the key highlights and summarises the main developments within each of the thematic fields highlighted in the Guidelines for co-operation activities, as well as the activities implemented in the context of the Council of Europe Policy towards neighbouring regions.

² Framework document for co-operation activities of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities – Document CG/BUR/2011(21)4): <https://rm.coe.int/doc/090000168071909e>

³ Council of Europe Resolution 343(2012) on "Policy of the Council of Europe towards neighbouring regions: the role of the Congress": <https://rm.coe.int/0900001680718d3d>

⁴ "Improving the impact of Congress recommendations: Guidelines for co-operation activities in Council of Europe member States", CG/BUR/2015(27)31, Bureau of the Congress, 23 March 2015. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/168071a684>

⁵ The priorities of the Congress are available online here: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/congress/priorities-of-the-congress>

⁶ Details of the contributions per project can be found in the appendix.

⁷ "Report on the implementation of the Council of Europe Policy towards neighbouring regions", CM(2017)27-final, Bureau of Ministers, 19 May 2017. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/1680712371>

⁸ Resolution 376 (2014) Partner for Local Democracy status. Available at: <https://rm.coe.int/1680719fb5>

I. KEY HIGHLIGHTS

8. Since 2012, through the implementation of projects for a total amount of around € 13 105 000, 1 500 mayors, councillors and young local leaders have been inspired through capacity development activities provided by the Congress to lead the change in their communities. Countries and territories concerned are: (i) Members states: Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine; (ii) Regional project under the Partnership for good governance between the European Union and the Council of Europe for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus (2015-2017); (iii) Council of Europe Policy towards neighbouring regions: Morocco and Tunisia; (iv) Kosovo*. Congress co-operation and partnership activities key highlights in the period 2011 – 2022 are listed below.

9. The Congress flagship initiative - the Citizens' Assembly at local level – is a first deliberative process of this kind in the City of Mostar, in Bosnia and Herzegovina and in Southeast Europe. It was implemented following the first local elections since 2008 held in Mostar in 2020 and was designed to address complex challenges of democratic renewal. This innovative participatory method is applied to further incorporate citizens into shaping local policies for more resilient and cohesive communities and has had a transformative effect both on citizens and decision-makers.

10. In Ukraine, the right to vote in the actual place of residence allows for better integration of internally displaced persons (IDPs) and is ensured by the Central Electoral Commission's Resolution No. 88 from May 2020. It is a result of several debates organised by the Congress and national associations of local and regional authorities and is based on the Congress' Recommendation 419 (2018) and its corresponding Resolution 431 (2018) on local voting rights for the integration of migrants and IDPs.

11. The dialogue between national and local authorities was strengthened through work to introduce institutionalised consultation mechanisms in Albania, Armenia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, jointly with national associations of local and regional authorities. In addition to capacity development of national associations, the Congress has supported them in better advocating for their needs and in contributing to national commitments and policy making. The Platform for National-Local Dialogue on open government in Ukraine, institutionalised in April 2021, is an exemplary illustration of this endeavour.

12. Through the "Leaders for change" programme, local and regional elected representatives developed their leadership skills, communication abilities, a sense of service to their citizens, and the capacity to nurture a renewed approach in addressing citizens' needs and improving the quality of life in local communities. They now provide stronger, more inclusive, proactive and accountable local leadership, which has resulted in higher trust of citizens in public institutions and in the creation of an effective local political environment conducive to sustainable economic and social development. This is a testimony to the work which has been accomplished so far in decentralisation, multi-level governance, local governance and local democracy. Although the Congress was not the only partner in this effort, it has been an important and a relentless one.

13. In Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine, local elected representatives were supported in transforming the acquired knowledge and skills into practice through the implementation of almost 40 local initiatives. Capacities of young local leaders were strengthened to enhance their participation and engagement in local communities. As a result, many of them were elected as mayors or local councillors and still hold these positions or represent their constituencies in parliaments.

14. The Congress developed and launched an online tool "be-Open⁹" to respond to the needs voiced by local elected representatives related to public ethics and accountability, corruption prevention, and greater transparency and citizen participation. bE-Open provides information on relevant international standards and the domestic context and legislation, giving examples of case law related to corruption, as well as relevant guidelines and good practices in Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, and Kosovo*.

15. A stronger gender perspective was introduced in all Congress' project activities. A gender mainstreaming e-course was made available to all local elected representatives and senior officials in Ukraine to improve their knowledge on gender equality and to promote the empowerment and equal participation of women and men in policymaking at local level. Moreover, guides for combatting and preventing sexism at local level were developed in Georgia, Ukraine and Kosovo*.

⁹ bE-Open is an online tool aimed at supporting local authorities in their efforts to improve the quality of local democracy by providing practical guidance on public ethics, accountability, transparency and citizen participation. The tool is available at: <https://www.beopen-congress.eu/>

16. Human rights at local level have been in the focus of Congress co-operation with Georgia, which includes the piloting of an innovative methodology for strengthening capacities of local authorities to protect and implement human rights through data-driven, evidence-based decision-making and collaborative governance. A human rights-based approach is mainstreamed into the efforts towards strengthening the role of the local level in multilevel dialogue and consultations.

17. The Congress has advocated and contributed to setting up the Open Government Partnership (OGP) Local programme, to further localise principles of open government, namely transparency, accountability and participation. This has resulted in the global appreciation by OGP of the efforts in four local authorities from Armenia and three from Ukraine as demonstrating the necessary leadership in advancing open government standards to be endorsed in the OGP Local Programme.

18. Congress co-operation activities have also integrated the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development as a framework for the efforts towards better local democracies and strengthened human rights implementation at local level. With a focus on localisation of SDGs, the Congress has contributed to achieving in particular SDG 3 (Good health and well-being), 5 (Gender equality), 10 (Reduced inequalities), 11 (Sustainable cities and communities), 16 (Peace, justice and strong Institutions) and 17 (Partnerships for the Goals).

19. Cooperation programmes were extended to non-member states from the South Mediterranean. The status of Partner for Local Democracy, established by the Congress in 2014, was granted to Morocco and Tunisia in 2019 and delegations from these countries started to participate in committee meetings and Congress sessions.

20. In Tunisia, the Congress supported the National Federation of Tunisian Communities (FNCT) carrying out an evaluation of the decentralization process and drafting a memorandum of understanding between the Ministry in charge of Local Affairs and FNCT to establish a platform of regular consultations between central and local authorities. The Congress also provided expert support for the elaboration of the Code of Local Authorities, a framework legislation adopted in April 2018, and observed the first municipal elections held in the country in May 2018.

21. In Morocco, the Congress contributed with its expertise to the revision of the institutional architecture for decentralised governance. Legislative support was provided to improve the framework on participatory democracy and mechanisms of citizen participation at territorial level, local financing mechanisms and financial autonomy of territorial communities, as well as the status of territorial elected representatives. The Congress observed local and regional elections in the country in September 2021.

II. EXTRAORDINARY CRISES AND UNEXPECTED PRIORITIES

22. The Covid-19 pandemic reshaped ways of working, as well as democracy and governance globally. Russian's Federation war in Ukraine is causing a wide range of consequences to the European continent and beyond, requiring enhanced solidarity and co-operation. During these extraordinary periods, the Congress co-operation efforts prioritise the assistance to local and regional authorities in navigating through challenges and seizing opportunities. The Congress regularly adapts priority areas for co-operation, as well as the approach for providing support, tailoring it to the needs on the ground.

1. Adapting to the Covid-19 pandemic and lessons learnt

23. For Congress co-operation activities, COVID-19 derived challenges were mainly related to restrictions of movement, that limited the overall organisation of events in person with main partners and stakeholders, leading to a reduction of bilateral discussions often held in the margins of conferences, round tables and official events. Providing assistance in a new context while the main partners, local elected representatives, were at the forefront of the pandemic response was another challenge, as they had to act upon pressing issues in their communities, such as unprepared health systems and infrastructures, access to services, social protection gaps, or digital divides among many others.

24. Congress efforts geared towards the empowerment of local and regional authorities, their associations, and the capacity building of local elected representatives included a focus on managing the pandemic. In this regard, peer exchanges were leveraged for sharing best practices, in handling the crisis and in setting-up mechanisms and procedures for future emergency situations in their role as actors of multi-level

governance. Moreover, the pandemic context highlighted the importance of improving the use of open government tools to mitigate the risks imposed by the pandemic.

25. In the context of national lockdowns, restrictions on gathering, and international travel restrictions, project teams took advantage of digital tools in supporting partners. Events were held online or in a hybrid mode, and included trainings, webinars, peer-exchanges and the launch of Congress publications. Online training courses for capacity building were developed as a means to support partners during lockdown, and these can be used outside of the pandemic context as they ensure accessibility and inclusivity. The events organised in-person or in a hybrid manner followed the sanitary regulations and recommendations of the Council of Europe as well as the domestic ones concerned.

26. Lessons learnt from this crisis include a move towards hybrid events and an improved use of digital tools for increased inclusivity and accessibility, increased focus on open government tools at local level to ensure democratic governance in crisis situations, and greater reliance on field staff who are closer to stakeholders and national context. However, new technologies cannot fully replace in-person interactions and human connection cannot be digitally replaced, and upon the return to usual “modus operandi”, the Congress co-operation activities now encompass again the aforementioned lessons learnt and build upon them in current and future work.

2. War of the Russian Federation against Ukraine

27. The Congress has been implementing co-operation activities in Ukraine since 2014, with the most recent project launched in October 2021. The Russian’s Federation war against Ukraine¹⁰ hindered the pace of implementation of the project, which has been adapted based on the Priority Adjustments to the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine 2018-2022¹¹. The ongoing project is aimed at rebuilding capacities of local authorities and their national associations to address unprecedented humanitarian, social, economic and environmental challenges they face as a consequence of war, to reconstruct democracy and rebuild resilience at local level.

28. A debate took place during the March 2022 session and it led to the adoption of a declaration condemning the Russian Federation’s war against Ukraine as a blatant breach of international law¹². Its adoption was preceded by a remote exchange of views with the Minister for the Development of Communities and Territories and the Mayors of Kyiv and Mykolaiv who unanimously expressed the urgent need to defend not only Ukraine but also Europe’s democratic values.

29. During the same March 2022 session, the Congress launched in March 2022 the Cities4Cities online platform¹³ that allows twinning and co-operation, by matching the demands and needs of Ukrainian cities and regions with the capacities and know-how of cities and regions from other Council of Europe member States willing to provide support to their peers in Ukraine.

30. Cities4Cities currently counts with almost 200 registered authorities. The Congress Secretariat continues to act as a liaison between the City of Sindelfingen, which hosts the platform, and Ukrainian counterparts, through the support to the Association of Ukrainian Cities (AUC), and regularly contributes to the improvement of the platform and its functions. A merger of the Cities4Cities with the *United for Ukraine* platform (supported in Ukraine by the Swedish Association of Local Authorities and Regions is being discussed in order to create further synergies and unite potentials of each separate platform into a stronger, more long-term oriented, user-friendly platform.

31. Since early March 2022, regular online meetings have been held with the AUC and the Secretaries general of the major European Associations of local and regional authorities.

32. Moreover, the Congress became institutional partner of the European Alliance of Cities and Regions

¹⁰ The Bureau of the Congress adopted a Declaration on the situation in Ukraine in its extraordinary meeting held on Monday 28 February 2022 in which it “condemns in the strongest terms, the armed attack on Ukraine by the Russian Federation, which constitutes a blatant breach of international law and the Statute of the Council of Europe”.

¹¹ “Priority adjustments to the Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine 2018-2022”, CM (2022)89-final, 132nd Session of the Committee of Ministers (Turin, Italy), 20 May 2022, available at: https://search.coe.int/cm/Pages/result_details.aspx?ObjectID=0900001680a694b6

¹² Declaration condemning the Russian’s Federation war against Ukraine, Congress Session, 22 March 2022: <https://rm.coe.int/0900001680a5ec3d>

¹³ Cities4Cities online platform available at: <https://www.cities4cities.eu/LandingPage/Index?ReturnUrl=%2F>

for the reconstruction of Ukraine launched by the European Committee of the Regions in June 2022¹⁴.

33. The President and the Secretary General paid a working visit to Ukraine (June 2022)¹⁵ and a delegation from Kyiv City Council visited the Congress in Strasbourg (April 2022).¹⁶

III. THEMES AND AREAS OF CO-OPERATION

34. All 46 member States of the Council of Europe committed themselves to apply provisions of the Charter which are complemented by the thematic recommendations of the Congress. In addition to these standards of local and regional democracy, the specific needs of the beneficiaries and the local context are taken into account to adapt the methodology of co-operation activities. They are therefore the outcome of an approach based on dialogue and partnership.

35. This chapter presents thematic co-operation activities along four lines of action: [1] empowering of local and regional authorities by fostering dialogue between central government and local and regional authorities and strengthening their associations; [2] building the capacities of local and regional elected representatives as agents of change; [3] making young people aware of the principles of local democracy and engaging them at local level; and [4] learning by doing through involvement in local initiatives to improve the quality of local democracy through the implementation of innovative, open, transparent, accountable and inclusive approaches at the local level.

36. This chapter also highlights the Congress' co-operation work in the field of human rights, in particular regarding gender equality, and integration and protection of internal displaced persons and minorities. The Congress has an important benchmarking, awareness-raising and enabling role to play in the implementation of human rights by local and regional authorities.¹⁷ Hence, it is actively engaged in applying a human rights perspective to complement the statutory work with co-operation activities.

1. Empowerment of local and regional authorities and their associations

37. The following section highlights various interventions, such as the introduction of an institutionalised consultation mechanism, measures to strengthen associations' institutional and/or administrative capacities, or political mediation between several associations of local and regional authorities. It gives an overview of the Congress' country-specific examples in **Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, and Ukraine**, and transnational co-operation between the countries of the Eastern Partnership of the European Union.

1.1. Dialogue between local and regional authorities and central government

38. The right to consultation is one of the cornerstones of the Charter. The integration of this right into member States' legislation and the complexity of its practical implementation are regularly underlined in the monitoring of the application of the Charter. It is a priority for the Congress and for that matter, new guidelines on consultation mechanisms¹⁸ were adopted by the Congress during its 35th session.

39. The Congress encourages dialogue between local and regional authorities and central government. Moreover, given the asymmetrical nature of the relationship between national and local level, the Congress defends the role of national associations of local and regional authorities as key partners of both – the central government and the authorities they represent. Therefore, the Congress offers its expertise to stakeholders, including national associations of local and regional authorities, who wish to enhance the exercise of the local and regional authorities' right to be consulted by central government. The consultation process may vary due

¹⁴ To learn more about this initiative of the European Committee of the Regions, visit the following website: <https://cor.europa.eu/en/engage/pages/european-alliance-of-cities-and-regions-for-the-reconstruction-of-ukraine.aspx#:~:text=The%20European%20Alliance%20of%20Cities,recovery%20and%20reconstruction%20of%20Ukraine>

¹⁵ The Congress President and the Secretary General visited Ukraine in June 2022. Learn more about the visit here: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/congress/-/council-of-europe-congress-president-in-ukraine>

¹⁶ Representatives of the Kyiv City Council visited the Congress in April 2022. Learn more about it here: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/congress/-/supporting-ukraine-council-of-europe-congress-president-meets-representatives-of-kyiv-city-council>

¹⁷ "Resolution 296 (2010) Revised) and "Recommendation 280 (2010) Revised on the Role of local and regional authorities in the implementation of human rights", CG(21)15, Bureau of the Congress, 19 October 2011 available respectively at: <https://rm.coe.int/090000168071907c> and <https://rm.coe.int/1680718e80>

¹⁸ "Resolution 437 (2018) 35th Session The consultation of local authorities by higher levels of government", RES 437(2018), 8 November 2018, <https://rm.coe.int/16808ecb38>

to the context in different countries; therefore, the Congress does not seek to promote a uniform pattern since the States and their local and regional authorities are better placed to decide on the suitable consultation model.

40. An example of Congress assistance in such matters can be found in Albania where - following the reform on administrative and territorial decentralisation and organisation in 2013 – Congress intervention led to the incorporation of the right to be consulted into the Organic Law on Local Self-Government (2015) and to the establishment of a Consultative Council of Local and Central Authorities (2017).

41. With its intervention taking place amidst an extremely polarised and tense political context, in which local and regional authorities, represented by partisan associations, were neither in a position to present their concerns to central government nor to identify joint lines of action, the Congress has maintained regular dialogue with all stakeholders since 2012, including political parties. However, challenges remain, especially with regards to the representation of local authorities on a pluralistic platform and the sustainable functioning of the Albanian Consultative Council.

42. In **Armenia**, following up on a series of meetings between the Communities Association of Armenia (CAA) and the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure (MTAI), the Association developed with the Congress support, adopted and submitted to the Ministry a strategy for consultations between national and local authorities in Armenia. In addition, the Community of Practice on public integrity and ethics was established in March 2020. Composed by 23 communities, the Ministry of Territorial Development and Infrastructure, the Ministry of Justice and the Ministry of Finance, Corruption Prevention Commission and the OGP Secretariat, the Community allowed for a focused dialogue between the local and national level on diverse aspects such as corruption, open government and transparency in public procurement, as well as on practical mechanisms for the implementation of measures in these areas.

43. Moreover, the CAA has actively worked on the Territorial Administration Reform in Armenia (TARA) through the adoption of policy positions and organisation of Forums on Local Democracy in Armenia jointly with the Armenian Government. Further steps were taken in 2019 with the preparation of the annual report on decentralisation which was developed in the initiative of the Association's Board and with its own resources. The report was presented to representatives of central and local authorities in early 2020 to advocate for further decentralisation of power and responsibilities to the local level, promote an inclusive and sustainable consultation mechanism, as well as more co-operative and strategic relation between the Government, local authorities and their associations.

44. The International Conference on “Decentralisation in Armenia: a new agenda in the post-TARA environment” was organised in June 2022 jointly with MTAI to take stock of the current challenges facing the Government and local authorities of Armenia. Conference participants addressed institutional questions related to the role of stakeholders in the decentralisation process and interaction between them in formulating and implementing a decentralisation strategy and action plan.

45. In the **Republic of Moldova**, the Congress signed a Post-monitoring Roadmap on Local Democracy with the authorities in April 2021, which was followed by a meeting between the President of the Congress and the President of the Republic of Moldova highlighting the importance of strengthening local democracy in Moldova.

46. Seeking to strengthen the dialogue between the local and central authorities, the Congress supported the Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova (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 to CALM regarding a platform for dialogue, developed by CALM as a proposal for enhancing dialogue and consultation with the central authorities. These proposals were subsequently discussed between CALM and the Government.

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

48. In October 2022, a roundtable was organised to discuss the consultation mechanism in the Republic of Moldova, international good practices and ways for enhancing consultation in the country. The event brought together representatives of the central and local levels of governance in the Republic of Moldova, the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe, and national and international experts.

49. **In Ukraine**, the XV and XVI Ukrainian Municipal Forums organised by the Congress and the AUC, held on respectively in June 2019 and July 2020 in Odesa, Ukraine, gathered more than 400 mayors on each occasion, with the intention of sharing their knowledge and experiences in building inclusive, open and transparent cities. The Forum, celebrated annually, represents a unique platform for consultation and dialogue between all levels of government and is based on a wide communication among the members of the AUC. The Congress is fostering dialogue across various fields that concern local authorities and their competencies, such as accountability of local elected representatives, administrative supervision and the electoral reform, including Congress intervention aimed at enfranchising internally displaced persons (IDPs) at local level which contributed to the adoption of legislative provisions on political rights of IDPs in Parliament and the adoption of the Electoral Code of Ukraine, stipulating full participation of IDPs in local elections held in October 2020. Further support was provided to local authorities and their associations in enhancing their role in the implementation of the Fourth National Action Plan of the OGP 2018-2020 in Ukraine.

50. Moreover, legislative support was provided to national and local authorities in Ukraine, on matters related to the local self-government and constitutional reforms. The Council of Europe Preliminary comments on the Draft Law “On Amendments to the Constitution of Ukraine” included discussions with the Parliament, the Government, local authorities and their national associations in February 2020, with the contribution of the Congress Constitutional Advisor. The draft amendments were reviewed in line with the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, highlighting particular concern with the powers of the prefect and the principle of proportionality in relation to administrative supervision of local authorities. The draft law “On the City of Kyiv - Capital of Ukraine” was also reviewed, and recommendations were provided to enhance the legislative provisions. The Congress also contributed to the discussion on the legal personality of local public entities by assessing its applicability and conformity with the European Charter of Local Self-Government and participated in several events, in particular the thematic meeting organised by the Council of Europe Office in Ukraine in January 2022.

51. A second meeting of the “Platform for national-local dialogue on open government” was organised jointly by the Secretariat of the Cabinet of Ministers and the AUC in December 2021, to discuss the Ukrainian commitments to OGP and identify common priorities for a new Roadmap to be implemented jointly with the Ministry of Youth and Sport and the Ministry of Digital Transformation, who joined the Platform.

52. In July 2022, under the adapted project to face the humanitarian and social needs of local and regional authorities during the war in Ukraine, more than 350 representatives of the Ukrainian local and regional authorities and their national associations gathered during the online roundtable on collaboration mechanisms of local and regional authorities in times of war. They discussed ways to identify new co-operation methods and improve the existing ones with their peers from other European countries. Joint actions and trust were identified as the main corner stones for Ukraine’s revival.

53. In October 2022, an event to award best local practices on open government in times of war was organised jointly with the AUC.

54. **In Georgia**, the Congress is supporting the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG) in the development of a platform of dialogue between central and local authorities and civil society organisations to promote, and advocate for, the implementation of human rights standards at local level and to contribute to Georgia’s national commitments. The platform will include local authorities, the Public Defender’s Office (PDO), as well as representatives of the Parliament and of the Government of Georgia, and its mandate will be that of organising consultations and dialogue for enhanced contribution of local authorities to the national commitments on human rights municipalities in implementing human rights policies (e.g. the role of municipalities in the enforcement of the Code on the rights of the Child) and proposing policy recommendations.

55. Moreover, through a series of consultations, the Congress is supporting the association to become a fully-fledged partner in multilateral dialogue on human rights. In December 2021, NALAG was invited for the first time to a consultation meeting with new mayors organised by the Human Rights Secretariat under the Administration of the Government of Georgia, wherein their needs towards strengthening institutional frameworks for gender equality were discussed. Moreover, NALAG was regarded as one of the main partners for the Gender Equality Council of the Parliament of Georgia in terms of engagement with local municipalities while discussing its action plan for 2022-2024.

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

as a fundamental actor of human rights governance. Moreover, in October 2022, the Executive Board of NALAG met to discuss the importance of human rights at the local level and strengthen their capacities to further contribute to human rights governance as a leading actor for dialogue.

57. The Congress, in its role as the watchdog for the application of the Charter, conducted a study on the alignment of the local self-government framework in **Kosovo*** with European standards. Consultation meetings were held with local authorities and the Association of Kosovo Municipalities (AKM), as well as representatives from the Ministry of Finance, the Ministry of Local Government Administration, the Parliament, Ombudsperson, and others. The conclusions of the study were subsequently translated into an Action Plan, developed in consultation with local and national authorities. The central Government committed in December 2021 to include Congress recommendations in the government programme and pursue its implementation together with the newly elected local leaders. It is a major success that the findings and the Action Plan were supported by both the central and local levels of the government, and in particular by the Prime Minister.

58. The Congress will continue to support the process of decentralisation and regular and effective consultation between central and local authorities and their associations through projects implemented in member States.

1.2. Strengthening associations of local and regional authorities

59. National associations of local and regional authorities are key partners for the central government, as it is the associations' duty to advocate the interests of local and regional authorities and to hold internal consultations with their members on subjects relevant to local and regional democracy. Thus, strengthening the right of local and regional authorities to be consulted by higher levels of government also requires reinforcing the capacities of their associations. In this regard, support has been provided to strengthen internal governance, decision-making, communication with members and external stakeholders, and improve skills in advocacy, policy analysis and influencing, corruption prevention and legal matters.

60. The co-operation with the Communities Association of **Armenia** (CAA) highlights the Congress' contribution in this respect. The CAA was supported in establishing its institutional structures and procedures necessary for a functional association, including the introduction of a new culture for internal governance, decision making, communication and policy advocacy. As a result of this "opening", the circle of engagement of the CAA members was broadened during 2019 to involve community councillors, municipal servants and municipal lawyers. The CAA was also supported in the review of amendments related to legal acts on local self-government and in the preparation of subsequent position papers to be submitted to central authorities. In 2020, two papers and six opinions of the CAA on legislative amendments were developed with the support of the Congress.

61. Following the finalisation of the TARA in December 2021, and the consequent reduction in the number of communities from 502 to 79, the CAA was supported in the revision of its Charter in order to reflect on relevant legislative changes, and accordingly redefine its governing bodies and representation of members. A CAA Working group discussed specific issues related to the new administrative setting in Armenia and its influence on the functioning of the Association, such as decision-making bodies and the representation of communities, voting rights and balanced political representation in view of the recent transition to proportional representation method.

62. Similarly, the Congress support to the association of local authorities in the **Republic of Moldova** led to significant progress towards strengthening the organisational development of the association and its operational alignment with European standards of local self-government. CALM was supported to develop its Strategic Plan 2021-2027 through 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 the Congress Recommendation 436 (2019) on local and regional democracy in the Republic of Moldova, as well as the Roadmap for its implementation signed between the country and the Congress in April 2021.

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

64. Other objectives of the Congress are to establish close co-operation and lasting relations with the

different national associations of local and regional authorities in member States, as well as to provide advocacy support. In **Georgia**, the co-operation with the NALAG in 2017 led to the drafting of proposals for amendments to the Code of Local Self-Government concerning citizens' participation in local affairs. In May 2022, a grant agreement with NALAG was signed providing the Association with the tools and expertise necessary to mainstream human rights standards in national and local policies and actions, to establish peer-to-peer exchanges among member municipalities, and to strengthen its advocacy capacities to promote consultations between local and central authorities in the field of human rights. Within these efforts, the Congress is actively supporting NALAG's efforts for the development of a multilevel platform of dialogue and consultations of local authorities.

65. The Congress also supports local authorities and their associations in their efforts to mainstream human rights in local decision-making, and to promote more citizen-oriented, open, inclusive and gender sensitive local governance. For instance in **Georgia and Ukraine**, Memoranda of Understanding was signed between the Congress and the NALAG and the AUC respectively in December 2021 with this commitment. Another Memorandum of Understanding was signed in September 2022 in **Bosnia and Herzegovina** between the Congress and the two associations of municipalities and cities in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in the Republic of Srpska to foster the implementation of the principles of open government and public ethics at the local level in the country, and further disseminate good practices in inclusive policy-making and co-creation between local authorities and citizens.

66. In **Ukraine**, the Congress supported the AUC in the elaboration of comprehensive proposals for amendments to two draft laws, concerning the status of local councillors and State supervision and control over local authorities' activities. Following this support, the Congress enabled local authorities to reach a common position on the amendments, which were then submitted to the Parliament of Ukraine by the AUC.

67. Regular meetings are held between representatives of the associations¹⁹, members of the Ukrainian delegation to the Congress, and the beneficiaries of the project being implemented in that country. Emphasis is put on further enhancing the institutional consultation and dialogue between local and national authorities, as well as in the pursue of the irreversibility of reforms and the decentralisation of powers in Ukraine.

68. The AUC's institutional capacities were strengthened on different levels, including internal planning and management, external communication and advocacy, as well as analytical and legal capacities. The process of the development of the AUC's midterm strategy was launched in 2019 following the results and recommendations of the Baseline Assessment of institutional capacities of the AUC. The elaboration of the strategy gathered more than a hundred members of the association representing all regions of Ukraine. This wide participatory process ensured that both members of the AUC and the executive staff share the Association's vision and mission and are committed to achieving it with a unified voice. The Strategy was approved by the AUC Management Board in 2020. Consequently, the job classification was revised, an electronic file management system introduced, membership fees were increased and the collection rate was enhanced, resulting in improved financial situation and sustainability, efficiency and effectiveness in the work of the Association. The AUC represents the interests of 951 local authorities, covering 85% of the population of Ukraine.

69. The strong institutional position and capacities of the AUC are recognised in the dialogue with the Verkhovna Rada of Ukraine, in particular within the debates on the legislative provisions needed for ensuring political rights of IDPs. This dialogue was grounded on the Congress Recommendation 419 (2018) and the corresponding Resolution 431 (2018) on local voting rights for the integration of migrants and IDPs. As a result, the Electoral Code of Ukraine, adopted in December 2019, stipulates full participation of IDPs in local elections. IDPs from different regions of Ukraine were included into local electoral registries for voting in local elections held in October 2020, which represented a major step forward towards the inclusion of IDPs in the political life.

70. In 2020-21, the AUC implemented a grant provided by the Congress to improve services to its members, integrate the principles of openness, transparency and equal opportunities in the Association's activities and policies, enhance its analytical capacities, strengthen advocacy and communication, and mainstream gender equality in all of its activities. Although the situation with the Covid-19 pandemic affected the AUC's ability to implement all activities in line with the initial plan, an electronic document management system was introduced and is being used by all members of the AUC Secretariat and Regional Branches. In line with the component on gender equality, the AUC conducted a survey on the implementation of gender policies in member municipalities, with a remarkable response rate of 92.7% of all AUC members. This provided valuable information for the online gender course "Introduction to Gender Mainstreaming at Local

¹⁹ The Association of Ukrainian Cities, the Association of Village and Settlement Councils of Ukraine, and the Ukrainian Association of District and Regional Councils.

Level” which aims at improving the knowledge of local councillors and municipal officials on gender equality and to promote the empowerment and equal participation of women and men in policymaking at local level in Ukraine. It is hosted by the AUC and offered to all member local authorities as part of regular services. The e-course was developed in close co-operation with the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS) and piloted in 2020 with the participation of several Ukrainian and Georgian local authorities. This helped tailor the course to local needs. The course was further adapted following trainings delivered to around 50 staff members of the AUC Secretariat and Regional Branches. In 2021, the course was expanded with the module on combatting sexism at the local level.

71. The AUC has taken steps to increase its advocacy capacity and provide further support to members by lobbying for their needs at national level. Following the identification of Ukrainian local authorities’ open government successful practices, concrete steps were made for the Association’s inclusion in the co-ordination group of the OGP and subsequent involvement of local authorities in the implementation of the Fourth National Action Plan of the OGP 2018-2020. The consultative process and the dialogue with national authorities resulted in the preparation of a Road Map for the development of open government and e-governance at local level in Ukraine, which the AUC submitted to the Cabinet of Ministers in July 2020. These efforts resulted in the Association’s formal inclusion in the co-ordination council of the National Open Government Initiative, along with national authorities and civil society representatives. Thus, the inclusion of local authorities to the design, implementation and evaluation of the national OGP commitments was institutionalised. The sustainability of a dialogue between central and local authorities on open government is ensured through a Platform for National – Local Consultation on Open Government in Ukraine, established in April 2021 by the Secretariat of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and the AUC. That also brought direct impact on the engagement of local authorities in the design of the National Open Government Action Plan 2021 – 2022, which incorporates proposals on national commitments submitted by the AUC following consultations with its members.

72. To enhance gender equality at local level, the AUC has carried out substantive work within the Association’s Committee on Equal Rights and Opportunities for Women and Men and nominated a gender advisor, with more than 80 municipalities having signed the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life (CEMR Charter). The role of the Association has been key in this endeavour.

73. At the invitation of the AUC, a Congress Congress visited Ukraine in June 2022 to participate in the Forum "reVIVED Ukraine - reVIVED communities" organised jointly with other international stakeholders and which gathered together more than 200 representatives of Ukrainian local authorities. They discussed the reconstruction of Ukraine, the development of shared projects in line with the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the promotion of solidarity with Ukrainian and other European municipalities.

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

75. In addition to country-specific work, the Congress encouraged exchanges between the associations of different countries. The associations’ intention to strengthen co-operation was confirmed by the Memorandum of Understanding, signed in June 2017, between the National Association of Local Authorities of Georgia (NALAG), the Congress of Local Authorities of Moldova (CALM) and the Association of Ukrainian Cities, under the auspices of the Congress. Furthermore, the Community of Practice on local democracy,²⁰ established in January 2016, which involved the representatives of the national associations of **Armenia, the Republic of Moldova, Georgia and Ukraine**, as well as representatives of **Azerbaijan and Belarus**, has served as an excellent networking and discussion platform to improve the quality of local democracy and build sustainable transnational relations for strengthening local governance in the region. As a result, apart from the 81 Ukrainian municipalities previously mentioned, four other Georgian municipalities signed the CEMR Charter in September 2019.²¹

76. In Kosovo*, support has also been provided to enhance multi-level dialogue. During the study on the alignment of the local self-government framework in **Kosovo*** with the European standards, which took place in the summer of 2021, the AKM took a leading role in engaging with the relevant stakeholders. The

²⁰ The Community of practice on local democracy is a network of experts and practitioners in the fields of local governance and ethics, representatives of national associations of local and regional authorities, and civil society.

²¹ The four Georgian municipalities that have signed the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life are: Ozurgeti, Lagodekhi, Rustavi and the self-governing city of Kutaisi.

association's institutional position has been strengthened and the association is now seen as a key stakeholder in the implementation of the conclusions of the study that were consequently included in the national programs.

77. Furthermore, the AKM acquired teaching and reference materials and other intellectual tools to promote public ethics, and principles of integrity and good governance at the local level. This effect on the AKM can be observed in its Strategic plan for 2021-2025 where the consolidation of local self-government and the promotion of integrity and good governance principles clearly appear in the strategic vision. Learning resources and practical tools reflecting Congress recommendations were developed and shared with the AKM Training Centre, thereby strengthening the association in its capacity building and representational role towards local authorities.

2. Capacity building of local and regional elected representatives as agents of change

78. Delivering meaningful, successful decentralisation requires ongoing political support from all the relevant stakeholders, both authorities and citizens. It also requires these stakeholders to have a sense of ownership over, and be deeply committed to, local governance in keeping with European principles.

79. Mayors and local councillors are the level of government closest to citizens. Their primary responsibility is to promote the principles of local democracy and the values of their community, while complying with the national legislation and exercising the competences entrusted to them. Furthermore, local and regional elected representatives have a duty to ensure transparency in public action, to adopt appropriate measures for the prevention of corruption and to develop democratic tools for enhancing citizen participation in local affairs.

80. The promotion of the principles of the Charter and supporting the adoption of innovative and participatory approaches, in response to citizens' wishes and needs, was the rationale behind designing targeted activities for mayors and councillors.

81. Local and regional elected and appointed officials benefit from Congress support in deepening their knowledge on the principles of the Charter, as well as in developing their skills in public ethics, integrity, open government and gender equality principles, as well as in advocacy and policy influencing. This comes in various forms including workshops, peer exchange, practical tools and guidelines, to name a few.

82. In **Ukraine**, the Congress contributed to the discussion on the legal personality of local public entities by assessing its applicability and conformity with the European Charter of Local Self-Government. Major international stakeholders gathered during a thematic meeting organised by the Council of Europe Office in Kiev in January 2022, while the Congress was represented by a member of the Group of Independent Experts on the European Charter.

83. In the area of public ethics, integrity and open government, the online tool "**be-Open**" was developed to provide easy access to relevant international standards and domestic context, legislation, case law, guidelines and good practices in four main areas of focus, namely public ethics and accountability, preventing corruption, transparency, and citizen participation. Launched in March 2021, the tool has been since expanded with new chapters, examples, and practical advice. The tool is being implemented in **Albania, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova, Ukraine, and Kosovo***.

84. The content of the tool is also included in the Handbooks on Open Local Government and Public Ethics developed for these countries. The handbooks support local authorities, mayors, local councillors, and civil servants in their efforts to improve the quality of local governance in their villages, towns and cities. In Bosnia and Herzegovina, the Handbook has been presented to representatives of local authorities in view of capacity-development activities within the project. In **Albania, Armenia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine**, the respective Handbooks were updated to reflect on the most recent legislative changes and present good practices.

85. In **Armenia**, the e-learning courses on "Fraud Awareness and Prevention" and on "Public Ethics" were developed in response to the request from MTAI and the needs voiced by local authorities. These short, yet effective and practical e-courses were developed in close co-operation with the Directorate of Internal Oversight of the Council of Europe with the aim of having them available on the MTAI e-learning platform for all 79 Armenian municipalities, their elected representatives and appointed officials.

86. In **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, a series of capacity development workshops contributed to enhancing the knowledge of newly elected Mostar city councillors in the areas of transparency, accountability, open

government, public ethics, citizen participation, improved provision of municipal services, and roles and responsibilities of local councillors. Seven Congress members shared their expertise and were engaged in peer exchange within these activities.

87. In addition, through active participation in the first deliberative process in the city of Mostar, local elected representatives gained knowledge and skills on the use of innovative democratic tools as complements to representative democracy.

88. In May 2022, a Platform of Exchange among municipalities and cities across Bosnia and Herzegovina on open government for transparent, inclusive and citizen-oriented local policy making was established, following a public call for expression of interest. It held its first meeting on May 2022 and its second meeting on July 2022. The Platform, which is composed of 23 local authorities²², also supports strategic interests of the Association of Municipalities and Cities of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and the Association of Municipalities and Cities of Republic of Srpska.

89. In **Kosovo***, elected and appointed officials also enhanced their awareness and skills in the field of open local government, public ethics, and integrity through various capacity-building activities in 2021. These included trainings and international peer-exchanges, as well as the development of learning resources and practical tools which were shared with the AKM Training Centre for continued capacity development. The trainings were inclusive and representation was ensured from Albanian-majority municipalities, Serb-majority municipalities and the Turkish-majority municipality of Mamushë. Participants gave very positive feedback and requested that these trainings be used during the onboarding for newly elected or appointed public officials at the beginning of 2022. Based on the experience of the workshops, two training modules on public ethics and integrity, and open government respectively, and a trainer manual were developed and shared with the AKM to ensure sustainability of knowledge sharing with local authorities through the AKM Training Centre.

90. The Congress supported municipal Legal and EU Integration Officers to enhance their knowledge and skills on European standards of local self-governance and best practices through workshops and peer exchange.

91. The programme “Leaders for Change”, implemented in a number of countries, served the purpose of capacity building and facilitated peer-to-peer exchanges as well as the sharing of good practices with Congress members. The programme focused on specific themes such as the roles and responsibilities of elected representatives, communication with citizens, promoting values at local level, and effective and ethical strategic decision-making. The discussions, with the participation of national and international experts, gave participants an opportunity to identify ways to effectively and practically implement the above-mentioned principles.

92. In the early stages of the co-operation activities, the programme “Leaders for Change” proved to be successful in **Armenia**²³ and **Ukraine**²⁴. It has better placed local elected representatives to lead innovative policies and to involve citizens in decision-making processes. Moreover, interaction between participants and Congress members had an added value to facilitate meaningful change in their local communities.²⁵

93. Likewise, under the programme implemented within the Council of Europe – European Union “Partnership for Good Governance” (PGG), over 60 mayors and representatives of their national associations from **Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine** have taken part in thematic activities and peer-to-peer exchanges on the subjects of public ethics, prevention of corruption, transparency and citizen participation. The four country-specific handbooks on transparency and citizen participation²⁶ and the *Management of change: a tool guide for local and regional authorities*²⁷ were the practical tools used to support them in developing accountable, effective and transparent institutions.

94. The Congress has acknowledged the role of local and regional authorities to protect the fundamental

²² The Municipalities / cities that will take part in these activities are Berkovići, Bijeljina, Bratunac, Brod, Centar Sarajevo, Doboj Brod, Doboj Jug, Gradačac, Ilijaš, Jajce, Jezero, Kostajnica, Lopare, Lukavac, Maglaj, Modriča, Mostar, Orašje, Sokolac, Teslić, Travnik, Vareš and Vukosavlje.

²³ Within the scheme some twenty mayors took part from 2013 to 2016 in Armenia and helped to create a space for experimenting with citizen participation. The experiences of Armenian elected officials have been compiled into a publication entitled *Toolkit on Citizen Participation* for the attention of their peers, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/16806cf43c>

²⁴ Over 150 mayors and 220 local councillors have benefitted from the Congress activities since 2014 in Ukraine.

²⁵ The project's closing conference was organized in December 2016, where Armenian Mayors acknowledged the significance of the programme “Leaders for change” for their capacity building.

²⁶ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/congress/-/handbooks-on-transparency-and-citizen-participation>

²⁷ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/congress/-/management-of-change-a-tool-guide-for-local-and-regional-authorities>

rights and freedoms of citizens. Making local and regional elected representatives more aware of the human rights dimension in carrying out their responsibilities regarding the daily lives of local residents, including the principles of equality, inclusivity and non-discrimination, is one of the priorities of the Congress.²⁸

95. In **Georgia**, in March 2022, the Forum of Exchange on human rights at local level, the unique platform of 13 local authorities²⁹ established in cooperation with the NALAG, held its first meeting to exchange about human rights-based policymaking at the local level. On this occasion, a baseline assessment exercise was launched in order to identify the local authorities' capacities, challenges, and needs for effective human rights implementation.

96. Following the priorities set by the Forum, in April 2022 two workshops on gender equality mainstreaming for effective human rights-based local governance were carried out. The workshops strengthened the capacities of more than 50 local elected representatives and senior officials, and led to the official commitment of the municipality of Marneuli to sign the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life.³⁰

97. In October 2022, the Forum of Exchange met for the second time to discuss capacities, challenges, needs and visions of local authorities based on the results of the baseline assessment. The members of the Forum, based on their reflection on common challenges and practices, agreed on a Declaration which calls upon the NALAG to strengthen its advocacy efforts within human rights multilevel governance.

98. In **Ukraine** peer-to-peer exchanges, with the participation of AUC representatives of the Management Board and its regional branches, started a debate on the role of national associations of local authorities in promoting SDG 5 on gender equality, at local level specifically.³¹ The adoption of the CEMR Charter by 80 Ukrainian municipalities over the course of one year demonstrated the proactiveness of local authorities to undertake concrete steps for its effective implementation.

99. The e-course "Introduction to Gender Mainstreaming at Local Level", was developed by the AUC with the Congress support, and based on an existing online course developed by NALAS. It became available to all their members as of November 2020. The course, developed to respond to the needs of local elected representatives and civil servants, aims to build their capacities to develop strategies and approaches for overcoming gender inequality, use different tools and methods for mainstreaming gender in policymaking, learn to integrate gender perspectives throughout the budget process and thus contribute to a more gender equal society. In the first months of implementation, the e-course was undertaken by more than 100 participants.

100. A stronger gender perspective was introduced in all project activities to promote the participation of women in local life and foster gender equality. To support the fight against sexism in local politics, three Guides on "Combatting and preventing sexism at the local level" were developed for **Ukraine, Georgia and Kosovo***. They provide practical advice to local authorities and their national associations as well as possible targets of sexist violence and gender-based discrimination such as female candidates and local office holders. The guides present concrete measures for combatting sexism at local level and ensuring that women play an active and meaningful role in the decision-making process. International and local good practices from the local context are included. They also provide an overview of the representation of women in local government, the legal framework and current statistics.

101. Congress members also engaged in co-operation activities aimed at combatting sexism. In October 2021, the Congress spokesperson on Gender Equality and Chair of the Governance Committee delivered a keynote speech on Congress recommendations on fighting sexism at the FemArt Festival in **Kosovo***, one of the largest women's rights festivals in the region, organised to empower women and girls and to promote equal participation in all spheres of life.

102. The Congress also engaged with the **Open Government Programme (OGP)** to promote principles of open government in the countries it co-operates with. Support was provided to Ukrainian local authorities, in partnership with the AUC and in co-operation with the OGP Secretariat, in their applications to the OGP Local Programme, which is composed of 56 participants worldwide in its first intake. As a result, three out of 11

²⁸ Council of Europe Congress of Local and Regional Authorities Priorities 2017-2020, I-g, §72, p.11, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/168071b2cb>

²⁹ Members of the Forum are the municipalities/cities of Bolnisi, Borjomi, Chokhatauri, Dedoplistskaro, Dmanisi, Marneuli, Oni, Ozurgeti, Tbilisi, Tetritskaro, Tsalka, Tskaltubo, and Zestaponi.

³⁰ To the date of publication of this document, 21 Georgian local authorities have signed the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life.

³¹ Workshop on "Gender equality at local level: challenges and opportunities in Ukraine" held on 21-22 February 2018.

applications from Ukrainian municipalities and one Regional Council were selected to join the OGP Local Programme, namely Vinnytsia, Ternopil and Khmelnytskyi. In January 2022, Khmelnytskyi received the first prize of the OGP award for innovation and the City of Vinnytsia the third prize of this global award, thereby demonstrating the leadership and empowerment of Ukrainian cities in advancing European open government standards and localising Sustainable Development Goals. In May 2021, the Congress jointly organised with the AUC an online marathon as part of the 2021 edition of the Open Gov Week. Representatives of Ukrainian local authorities shared good practices on open government at local level and demonstrated their proactive stand in leading inclusive, diverse and gender-balanced initiatives and presented concrete measures to improve citizen participation and respond to and recover from the COVID-19 pandemic. Further to this, the Congress keeps on co-operating with the AUC and OGP Secretariat during the global initiative of the Open Gov Week and advocating open local government at global level, including at the 5th and 6th OGP Global Summits held respectively in Tbilisi, Georgia in 2018 and in Ottawa, Canada, in 2019, in which a delegation of Ukrainian local authorities and members of the AUC participated.

103. The regional round table on open government and democracy was organised jointly with the OGP on 18 February 2022 to allow local decision makers from **Armenia, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova and Ukraine** to exchange experiences on sustainable partnership strategies, as well as to reflect on the respect of core values and principles of open government and human rights. The event also aimed at facilitating applications from interested local authorities to the global Call for Expression of Interests for endorsement into OGP Local Programme. In February 2022, as a response to the growing interest of Ukrainian local authorities, the Congress and the AUC organised an awareness raising workshop on open government and the potential of the OGP Local programme. Some 160 participants representing urban and rural communities of 24 Ukrainian regions discussed with current Ukrainian members of the OGP Local Programme on the benefits of adhering to open government principles at local level.

104. In October 2022, in the margins of the Ministerial and High-Level engagement at OGP Europe Regional Meeting held in Rome, a tripartite Memorandum of Understanding was signed between the Congress, OGP and the AUC, through which the parties commit to follow the principles of openness, inclusiveness and accountability in the joint efforts for ensuring rapid and stable reconstruction of Ukrainian communities as well as efficient functioning of local authorities.

105. In **Armenia**, within the framework of the project, a Community of Practice on public integrity and ethics was launched in March 2020, with the aim to act as the focal group for strategic localisation of public integrity and anti-corruption policies and their implementation by local authorities of Armenia. It promotes and advocates for the European standards on political integrity, ethics, transparent and open governance and citizen participation with local authorities in Armenia. To facilitate the work of the Community of Practice, two working groups have been established, each focused on identifying challenges and designing approaches in specific areas, namely: [1] anti-corruption policies and open government, [2] public integrity and transparency in public procurement. Working groups are used as a unique platform for both building the capacities of group members and developing concrete measures and policies, such as a model Code of conduct, and a Roadmap for the involvement of local authorities in the development, implementation and evaluation of the national OGP Action Plan. With Congress support, the City of Yerevan and Municipality of Armavir became two additional local authorities to be endorsed as partners of OGP Local Programme in May 2022, following the earlier endorsement of Vanadzor and Gyumri.

106. Members of the Community of Practice on public integrity and ethics in local governance in Armenia (CoP) were supported to act as drivers for change at local level and to address the key elements of ethical and transparent governance, including ways to prevent and combat corruption and to foster citizen participation as a means of reinforcing the accountability of local authorities. Representatives of 23 member communities participated in a series of four thematic workshops and enhanced their skills and knowledge of public integrity, open and transparent governance, anti-corruption policy and transparency in public procurement.

107. Following discussions with the MTAI of the Republic of Armenia, and in line with the National Anti-Corruption Strategy, a corruption risk self-assessment tool as well as a model Code of Conduct for public officials were developed, and submitted to the Corruption Prevention Commission (CPC) for endorsement. They were piloted with expert support in six municipalities, contributing to their final adoption and dissemination to all Armenian local authorities. A legal and financial analysis of potential corruption risks related to the public procurement procedures was conducted and submitted to MTAI for their further action.

108. The Congress' peer-to-peer exchange programme helps to disseminate new practices and to forge closer ties between elected representatives within their countries. This modus operandi has also led to the creation of various policy-making platforms and opportunities for experimentation. Improved understanding of the principles of local democracy and their rights, as well as the heightened awareness on advantages of co-

operation/joint actions have encouraged mayors and local councillors to uphold the interest of local populations and invest more in them.

109. In view of supporting the advocacy and policy-influencing skills of local officials, a capacity development path was created and implemented in the **Republic of Moldova**. It included workshops (that also focused on achieving the SDGs at local level), an online seminar, and support towards drafting an Action Plan on Advocacy for Local Finances.

3. Enhancing the awareness of young people on the principles of local democracy

110. The preamble of the Revised Charter on the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life³² states the following:

111. *“Participation in the democratic life of any community is about more than voting or standing for election, although these are important elements. Participation and active citizenship is about having the right, the means, the space and the opportunity and where necessary the support to participate in and influence decisions and engage in actions and activities so as to contribute to building a better society.”* This is a guiding notion for the Congress to develop youth-oriented co-operation activities, targeted to the young people who are already engaged at local level, who have been elected to the local council for the first time or might run for office in future elections, or who represent civil society or the media. Since 2014, young local leaders from **Armenia**³³ and **Ukraine**³⁴ benefited from the Congress activities.

112. The seminars designed for young local leaders have three main objectives: [1] to make young people aware of the principles of local and regional democracy; [2] to enhance their capacity to develop and implement initiatives involving both citizens and local authorities; and [3] to give them the desire and the means to participate in local and/or regional elections.

113. Twenty young people from the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk in Eastern **Ukraine**, selected in partnership with local authorities and vocational schools, enhanced their awareness of human rights standards and local democracy principles during the training course in January 2020. They had an opportunity to learn how human rights relate to the principles of local democracy. During the interactive exchanges with representatives of local authorities they were encouraged to engage further in the activities and decision-making in their communities. This is a follow-up to the Training for trainers organised in April 2019, which resulted in the creation of a pool of educators who will provide further support and guidance to the youth to apply their newly acquired knowledge and skills in practice, motivate their peers to join them in taking part in local political life and thus in strengthening the community’s social cohesion.

114. In May 2022, 200 representatives of local authorities and youth NGOs in Ukraine shared new practices of youth engagement developed and introduced in their municipalities during the war in the online workshop organised jointly with the AUC as part of the OGP Week 2022.

4. Local initiatives: learning by doing

115. Local democracy, which is crucial for the functioning of a democratic society, cannot prosper unless local and regional elected authorities are required to act with integrity and to set an example. It is vital that local and regional authorities respond to citizens’ needs and expectations quickly in a transparent, ethical and accountable manner and at the same time encourage greater citizen participation based on regular and open exchanges.

116. The implementation of local pilot initiatives is a way of “learning by doing”. The Congress offers selected local authorities operational and tailor-made support and expertise. Its activities enabled the mayors and their local administrations to put new skills in practice, using the tools, methodologies and examples of good practice exchanged. Consultative councils, forums and opinion-polling mechanisms are just a few examples of good practice that have resulted from local initiatives.

117. Since 2015, the Congress supported 34 local initiatives in five countries (**Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine**) in improving transparency, accountability and integrity of local government by introducing higher ethical standards and embracing new processes for citizen

³² Adopted by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of Europe (10th session – 21 May 2003 – Appendix to Recommendation 128).

³³ Two seminars held on European principles of local democracy for young local leaders gathered around 50 Armenian participants.

³⁴ Nearly 300 young Ukrainians have taken part in activities proposed by the Congress since 2014.

participation in decision-making. Establishing a transparent, reliable and efficient local self-government, in line with the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government is the main goal of local initiatives.

118. The local initiatives scheme has made a significant impact in raising the citizen participation and expectations of the public, enabling them to demand higher quality in local governance. In addition, the local initiatives serve as a three-folded tool – effective consolidation of the peer exchanges carried out on transparency, accountability and integrity in local governance, improvement of the level of citizen participation and trust, and strengthened capacities of local elected representatives, civil servants and local public administration overall.

119. Provided with funding, expert support and peer reviews, selected municipalities in **Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Georgia, the Republic of Moldova** and **Ukraine** were able to introduce local policies and mechanisms for transparent decision-making and change of public perception of local government. As a result of the local initiatives, proposals made by citizens were considered and incorporated into municipal budgets. The establishment of active citizen groups in 11 municipalities, one mentoring scheme, and youth and elderly councils led to the identification of community issues and development of local strategic plans. Moreover, direct channels for communication were introduced to increase citizens' confidence in local public authorities and in their mayors. This enabled higher engagement and simplification in the ways that citizens interact with local elected representatives, particularly for those far from the administrative centre. Supplemented with the incorporation of live streaming of council meetings, web pages and on-line complaint systems, these initiatives ensured that there is a sustainable system in place which enables constituents' confidence in the representative that they have elected to grow.

120. In **Ukraine**, 13 local authorities were selected in 2019 to implement initiatives on ethical, transparent and participatory decision-making with a view to foster the awareness, participation and engagement of under-represented groups as well as equal opportunities for women and men to participate in local political life. A team of international and Ukrainian experts provided on-site and distance guidance on policy development, governance processes as well as on methodologic approaches to ensure sustainability and measure the change.

121. A series of webinars were organised in May, June, and October 2020 to develop value-driven leadership and to facilitate the exchange of views and experiences on thematic areas deemed crucial for the effective and sustainable results of the local initiatives, such as participatory budgeting, gender mainstreaming, youth participation, open government and inclusive decision-making, in particular in times of crisis.

122. In August 2022, a survey on the needs and priorities of local authorities related to adequate provision of services, in particular for IDPs and underrepresented groups, in times of war and post-war recovery was launched in close co-operation with the AUC and other national associations. The draft report highlights needs and consequent recommendations in the areas of fight against corruption, citizen engagement, and multi-level governance co-operation with support of national associations, to name just a few. The report will serve as a basis for providing further support to Ukrainian local authorities and their national associations to enhance resilience and support recovery and reconstruction.

123. Moreover, it will also lay the ground for the development of a Manual for local authorities and their national associations on responding to the crisis situations. The preparation of the Manual was launched in October 2022, and it aims to gather and provide good examples of functioning of local authorities in times of war, responding to crisis situations and making efforts to best meet the needs of local population by providing essential services.

124. Local initiatives are led by mayors determined to bring meaningful change in their municipalities, who, through an inclusive approach involving citizens, deliver a better quality of local democracy and of public services for their communities. The fact that some tools are now being promoted at national level brings the opportunity to replicate them in other municipalities, highlighting their success towards the establishment of a professional, depoliticised, accountable and ethical public administration. In addition, their results were disseminated to mayors in other countries which encouraged others to replicate and generate more efficient, accountable and transparent policy-making in their own municipalities.

125. In **Armenia**, the Congress provided direct support to local elected representatives and civil servants in six newly formed communities to better manage state affairs and deal with increased level of delegated authorities. Building on the previous work carried out jointly with the MTAI and the Corruption Prevention Commission (CPC), the Congress organised on-the-job trainings to strengthen institutional capacity and organisational performance of six pilot local authorities, focusing on the implementation of the anti-corruption policy and on developing and maintaining registers of administrative acts, bylaws and proceedings. As a result

of this close co-operation, the CPC developed the model Code of conduct for public officials in Armenia, based on the principles of the European Code of Conduct for all Persons Involved in Local and Regional Governance adopted by the Congress.

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

127. In the city of Mostar, in **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, the Congress created opportunities for citizens to engage in dialogue with local decision-makers and among themselves through a deliberative process, thereby boosting democratic innovation at local level. The first deliberative process in the form of a citizens’ assembly brought together 48 randomly selected citizens from Mostar who proposed 32 recommendations for city authorities on the topic of cleanliness and maintenance in public spaces. These proposals were considered and officially approved by the city councillors through the adoption of the Action plan for the implementation of recommendations, thereby paving the way towards sustainability of these processes and enhanced co-creation and collaboration between local authorities and citizens. The goal and approach of this intervention were consistent with the political agenda of the Congress for Bosnia and Herzegovina and followed-up on the recommendations of the Congress Reflection Group on Mostar.

128. While the concept of citizen participation implies the right to take part in local governance and influence decision-making, it is also a process of learning, listening, recognising and accepting different opinions, values and knowledge. Deliberation is a more advanced practice of citizen participation being used in many communities where local, regional or national authorities want to include representative groups of citizens in decision making. It allows for a more rounded and informed public opinion and arguably better decisions, and finally to increased trust towards local authorities. It is through a tailored methodology for the deliberative process that opportunities for citizens to dialogue among themselves and with local decision makers will arise.

129. In March 2022, the Mayor of Mostar addressed the Congress session, taking stock of successful co-operation within previous Congress action in the country, focusing on results and prospects stemming from the first deliberative process in the city, the Mostar Citizens’ Assembly, which was presented as one of the case studies in the Congress report on use of deliberative methods at local and regional³⁵ level adopted at the session.

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

131. In September 2022, the European Conference on Democratic Renewal: innovating with deliberative democracy was held in the city of Mostar. It brought together local and regional officials from Bosnia and Herzegovina and international elected representatives and experts from Brussels and Ostbelgien (Belgium), Paris (France), Ireland, Bologna (Italy), Gdansk (Poland), Istanbul (Türkiye), Northern Ireland (United Kingdom), and Mostar (Bosnia and Herzegovina). The Conference allowed participants to discuss the added value of adopting deliberative approaches in decision-making as a form of “collective wisdom” and a response to democratic backsliding.

132. In **Georgia**, in June 2022, a three-day innovative Spring School on Human Rights Data and Evidence-Based Policy Making at the Local Level took place. Georgian local authorities developed a rationale and checklist for concrete steps to apply an evidence-based approach in their policy making. The baseline assessment contributed to mainstream such an approach and enhance the advocacy and dialogue with central authorities.

133. In October 2022, the Forum of Exchange on human rights at local level, composed of thirteen local authorities to share practices, capacities, and visions for human rights implementation at local level, agreed on a Declaration which calls upon the NALAG to strengthen its advocacy efforts within human rights multilevel

³⁵ Report CG(2022)42-12, available at: [Beyond elections: The use of deliberative methods in European municipalities and regions](#).

governance. The Executive Board of NALAG met on the following day and relaunched its commitment to participate in human rights multi-level dialogue in Georgia as a leading actor. During that month, a call for local initiatives to mainstream equality, diversity and inclusion in local life and political action in Georgia was officially launched.

IV. CO-OPERATION ACTIVITIES AS PART OF THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE'S POLICY TOWARDS NEIGHBOURING COUNTRIES

134. The co-operation programme "South-Med Partnership" was designed to strengthen local and regional governance in the southern Mediterranean countries, in particular Morocco and Tunisia³⁶. In light of the programme, the Congress Bureau created a mandate to provide political support to the dialogue and co-operation established with neighbouring countries in December 2016 and established the position of spokespersons on the South-Mediterranean Partnership.

1. Bilateral projects

135. The "Partner for Local Democracy"³⁷ status introduced by the Congress in 2014 allows delegations from the beneficiary countries to participate in the work of the Congress without having voting rights. It is a tool to strengthen political dialogue, decentralised co-operation and experience sharing. In April 2019, the Kingdom of Morocco was granted the status of "Partner for local democracy" by the Congress.³⁸ This made Morocco the first country to enjoy this status, which offers the Council of Europe's neighbouring countries an ideal platform for dialogue and institutional contacts with their European counterparts. A Memorandum of Understanding on the granting of the status aimed at reaffirming the mutual commitment to cooperation was signed. On this occasion, the Congress President and Vice-Presidents had bilateral meetings with the Moroccan delegation to the Congress and representatives of the Moroccan Government accompanying the delegation. In May 2019, Tunisia submitted a request for the status of Partner of Local Democracy. This request was approved by the Bureau of the Congress at its meeting in Brussels, Belgium, on 28 June 2019 and the Status was granted to Tunisia during the 37th session of the Congress on 29 October 2019 in Strasbourg. Both delegations now contribute to the Congress' work including the meetings of its committees, which provides opportunities for peer-to-peer exchange with the members of the Congress. Both delegations took part in exchanges with the Congress' Secretariat and contributed to Sessions and Committees meetings in 2020 and 2021, as well as coordination meetings in 2020 and 2021.

136. Within the programme, the Congress provided legislative assistance as well as implemented various activities to develop the capacities of local elected authorities and their associations. Activities mainly focused on regionalisation and decentralisation reforms and the development of consultation mechanisms and participatory democracy. To accelerate the progress of the programme, a number of key documents on European principles and standards in the field of local democracy³⁹ have been produced in Arabic.

137. In **Morocco**, the Congress contributed its expertise in the revision of the institutional architecture for decentralised governance in Morocco, based on international benchmarking. Recommendations focused on the need for adaptations or legislative and/or regulatory interventions such as the precision of the intrinsic competences at each level of local authorities, the clarification of certain guiding legal concepts, and reconsideration of the relevance of certain competences attributed to levels of local authorities. Legislative support was provided to improve the framework on participatory democracy and mechanisms of citizen participation at territorial level, local financing mechanisms and financial autonomy of territorial communities, as well as the status of territorial elected representatives. Expert studies were carried out on the three subjects, based on international benchmarking and exchanges with the three associations and Directorate-General of Territorial Authorities (DGCT) of the Interior Ministry, to identify shortcomings in the existing framework and formulate proposals for improvement. Following their completion in December 2021, further work on formulating recommendations for legislative amendments is to be pursued in 2022.

³⁶ Following the Congress Secretariat's visits to Rabat and Tunis in November 2016 the programme was adopted by the Congress Bureau on 10 February 2017. For further information, see document CG32(2017)26 "Congress South-Med Partnership", submitted to members of the Congress on 16 March 2017 for information, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/16806fe484>

³⁷ Resolution 376 (2014) Partner for Local Democracy status, available at: <https://rm.coe.int/1680719fb5>

³⁸ On 30 May 2018 the Ministry of the Interior of Morocco, and three associations of local and regional authorities – the Association of the Regions of Morocco (ARM), the Moroccan Association of Presidents of Municipal Councils (AMPCC) and the Moroccan Association of Prefectural and Provincial Councils (AMPCCP) – applied for the status of Partner for Local Democracy of the Congress.

³⁹ European Charter of Local Self-Government; the revised European Charter for the Participation of Young People in Local and Regional Life; the European Code of Conduct for all persons involved in Local and Regional governance and the public ethics collection of the Congress.

138. The Congress provided expert support for the development and improvement of websites for the three associations (AMPCC, AMPCPP and ARM), launched in November 2020 and finalised in December 2021, in order to strengthen their communication capacity for the public and their members. The project also assisted the development of an online training platform for members of the AMPCPP, that can be applied eventually for other associations.

139. With regard to the promotion of Congress work in Morocco and following the translation into Arabic of the Congress “Public Ethics” Collection, a webinar was organised in October 2020 to facilitate an exchange of views and experiences on national and international legal frameworks and the challenges of implementing the principles of public ethics, open government and fight against corruption at local and regional level. In November 2020, another webinar was organised on the theme of consultation mechanisms between central government and local authorities, with the participation of representatives and experts of national associations of local and regional authorities from several European countries. The DGCT and the three associations agreed to work on establishing a permanent institutional framework for consultations, starting with the creation of a Forum of the three associations as a platform for dialogue.

140. In **Tunisia**, the Congress supported national authorities in the creation of the legal framework for local self-government since 2014, including for the Code of local authorities adopted in April 2018, and eight of its implementation decrees on the statute and organisation of elected councils. Following the request of the Higher Authority on Local Finances (HIFL), the Congress carried out an expert study on the revision of the Code of local taxes including international benchmark, which current provisions date back to 1997 and are no longer consistent with the decentralised organisation of Tunisia. Congress assisted the HIFL in the establishment of a data collection and monitoring system on local finances.

141. In terms of capacity building, the Congress organised a training on mechanisms for internal control for the benefit of 30 municipalities, in partnership with the national authority in charge of the fight against corruption. Significant support was provided to the representative association of Tunisian municipalities, the National Federation of Tunisian Communities – FNCT to improve its capacities (administrative organisation, political oversight and overall expertise), including the creation of a new Department on Advocacy, Communication and relations with the members working on financial support of the project. Congress experts contributed to drafting communication and advocacy strategies and supported the organisation of a national evaluation by local authorities of the decentralisation process. The outcomes of this consultation were included in a report with recommendations on further priority action, widely shared with relevant national partners.

142. Upon request by both central and local authorities, concrete steps were taken towards greater dialogue and consultation between the government and representatives of local authorities. Following a webinar dedicated to this issue, featuring presentation of European standards and Tunisian framework, an expert study was prepared to make recommendations on implementing consultation in Tunisia. This led to an agreement in principle to establish a platform for regular consultations between the Ministry in charge of Local Affairs and the FNCT, based on a memorandum of understanding.

143. With regards to the promotion of gender equality, a conference on “Women in local politics”,⁴⁰ in September 2017, facilitated an exchange of views and experiences on national and international legal frameworks, the challenges of implementing legislative safeguards and the role of different stakeholders in strengthening women’s participation in local affairs. This event was followed by exchanges between European and Tunisian locally elected women representatives, organised in Tunis in November 2018 and in April 2019, the latter in the format of a “Café of elected women representatives” during the Tunis Forum on Gender Equality. In June 2021, a webinar on women’s participation at territorial level was organised in the context of Moroccan elections in September 2021, allowing for sharing of experience between women from Morocco, Tunisia and Europe.

2. Regional activities in the Southern Mediterranean – South Programme IV

144. Building on the achievements and relations established through its bilateral co-operation projects in Morocco and Tunisia since 2017, and according to the objectives of reinforcing regional co-operation and building networks of the South Programme IV, the Congress has launched a regional activity in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA)⁴¹ region. This initiative was initially implemented between October 2021 and February 2022.

⁴⁰ Conference organised jointly by the Tunisian Ministry of Women, Family Affairs and Childhood and Ministry of Local Affairs and the Environment and the Council of Europe’s Directorate General of Democracy in Tunis on 26-27 September 2017.

⁴¹ 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.

145. This regional initiative aims 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.

146. Two main activities are implemented in this framework. The first is the creation and support to the work of a community of practice, whose work focuses on priority topics identified: participatory democracy, local finances, and status and conditions of office of territorial elected representatives. These topics will be complemented by two transversal dimensions: implementing the principles of open government and fostering dialogue and consultation between central and territorial authorities. Three working groups and three webinars were organised in this framework. The second is capacity development and support to women, newly elected territorial representatives in Morocco. This activity combines theoretical inputs and peer exchanges and is organised in partnership with the Organisation Internationale de la Francophonie (OIF). The first part of this activity, dedicated to institutional mechanisms of territorial governance, was held online on 18-20 December 2021, while its second part on improving advocacy, leadership, communication and networking capacities of elected women took place on 18-20 February in hybrid mode.

CONCLUSION

147. Through its co-operation activities, the Congress contributes to promoting local and regional democracy in the beneficiary countries and encourages the implementation of the principles of the Charter and the recommendations and resolutions adopted by the Congress. Furthermore, the proximity to field work opens new avenues to explore and feeds into the Congress' work and thematic debates.

148. The operational component of the Congress' action is a demand-driven response and it provides local and regional authorities, their associations, and young people engaged at local level with a platform where they can express their aspirations, needs and concerns, and share their experiences and innovative practices with Congress members and with each other. This approach creates a network of players who are committed to improving the quality of local and regional democracy across Europe, as well as in the Council of Europe's neighbouring regions.

149. The Congress' interventions in the field are vital for strengthening local democracy. New projects were launched in 2022 in **Bosnia and Herzegovina**, in **the Republic of Moldova**, and in **Ukraine**.⁴² Furthermore, the Congress Secretariat developed proposals for new bilateral projects in **Armenia, Kosovo***, **Morocco**, **Tunisia** as well as a **multilateral project** aimed at strengthening resilience in local and regional authorities facing migration challenges in Czech Republic, Poland, Republic of Moldova, Romania and Slovak Republic. The projects are focused on cross-cutting themes related to governance and local democracy, such as the fight against corruption, the promotion of human rights at local level and gender equality, among others.

150. The Congress co-operation activities also contribute to the implementation of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as part of the wider Council of Europe contribution to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In particular, the Congress contributes to the implementation of the following SDGs:⁴³



151. To successfully implement the SDGs, the Congress co-operates with institutional partners within the Council of Europe and with a wide range of international actors and networks of local and regional authorities and associations, such as the Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South-East Europe (NALAS), United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG), the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR), the Assembly of European Regions (AER), the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE), the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) and with European Union institutions such as the European Committee of the Regions.

⁴² More information about upcoming projects can be found in the Appendix, section I-B and III-A.

⁴³ Congress contribution to the SDGs and the Agenda 2030: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/congress/sdg>

152. Moreover, the Congress co-operation activities contribute to the EU neighbourhood policy, both the Eastern and the Southern partnerships, and in particular to the “Recovery, Resilience and Reform: post-2020 Eastern Partnership priorities”.⁴⁴ The contribution to the governance pillar of this new agenda includes support to enhance the skills of local public administrations, corruption prevention and protection of human rights at local level.

⁴⁴ The renewed agenda for recovery, resilience and reform was adopted in July 2021 and builds on the results of the Eastern Partnership 20 deliverables for 2020: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/IP_21_3367

APPENDIX – SUMMARY OF PROJECTS⁴⁵

(Situation as of 17 October 2022)

I. Bilateral projects implemented in Council of Europe member countries

A. Projects in progress

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Project title Innovating democratic participation at local level in Bosnia and Herzegovina

Dates January 2022 – June 2024

Budget € 780 000

Funding [Council of Europe Action Plan for Bosnia and Herzegovina \(2022-2025\)](#)⁴⁶

Objectives Enhancing the quality of local democracy and create opportunities for citizens to engage in innovative deliberative processes in Mostar and in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Promoting new democratic approaches, open government, public ethics, transparent and inclusive local policy making in the country.

Activities

Online partners' meetings with the two associations of local authorities and with the city authorities in Mostar to discuss the project and joint activities.

Online conference to launch the project with the participation of mayors and presidents of local councils across BIH, Congress members and representatives of Association of Municipalities and Cities of the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Association of Municipalities and Cities of Republika Srpska

Grant Agreement signed in May 2022 with the City of Mostar to support the implementation of the recommendations emerging from the first Citizens' Assembly, organised in July 2021 as part of the previous Congress intervention.

Establishment of the Platform of Exchange among municipalities and cities across Bosnia and Herzegovina on open government for transparent, inclusive and citizen-oriented local policy making, following a public call of expression of interest. It is composed of 23 local authorities.

First meeting of the Platform on 23 May 2022 with participation of two Congress members.

Organisation of the event "Open, inclusive and transparent local policies in Bosnia and Herzegovina" in July 2022 for the members of the Platform of Exchange, with participation of two Congress members.

European Conference on Democratic renewal: innovating with deliberative democracy held in the city of Mostar in September 2022, with participation of local and regional officials and international elected representatives and experts, as well as two Congress members.

Memorandum of Understanding signed on 19 September 2022 between the Congress and the two associations of municipalities and cities in the Federation of Bosnia and Herzegovina, and in the Republic of Srpska to foster the implementation of the principles of open government and public ethics at the local level in the country, and further disseminate good practices in inclusive policymaking and co-creation between local authorities and citizens.

Publications and tools Handbook on Open Government and Public Ethics in Bosnia and Herzegovina

⁴⁵ <https://www.coe.int/congress-cooperation>

⁴⁶ Projects within the Action Plan are to be funded from multiple sources. Funding is to be provided mainly from voluntary contributions from donor countries and international organisations. The Action Plan is available at <https://rm.coe.int/action-plan-bosnia-and-herzegovina-2022-2025-eng/1680a54231>

[[English](#)⁴⁷ | [Bosnian](#)⁴⁸]

Booklet for Children – How to make your town a better place [[English](#)⁴⁹ | [Bosnian](#)⁵⁰]

GEORGIA

Project title	Strengthening participatory democracy and human rights at local level in Georgia
Dates	December 2020 - November 2023
Budget	1 800 000 € (of which 900 000 € for the Congress component)
Funding	Council of Europe Action Plan for Georgia 2020-2023 ⁵¹ and the Austrian Development Agency
Objectives	<p>Strengthening human rights protection and democratic public participation at local level in Georgia by enhancing institutional frameworks and by supporting local authorities and their national association in their efforts to promote gender equality and eliminate discrimination;</p> <p>Strengthening the capacities of local authorities and the National Association of Local Authorities (NALAG) to integrate and implement human rights standards and practices in their policies and strategies, and to advocate human rights in Georgia as fully-fledged partners;</p> <p>Implementing human rights-based initiatives to promote social inclusion and equal opportunities for all, incorporate a gender perspective in local political action, and eliminate discrimination.</p>
Activities	<p>Updated assessment report on human rights at local level with the active involvement of NALAG and representatives of local authorities.</p> <p>Hybrid workshop to launch the guide and discuss ways forward to prevent sexism at local level and foster women’s political participation ahead of the local elections.</p> <p>Signed Memoranda of Understanding with NALAG and with each of the thirteen selected local authorities from the target regions, selected jointly with NALAG to constitute a forum of exchange to address common challenges for improving social inclusion, promoting equal opportunities for all and incorporating a gender perspective in local political action, with a view to eliminate discrimination.</p> <p>High-level workshop on “Reducing inequalities, advancing human rights at local level in Georgia” on the occasion of the Human Rights Day.</p> <p>Consultations with the objective of setting up a platform for inter-institutional dialogue on human rights in Georgia.</p> <p>First meeting of the Forum of Exchange on human rights at the local level, to exchange about human rights-based policymaking at the local level. Identification of the local authorities’ capacities, challenges, and needs for effective human rights implementation.</p> <p>Two intensive workshops on gender equality mainstreaming for effective human rights-based local governance in April 2022, with the participation of the Congress Spokesperson on Gender Equality.</p> <p>Official commitment of the municipality of Marneuli to sign the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life.</p> <p>Grant agreement signed with NALAG in May 2022 providing the Association with the tools and expertise necessary to mainstream human rights standards in national and local policies and action, to strengthen its advocacy capacities, and to establish peer-to-peer exchanges among member municipalities.</p> <p>First-ever roundtable meeting between NALAG’s members and the Public</p>

⁴⁷ <https://rm.coe.int/handbook-bosnia-and-herzegovina-eng-word/1680a59b5b>

⁴⁸ <https://rm.coe.int/1680a59b5c>

⁴⁹ <https://rm.coe.int/booklet-how-to-make-your-town-a-better-place-/1680a61eec>

⁵⁰ <https://rm.coe.int/booklet-for-children-sdgs-and-sustainable-cities-bih/1680a7d217>

⁵¹ <https://rm.coe.int/ap-georgia-2020-2023-en/168098f179>

Defender's Office in June 2022 to discuss the recommendations addressed to local authorities within the Public Defender's report on the situation of human rights and freedoms in Georgia in 2021.

Three-day innovative Spring School on Human Rights Data and Evidence-Based Policy Making at the Local Level in June 2022, with the participation of the Congress spokesperson on Human Rights.

Second meeting of the Forum of Exchange in 3 October 2022 to share current practices, capacities, and visions for human rights implementation at local level, as well as the perspectives for sustainable change, including strengthening their own capacities, empowering underrepresented groups to participate and advocating for better access to human rights-related data. Based on their reflection on common challenges and practices, they agreed on a Declaration which calls upon the NALAG to strengthen its advocacy efforts within human rights multilevel governance.

Meeting of the Executive Board of NALAG on 4 October 2022 which provided a space for dialogue and capacity development on human rights law and local policymaking, agreeing to strengthening NALAG's contribution to human rights governance to consolidate its position as a leading stakeholder in multi-level dialogue in Georgia.

Launch of the call for local initiatives on mainstreaming equality, diversity and inclusion in local life and political action in Georgia targeting the municipalities which are members of the Forum of Exchange on human rights at the local level.

Publications and tools Guide on "Preventing and combatting sexism at local level in Georgia" [[English](#)⁵² | [Georgian](#)⁵³]

Handbook on Open Local Government and Public Ethics for Georgia [[English](#)⁵⁴ | [Georgian](#)⁵⁵]

Human rights at local level in Georgia – Assessment report [[English](#)⁵⁶ | [Georgian](#)⁵⁷]

Booklet for Children – How to make your town a better place [[English](#)⁵⁸ | [Georgian](#)⁵⁹]

REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Project title Reinforcing the culture of dialogue and ethical open local government in the Republic of Moldova

Dates March 2022 – March 2024

Budget 475 000 €

Funding [Council of Europe Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2021-2024](#)⁶⁰

Objectives The project aims to strengthen the political dialogue between local and central authorities and provide support for improving the quality of local governance through open government, public ethics, integrity, corruption prevention, and gender equality at local level. The two-fold effort ultimately contributes to enhancing the quality of local democracy and ensuring that citizens of the Republic of Moldova benefit from local policies and practices that are ethical, fair, inclusive, and open.

Main activities

Grant awarded in June 2022 to the Congress of Local Authorities from Moldova (CALM) to strengthen the institutional capacity of the organisation in evidence-based advocacy, coordination, communication, and monitoring.

⁵² <https://rm.coe.int/guide-on-preventing-and-combating-sexism-at-the-local-level-in-georgia/1680a3e961>

⁵³ <https://rm.coe.int/-geo-2021-09-16-practical-guide-on-preventing-and-fighting-sexism-in-l/1680a4af28>

⁵⁴ <https://rm.coe.int/2021-12-06-handbook-open-government-and-public-ethics-georgia-eng/1680a53f06>

⁵⁵ <https://rm.coe.int/handbook-open-government-and-public-ethics-georgia-geo/1680a53ecf>

⁵⁶ <https://rm.coe.int/assessment-report-human-rights-at-local-level-in-georgia-eng/1680a524e0>

⁵⁷ <https://rm.coe.int/assessment-report-human-rights-at-local-level-in-georgia-geo/1680a524e1>

⁵⁸ <https://rm.coe.int/booklet-how-to-make-your-town-a-better-place-/1680a61eec>

⁵⁹ <https://rm.coe.int/childrens-booklet-on-sdg-geo-/1680a87451>

⁶⁰ Projects under the Action Plan are to be funded from multiple sources. The Action Plan is available at: <https://rm.coe.int/prems-043221-eng-1501-action-plan-moldova-couv-texte-a4-bat-web/1680a22649>

Consultation meetings in June 2022 in Chisinau with stakeholders, including CALM, representatives of the State Chancellery, local authorities, the People's Assembly of Gagauzia, and the Ministry of Infrastructure and Regional Development.
Roundtable in October 2022 to discuss the consultation mechanism in Moldova, international good practices, and ways for enhancing consultation. Participants included representatives of the central and local authorities, the Congress, and national as well as international experts.

UKRAINE

Project title	Strengthening local democratic governance in Ukraine ⁶¹
Dates	October 2021 – December 2022
Budget	700 000 €
Funding	Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine 2018-2022 ⁶²
Objectives	Supporting policy co-ordination and consultation between local authorities, their associations, and the national authorities are systematic and effective Improving local governance in Ukraine through the integration of principles of transparency, accountability and equal citizen participation
Main activities	<p>Second meeting of the National-Local Platform on Open Government organised jointly by the Association of Ukrainian Cities (AUC) and the Cabinet of Ministers, joined by new stakeholders, namely the Ministry of Digitalisation of Ukraine and Ministry of youth and sports of Ukraine and launching of the elaboration of a new Roadmap on open government in Ukraine.</p> <p>Assessment of youth policies, policymaking processes and engagement practices at local level with the involvement of 275 communities. It provides an analysis of existing practices and initiatives that local authorities are taking to engage young people in local decision making and identifies challenges faced.</p> <p>Expert recommendations for improving the draft law “On the City of Kyiv - Capital of Ukraine” with recommendations on its compatibility with the European Charter of Local Self-Government, in particular, the proportionality principle laid down in Article 8.3.</p> <p>Contribution to the Council of Europe Policy Advice on Legal Personality at Local Level through the prism of the European Charter of Local Self-Government.</p> <p>Memorandum of Understanding with the AUC to enhance the institutional consultation and dialogue between local and national authorities, as well as to pursue of the irreversibility of reforms and the decentralisation of powers in Ukraine.</p> <p>Launching of the Cities4Cities Platform in March 2022 to match the humanitarian needs of Ukrainian citizens with the offer of other European cities and regions. 200 authorities are registered.</p> <p>Congress Secretariat acts as a liaison between the City of Sindelfingen and Ukrainian counterparts, through the support of the AUC, and regularly contributes to the improvement of platform and its functions.</p> <p>Organisation, jointly with the AUC, of an online workshop during which 200 representatives of local authorities and youth NGOs shared new practices of youth engagement developed and introduced in their municipalities during the war.</p> <p>Visit of the Congress President and Secretary General to Ukraine in June 2022, at the invitation of the AUC. Participation in the Forum “reVIVED Ukraine – reVIVED communities”, in which 200 representatives of Ukrainian local authorities took part.</p> <p>Grant Agreement signed in June 2022 with the AUC to further promote co-operation</p>

⁶¹ This project is based on the needs and recommendations voiced by relevant stakeholders and beneficiaries during the implementation of Congress projects carried out in Ukraine since 2014.

⁶² The Action Plan for Ukraine 2018-2022 is funded by 17 member States: Canada, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland, Hungary, Ireland, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Romania, Sweden, Switzerland, Turkey. The Action Plan is available at: <https://rm.coe.int/168078b606>

between Ukrainian local authorities and partnership networks between Ukrainian municipalities and with other European municipalities and associations, in particular through the Cities4Cities platform.

Online roundtable on collaboration mechanisms of local and regional authorities in times of war, gathering more than 350 representatives of the Ukrainian local and regional authorities and their national associations.

Launching, in close co-operation with the AUC and other national associations, of a survey on the needs and priorities of local authorities related for adequate provision of services, in particular to IDPs and underrepresented groups, in times of war and post-war recovery. This led to a draft report.

Launching, on the basis of the mentioned report, of the preparation of a Manual for local authorities and their national associations on responding to the crisis situations.

Organisation, jointly with the Cabinet of Ministers and the AUC, of the Third Platform of Dialogue on Open Government in October 2022. It awarded three local authorities with a special recognition for their efforts and successes in the promotion and uphold of principles of open government during the war.

Publications and tools Booklet for Children – How to make your town a better place [[English](#)⁶³ | [Ukrainian](#)⁶⁴]

B. Completed projects

ALBANIA

Project title	Strengthening local and regional government structures and cooperation between local elected representatives in Albania ⁶⁵
<i>Congress Component</i>	<i>Building a sustainable, pluralistic and unified platform of dialogue for local government representatives in Albania</i>
Dates	October 2012 – June 2017
Budget	1 630 473 € (of which 637 018 € for the Congress component)
Funding	Federal Government of Switzerland under the Co-operation programme for Albania 2012-2014 ⁶⁶ and the Co-operation programme for Albania 2015-2017 ⁶⁷
Objectives	Strengthening local and regional government structures Strengthening cooperation between local elected representatives in Albania to ensure effective decentralisation and local self-government, in line with the principles enshrined in the European Charter of Local Self-Government
Main activities	Three regional workshops for 150 local government representatives to contribute to the ongoing legislative process, as regards territorial and administrative reform; Five round tables between experts and representatives of municipalities on specific issues related to the territorial and administrative reform; Development of a report on the functions of local authorities and their finances, with 49 recommendations; Study on reinforcing the political role of local and regional authorities and their associations in Albania, with 11 guidelines for improved cooperation between Albanian associations for local authorities;

⁶³ <https://rm.coe.int/booklet-how-to-make-your-town-a-better-place-/1680a61eec>

⁶⁴ <https://rm.coe.int/20221006-how-to-make-your-town-better-ua-web/1680a865ee>

⁶⁵ Programme jointly implemented with the Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform, a unit of the Directorate General of Democracy of the Council of Europe Secretariat.

⁶⁶ <https://rm.coe.int/16802ed0b9>

⁶⁷ <https://rm.coe.int/16802f95e4>

Three workshops on "Mayors, leaders for change";

Study visit by eight municipal representatives to Switzerland to observe Swiss practices of direct democracy;

Pilot initiatives on direct democracy in the municipalities of Tirana and Mallakstra: fifteen meetings with 250 citizens, schoolchildren, members of municipal staff and municipal councillors;

Study visit by 5 representatives of local and regional authorities and 1 representative of the Latvian Agency for Implementation of Territorial Reform to observe the functioning of consultation in the country and the role of the Latvian Association of Local and Regional Governments;

National conference for representatives of newly formed municipalities, organised jointly with the government, CoE, SDC, USAID, UNDP and SIDA, on the challenges following Territorial and Administrative Reform, and the needs to improve local democracy in Albania;

Contribution to the National Strategy on Decentralisation 2015-2020, amendments on the right to be consulted in law 8652/2000, and Organic Law on Local Self-Government;

Establishment of the Local Self-Government and Central Government Consultative Council, based on the draft Decision of the Council of Ministers on the Consultative Council, explanatory memorandum and draft rules of procedures developed;

Consultancy assistance and peer-to-peer approach training for the Consultative Council/Technical Secretariat;

4 regional workshops to inform Albanian mayors of the setting up of the Consultative Council and explain how it works.

Publications and tools Study on the strengthening of the political role of Local and Regional Authorities and their Associations in Albania [[English](#)⁶⁸].

ARMENIA

Project title Strengthening the Communities Association of Armenia and transparent, participatory local governance in Armenia

Dates July 2019 – June 2022

Budget 900 000 €

Funding Federal Government of Switzerland under the [Council of Europe Action Plan for Armenia 2019-2022](#)⁶⁹

Objectives

Supporting implementation of the genuine decentralisation strategy through regular and effective dialogue between local and national authorities, as well as improved transparency and citizen participation at local level;

Building capacities of local elected representatives to prevent corruption and increase openness of local government;

Improving the advocacy capacities of local elected representatives through the work with Communities Association of Armenia (CAA).

Activities

Conference on Political Integrity and Ethics in Local Governance in March 2020 with representatives of 23 member communities, Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure, Ministry of Justice, Ministry of Finance, CAA and civil society sector.

Two meetings of the *Community of practice on political integrity in local governance* held since its establishment in March 2020 and six meetings of its working groups, four during 2021, namely Working group on [1] Anti-corruption policy and open government and [2] Public integrity and transparent procurement. Community of practice acts as the focal group for adopting national integrity and anti-corruption

⁶⁸ <https://rm.coe.int/168071af10>

⁶⁹ Projects within the Action Plan are to be funded from multiple sources, including Joint Programmes with the EU, voluntary contributions from donor countries and international organisations, as well as the Council of Europe ordinary budget. The Action Plan for Armenia is available at <https://rm.coe.int/action-plan-armenia-2019-2022-en-web-version/168092014b>

policies and measures at the local level.

Enhanced skills and knowledge of Community of practice members through a series of four thematic workshops on [1] Public integrity, [2] Open and transparent governance, [3] Anti-corruption policy and [4] Transparency in public procurement.

Grant agreements signed with 13 selected member communities of the Community of practice for the implementation of local initiatives on open government and anti-corruption, and ensured expert guidance and coaching for their implementation.

A corruption risk self-assessment electronic tool for local authorities has been approved by the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Infrastructure (MTAI) and shared with the Corruption Prevention Commission (CPC) for implementation.

Revised the Charter of the CAA to integrate the new institutional setting following Territorial Administrative Reform in Armenia (TARA) and consequent reduction of the number of communities in Armenia (from 502 to 79 in December 2021).

Legal advice on changes and in developing position papers and opinions on legislative amendments, including the Law on Local self-governance on the extension of powers of Head of Community and the Community Council in the conditions of emergency situation, and Martial law on impossibility to hold elections.

Legal analysis of the current state of local self-government, concentrating on the new electoral system and a study on decentralisation of powers of state bodies and equalisation of financial resources.

Support to the CAA in dissemination of and dialogue with national authorities on its first “Annual report on the state of decentralisation”.

Development of draft strategies on consultation framework and decentralisation and shared with the MTAI by the CAA for further reflection and discussion.

Grant Agreement with the CAA for improving its institutional capacities.

Assessment of the implementation of the CAA Strategic Plan 2015-2020 and launch of the process for developing a new Strategy.

Direct support to local elected representatives and civil servants in six newly formed communities to better manage state affairs and deal with increased level of delegated authorities.

On-the-job trainings to strengthen institutional capacity and organizational performance of six pilot local authorities, focusing on the implementation of the anti-corruption policy and on developing and maintaining registers of administrative acts, bylaws and proceedings.

Development, by the CPC, of the model Code of conduct for public officials in Armenia, based on the principles of the European Code of Conduct for all Persons involved in Local and Regional Governance adopted by the Congress.

Comprehensive legal-financial analysis of a number of legal acts relevant to the functioning of Armenian local authorities carried out by Congress experts. Legislative proposals were developed to address identified shortcomings.

Development, by Congress experts, of guidelines on the necessary tools (hardware and software), financial resources and municipal staff capacity development needs to address the corruption risks.

Development of an e-learning on “Fraud Awareness and Prevention” and “Ethics” in response to the request from MTAI and the needs voiced by local authorities.

Organisation of the International Conference on “Decentralisation in Armenia: a new agenda in the post-TARA environment” on 28 June 2022 jointly with MTAI to take stock of the current challenges facing the Government and local authorities of Armenia.

Community of Practice on Public Integrity and Ethics in Local Governance in Armenia continues to serve as a platform of exchange and coordination of work between 23 Armenian municipalities and key government stakeholders.

City of Yerevan and Municipality of Armavir became two additional local authorities to be endorsed as partners of Open Government Partnership (OGP) Local Programme in May 2022.

Support to the CAA in the revision of its Charter following the decrease in the number of communities from 502 to 79 in December 2021 (TARA).

Support in the development of CAA's new Strategic Plan for the next five years, adopted in June 2022.

Publications and tools	Handbook on Open Government and Public Ethics in Armenia [English ⁷⁰ Armenian ⁷¹]
ARMENIA	
Project title	Institutional support to the Communities Association of Armenia (CAA)
Dates	November 2014 – June 2019
Budget	1 025 000 €
Funding	Federal Government of Switzerland under the Council of Europe Action Plan for Armenia 2015-2018 ⁷²
Objectives	<p>Establishing the regular participation of local authorities in framing national policies within a sustainable institutional framework and formalising a consultation mechanism between the CAA and the Armenian government;</p> <p>Supporting the CAA in the process of achieving financial sustainability;</p> <p>Strengthening the capacity of the CAA to improve its image as a recognised political institution and communicate effectively.</p>
Main activities	<p>Consolidation of the CAA's decision-making procedures to make them more transparent and democratic: revision of the CAA Charter in 2016 and clear definition of the functions of the governing bodies, new elections in 2017 for the Presidency in 2017, Republican Council (108 members), Board (36 members) and oversight committee, with a gender representation quota;</p> <p>Regular meetings of the governing bodies and consultations with members (regional seminars and specialised working groups);</p> <p>Six thematic committees established in 2017 on: Financial, economic, budgetary issues; legal affairs; education, culture, sport and youth issues; sustainable development; gender, social and healthcare issues; and rural, mountainous, transfrontier communities' development and inter-municipal co-operation;</p> <p>1st General Assembly for more than 10 years organised in February 2017, with high attendance (400 mayors);</p> <p>Eight meetings of the Republican Council and 3 meetings of the Board in 2017 and 2018;</p> <p>Meeting of the Oversight Committee of the CAA in 2017; 9 meetings of the Standing Committees in 2018;</p> <p>Adoption of 8 policy papers/recommendations, 9 policy briefs, 3 calls addressed to the Government and 1 call addressed to the new Prime Minister;</p> <p>Strengthening the association's capacities to advocate, with input from experts and implementation of trainings;</p> <p>First Forum on local democracy in Armenia organised in co-operation with the government on Local Self-Government Day (10 November 2017), themes: transfer of competencies to local level and financial decentralisation;</p> <p>Consultative meeting between the Republican Council of the CAA and the Government of Armenia led by the President of Armenia (8-9 December 2017): an exchange between the mayors and the Government on mutual expectations vis-a-vis the local government reform agenda;</p> <p>Second grant to the CAA being implemented from March 2018 with four staff members employed as a part of the development of institutional capacities of the CAA;</p> <p>Study visit to the Serbian National Association of Local Authorities and exchanges with two municipalities organised in July 2018 for the CAA Heads of thematic</p>

⁷⁰ <http://rm.coe.int/handbook-arm-eng/168078a58c>

⁷¹ <https://rm.coe.int/handbook-armenia-hye/168078bbe6>

⁷² <https://rm.coe.int/1680471d82>

committees and the CAA leadership and staff;
 Mid-term assessment finalised in July 2018.
 On-the-job coaching for the CAA Secretariat ensured through the engagement of experts during July – December 2018 on communication (13 coaching sessions), advocacy (two coaching sessions), fund raising (nine coaching sessions);
 Modernisation of the association's communication tools (visual identity, website, etc.);
 Workshop on good governance and citizen participation organised jointly with the CAA and the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development in September 2018 to discuss effective mechanisms at local level;
 Workshop on consultation mechanisms between local and national authorities organised in September 2018 to create a framework for institutionalisation of a functional consultation mechanism in Armenia;
 Forum of rural communities organised on 5 October 2018 jointly with the Ministry of Territorial Administration and Development of Armenia;
 Workshop for journalists covering issues of local self-government on 27-28 October 2018;
 Six workshops for PR co-ordinators of the CAA member communities organised during October – November 2018;
 Restructuring of internal financial procedures; Financial Sustainability Strategy developed; rules of procedure drafted and in the process of adoption;
 HR Audit of the CAA Secretariat conducted during October – December 2018;
 Second Forum on local democracy organised on 12 November 2018 on the theme "Decentralisation and local economic development";
 Forum of Municipal servants and Forum of Municipal councillors organised on 13 and 15 December 2018, respectively;

ARMENIA

Project title	Support for the consolidation of local democracy in Armenia ⁷³
<i>Congress Component</i>	<i>Strengthening local elected representatives' leadership</i>
Dates	October 2013 - December 2016 ⁷⁴
Budget	1 579 301 € (of which 608 236 € for the Congress component)
Funding	Government of Denmark under the Council of Europe Action Plan for Armenia 2012-2014 ⁷⁵ , and the Council of Europe Action Plan for Armenia 2015-2018 ⁷⁶
Objectives	Establishing a legal framework in line with European principles and standards of local democracy; Raising awareness of these principles and standards; Strengthening ethical governance and the prevention of corruption; Reinforcing leadership and governance skills and capacities of local authorities; Strengthening the involvement of young people and create mechanisms enabling citizens to participate in decision-making at local level.
Main activities	Consultation with mayors and councillors on the implementation of Recommendation 351 (2014) on local democracy in Armenia, resulting in a "Call to the government of Armenia", made public in January 2015, by the three associations dealing with local

⁷³ Programme jointly implemented with the Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform, a unit of the Directorate General of Democracy of the Council of Europe Secretariat.

⁷⁴ A follow-up to this project was submitted for funding in January 2017 and is still pending.

⁷⁵ <https://rm.coe.int/16802ed0ba>

⁷⁶ <https://rm.coe.int/1680471d82>

self-government issues;

Two series of regional seminars on the participation of citizens in decision-making at local level in Armenia, attended by over 170 Armenian mayors and councillors;

Leadership programme for a group of Armenian mayors in the form of 6 thematic interactive workshops aimed at supporting them in their role as leaders of change;

Support programme for the implementation of citizen participation initiatives in 4 Armenian communities, to enable mayors having participated in the leadership programme to put the skills developed into practice - these initiatives were followed up by peer reviews;

Three regional workshops for newly elected municipal councillors and councillors of merged communities;

Two seminars on European principles of local democracy for young local leaders;

Closing ceremony for the project to provide the Armenian participants (mayors, councillors and young local leaders) with an opportunity to present and share their experience with their peers, local and international experts, representatives of the Armenian government, associations of local authorities, as well as members of the Congress.

Publications and tools Toolkit “Enhancing Citizen Participation in Armenia” [[English](#)⁷⁷ | [Armenian](#)⁷⁸].

BOSNIA AND HERZEGOVINA

Project title	Building democratic participation in the City of Mostar
Dates	February 2020 – December 2021
Budget	500,000 €
Funding	Norway under the Council of Europe Action Plan for Bosnia and Herzegovina 2018-2021 ⁷⁹
Objectives	Creating opportunities for citizens to engage in a deliberative process and increasing their contribution to local decision-making. In turn, this process will foster dialogue at local level and contribute to the revitalisation of democratic processes in the City of Mostar.
Main activities	<p>First meeting on the project with the newly elected Mayor and City Council (39 participants)</p> <p>Development of a tailored methodology for a deliberative process in the City of Mostar, including the dedicated website for the process www.mostargradimo.ba/en</p> <p>Two workshops for defining potential topics for deliberation with the civil society, academic community and Mostar City authorities</p> <p>Signing of the Memorandum of Co-operation with the City of Mostar, 9 July 2021</p> <p>Organisation of the first Citizens’ Assembly in the City of Mostar in July 2021, bringing together 48 randomly selected citizens of Mostar, who proposed 32 recommendations for local authorities on the topic of cleanliness and maintenance of public spaces</p> <p>Two series of capacity development activities for Mostar City Councillors and city officials in the areas of transparency, accountability, open government, public ethics, citizen participation, and roles and responsibilities of local councillors (37 participants). Six members of the Congress shared their expertise and were engaged in peer exchange within these activities.</p> <p>Two meetings of the Oversight team of the Citizens’ Assembly</p> <p>Congress delegation visit to Mostar, November 2021 (2 members of the Congress)</p>

⁷⁷ <https://rm.coe.int/16806cf43c>

⁷⁸ <https://rm.coe.int/16806cf43e>

⁷⁹ Projects in the Action Plan are to be funded from multiple sources. The Action Plan is available at <http://rm.coe.int/bih-action-plan-2018-2021-en/16808b7563>

Provision of audio/visual equipment for improved transparency of work of the City Council
 Regional workshop on improving the quality of municipal services (38 participants)
 Development of the Handbook for Open Local Government and Public Ethics for Bosnia and Herzegovina

Media and outreach activities:

Interviews and news articles on the deliberative process at local platform www.pogled.ba July – October 2021
 TV Show “Context” on the topic of deliberative democracy broadcasted on regional TV Channel “Al Jazeera Balkans”.

Publications and tools Rulebook of the Mostar Citizen’ Assembly [[English](#)⁸⁰ | [Bosnian](#)⁸¹]

REPUBLIC OF MOLDOVA

Project title Reinforcing the culture of dialogue and consultation of local authorities in the Republic of Moldova

Dates June 2019 – June 2021

Budget 175 000 €

Funding [Council of Europe Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova \(2017-2020\)](#)⁸²

Objectives Reinforcing dialogue and consultation between the local and central levels of government and strengthening the institutional position and organisational capacities of the CALM in areas such as policy dialogue, advocacy, good governance, and provision of quality services to members.

Main activities

Strategic Plan for 2021-2027 adopted by CALM on 10 June 2021 and developed with the support of the Congress.

Baseline Assessment of the institutional position of CALM developed with the support of the Congress and finalised in December 2020. Its findings and recommendations were the foundation of the strategic planning process.

Support to CALM with the review of the concept for local government reform, by providing expertise on the best practices and European standards in local self-government.

Expertise to the platform for dialogue, developed by CALM as a proposal for enhancing dialogue and consultation with the central authorities.

Online interactive workshops and peer exchange on advocacy and policy-influencing and ways to achieve the SDGs at local level for members of the CALM Executive Bureau, Administrative Council and Secretariat, peers from other European countries, with the participation of Gunn Marit Helgesen (Norway, EPP/CCE), Congress Rapporteur on the Republic of Moldova.

Draft Action Plan on Advocacy for Local Finances for effective contribution to discussions on the Draft Fiscal Policy for 2021, particularly on the capping of local taxes, developed by a working group of mayors with Congress support.

Publications and tools Infographics explaining the CALM’s processes in the areas of advocacy and public procurement.

⁸⁰ <https://mostargradimo.ba/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/28072021Rulebook-ENG-web-2774-2955-3924.1.pdf>

⁸¹ <https://mostargradimo.ba/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Rulebook-BHS-web-2771-1668-5060.1.pdf>

⁸² The Council of Europe Action Plan for the Republic of Moldova 2017-2020 was funded by 7 member States: Bulgaria, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Norway, Romania, Sweden and Switzerland. The Action Plan is available at: <https://rm.coe.int/16806cd3a5>

UKRAINE

Project title	Promoting local democracy in Ukraine ⁸³
Dates	July 2015 – December 2017 + January – February 2018
Budget	1 498 433 € (2015-2017) + 107 007 € (2018)
Funding	Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine 2015-2017 ⁸⁴
Objectives	<p>Supporting local elected representatives to strengthen their institutional and leadership capacities, encouraging them to be more responsive and accountable in the exercise of their powers and better involve citizens in their policies;</p> <p>Supporting the implementation of local self-government reform by strengthening the capacities of local elected representatives to provide better co-ordination, planning and management;</p> <p>Promoting active democratic citizenship and support the implementation of local democratic participatory processes, including the observation of local elections.</p>
Main activities	<p>Six "Mayors, leaders for change" workshops, involving over 130 Ukrainian mayors;</p> <p>Six "Councillors: everyday actors of local democracy" workshops, with over 200 participants in total;</p> <p>Workshop organised specifically for the municipal council of the city of Kyiv (50 participants);</p> <p>Three round tables organised in partnership with the Ukrainian delegation to the Congress and the AUC;</p> <p>Round table on good governance in metropolitan areas;</p> <p>Seven seminars for over 200 young local leaders;</p> <p>Three study visits organised for 50 young local leaders, at the occasion of the World Forum for Democracy;</p> <p>The first Forum for local democracy in Ukraine, with the participation of around 100 mayors, municipal councillors and young local leaders;</p> <p>Five municipalities selected to implement local initiatives for more transparent and participatory governance (involving financial support, input from specialist experts, exchanges between peers and a study visit by mayors during the 33rd session of the Congress).</p> <p>Discussion paper on gender equality in local political life in Ukraine;</p> <p>Meeting and debate with representatives of the Ukrainian Parliament on the law on the status of municipal councillors;</p> <p>Seminar for exchange of good practices following the implementation of initiatives supported by the Congress, in Kyiv, Ukraine (around 75 participants).</p> <p>External assessment of the results of the project "Promoting local democracy in Ukraine";</p> <p>Workshop on the challenges and opportunities for gender equality at the local level in Ukraine, jointly organised with the AUC.</p>
Publications and tools	<p>Metropolitan Governance in Europe and in Ukraine: Legitimacy, Ownership and Efficiency [English⁸⁵ Ukrainian⁸⁶];</p> <p>Study on the Ukrainian Law on the Status of Local Councillors [English⁸⁷ Ukrainian⁸⁸];</p>

⁸³ This project is a follow-up to activities implemented within the framework of the "Immediate measures package for Ukraine" in 2014 and the project entitled "Strengthening the capacity of local authorities in Ukraine" in 2015, funded by Denmark.

⁸⁴ <https://rm.coe.int/16802f600e>

⁸⁵ <https://rm.coe.int/metropolitan-governance-in-eur-and-ukr-eng/168078549e>

⁸⁶ <https://rm.coe.int/metropolitan-governance-ukr-ukr-web/1680785e45>

⁸⁷ <https://rm.coe.int/2018-01-24-study-law-on-local-councillors-eng/1680783ffd>

⁸⁸ <https://rm.coe.int/2018-01-25-study-law-on-local-councillors-ukr/1680784064>

Study on “Powers and Duties of Local Councillors in the Framework of Decentralisation of Power in Ukraine” [[English](#)⁸⁹];

Discussion paper on “Gender Equality in Local Political Life and the Gender Perspective in Local Policies in Ukraine” [[English](#)⁹⁰ | [Ukrainian](#)⁹¹];

UKRAINE

Project title	Strengthening democracy and building trust at local level in Ukraine ⁹²
Dates	July 2018 – September 2021 ⁹³
Budget	1 600 000 €
Funding	Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine 2018-2022 ⁹⁴
Objectives	<p>Implementing genuine decentralisation and local self-government reforms through regular and effective consultation mechanisms between local authorities, their associations, and the national authorities;</p> <p>Implementation by local elected representatives of ethical, innovative and inclusive policies and practices in their municipalities.</p>
Main activities	<p>Three meetings of the Community of practice on Local Democracy in Ukraine held since 2019 to reinforce the capacities and institutional position of Ukrainian local and regional authorities and their national associations, including the latest meeting held in October 2020 focused on local elections in Ukraine in the specific context of the COVID-19 pandemic.</p> <p>AUC Strategic plan finalised in early 2020, approved by the Board in the summer of 2020 and pending approval of the General Assembly in December 2020.</p> <p>A grant agreement signed in January 2020 to support the AUC’s analytical capacities, strengthen advocacy and communication, and mainstream gender equality in all its activities.</p> <p>Expert support to the AUC in improving the legislative framework for decentralisation and local self-government; namely draft laws of Ukraine “On the Capital of Ukraine – Hero City Kyiv” and “On Amendments to the Constitution of Ukraine”.</p> <p>Join agreements with 13 Ukrainian local authorities, signed in December 2019, to implement local initiatives on: [1] ethical, transparent and participatory decision-making; [2] engagement of under-represented groups; and [3] equal opportunities for women and men to participate in local political life.</p> <p>Two series of webinars to support the implementation of the initiatives and address challenges linked to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as to allow for peer-to peer exchange, in May and October 2020.</p> <p>A training on human rights and local democracy with 20 young people from the regions of Donetsk and Luhansk in Eastern Ukraine in January 2020 in Dnipro. Participants, students from vocational schools, learnt about good practices on youth participation at local level, developed short action plans for getting involved in decision-making in their communities, and exchanged with representatives of local authorities in Ukraine.</p> <p>Participation of a Congress representative in the third edition of the Ukrainian Women’s Congress (10-11 December 2019), an ongoing public platform which</p>

⁸⁹ <https://rm.coe.int/study-on-powers-and-duties-of-local-councillors-in-the-framework-of-de/168078fafa>

⁹⁰ <https://rm.coe.int/gender-equality-in-local-political-life-and-the-gender-perspective-in-/16807bebde>

⁹¹ <https://rm.coe.int/16808a2a51>

⁹² This project is based on the needs and recommendations voiced by relevant stakeholders and beneficiaries during the implementation of the project ‘Promoting local democracy in Ukraine’ (2015-2017) and builds upon the Congress co-operation activities carried out in Ukraine since 2014.

⁹³ A follow-up to this project under the framework of the Action Plan for Ukraine 2018-2021 (approved by the Committee of Ministers on 21 February 2018) was submitted for funding in November 2017.

⁹⁴ Projects in the Action Plan are to be funded from multiple sources. The Council of Europe Action Plan for Ukraine 2018-2022 is available at <https://rm.coe.int/council-of-europe-action-plan-for-ukraine-web/1680a0b0cc%20aine-2018-2021-couv-bat-a4-web/1680794dc5>

shapes the gender policy agenda for the Ukrainian Parliament, Government, civil society and media.

A guide for women and men in local politics on “Preventing and combatting sexism at the local level in Ukraine” to equip local politicians with concrete measures for recognising and fighting sexist behaviour at local level and ensuring that women play an active and meaningful role in the decision-making process.

e-course “Gender Mainstreaming at Local Level in Ukraine” developed in co-operation with NALAS and piloted with several Ukrainian local authorities which helped tailor the course to local needs.

Update of the e-course on Gender Mainstreaming at Local Level in Ukraine with a module on combatting sexism at the local level.

More than 80 Ukrainian municipalities, together with the AUC, engaged towards mainstreaming gender equality in local policies and within the functioning of local administrations by committing to the principles of the European Charter for Equality of Women and Men in Local Life.

Two webinars on open government to support to Ukrainian municipalities in their application to the OGP Local Programme – a selective global partnership of local governments and civil society organisations –, resulting in three successful candidates out of 11 applications.

Three Ukrainian municipalities (Khmelnitsky, Ternopil and Vinnytsya) new members of the Open Government Partnership (OGP) Local programme positively contribute to the transformation of local governments by strengthening transparency, citizen participation, accountability and public ethics, as well as streamlining the implementation of e-government tools.

Platform for National – Local Consultation on Open Government in Ukraine established by the Secretariat of the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine and the AUC as a follow-up to the call by the AUC for effective inclusion of local and regional authorities in the design and implementation of the National OGP Action Plan.

Publications and tools

Study on “Voting Rights of Internally Displaced Persons at Local Level in Ukraine” [[English](#)⁹⁵] | [[Ukrainian](#)⁹⁶];

Guide on Preventing and combatting sexism at local level in Ukraine [[English](#)⁹⁷ | [Ukrainian](#)⁹⁸]

UKRAINE

Project title	Strengthening the capacity of local authorities in Ukraine ⁹⁹
<i>Congress Component</i>	<i>Congress post-monitoring dialogue and training of young political leaders</i>
Dates	April 2014 – May 2015
Budget	600 000 € (of which 120 000 € for the Congress component)
Funding	Government of Denmark
Objectives	Improving the quality of local self-governance; Developing national legal framework in line with the principles of the European Charter for Local self-government and standards on local democracy
Main activities	Three regional seminars in Chernihiv, Odessa or Dnipro for around 75 young local

⁹⁵ <https://rm.coe.int/voting-rights-of-idps-at-local-level-in-ukraine-strengthening-democrac/1680933f7e>

⁹⁶ <https://rm.coe.int/ukr-voting-rights-of-idps-at-local-level-in-ukraine-strengthening-demo/1680933f7f>

⁹⁷ <http://rm.coe.int/preventing-and-combatting-sexism-at-the-local-level-in-ukraine-eng-web/16809ee57f>

⁹⁸ <https://rm.coe.int/preventing-and-combatting-sexism-at-the-local-level-in-ukraine-ukr-web/16809ee580>

⁹⁹ Programme jointly implemented with the Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform, a unit of the Directorate General of Democracy of the Council of Europe Secretariat.

leaders to exchange on the European standards and of the principles of local democracy;

Two thematic round tables, in Kyiv, on constitutional revision and transfer of competencies and on constitutional reform and the financial independence of local authorities, organised with the relevant ministry around the main Congress recommendations.

UKRAINE

Project title	Immediate Measures Package for Ukraine
<i>Congress Component</i>	<i>Local Democracy</i>
Dates	April 2014 – December 2014
Budget	2 500 000 € (of which 295 288 € for the Congress component)
Funding	Pool of donors of the Immediate Measures Package for Ukraine
Objectives	Implementating democratic reforms in line with the principles and standards of local and regional democracy; Improving local political governance.
Main activities	Observation of the pre-term municipal elections on 25 May 2014; High level visit to Kyiv and Odessa; A thematic roundtable as part of the Congress post-monitoring dialogue with Ukrainian national authorities; 1 regional seminar for around 25 young local leaders on European standards of local and regional democracy; A study visit for 20 young local leaders in Strasbourg, in parallel to the 2014 World Forum for democracy; A workshop “Mayors, leaders for change”, for 30 mayors who have been newly elected in May 2014.

KOSOVO*

Project title	Promoting local democracy in Kosovo*
Dates	July 2020 – December 2021
Budget	400 000 €
Funding	Pool of donors - Overview of co-operation activities in Kosovo* (2019) ¹⁰⁰
Objectives	Improving local self-government and the quality of local democracy by fostering multilevel dialogue; Strengthening the capacities of local authorities on political integrity, public ethics and open government principles.
Activities	A study on the alignment of the Kosovo* local self-government framework with the European local democracy standards, including the principles enshrined in the European Charter of Local Self-Government with consultation meetings with local authorities and the Association of Kosovo Municipalities (AKM), as well as representatives from the Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Local Government Administration, the Parliament, the Ombudsperson and others.

¹⁰⁰ <https://rm.coe.int/1680933ba2>

An Action Plan for the implementation of the study recommendations prepared in consultation with local and central authorities, clearly identifying the challenges, concrete activities, timeline and responsible stakeholders, and proposing more than 30 concrete activities to local and central authorities, thus providing a basis for future reform work.

Two workshops on the European Charter of Local Self-Government for Municipal European Integration Officers and Legal Affairs Officers.

Three trainings for Chairs of Municipal Assemblies, European Integration Officers and Procurement Officers respectively on political integrity, ethics, open government principles and gender equality in local governance.

A Training Module on Public Ethics and Integrity, a Module on Open Local Government and accompanying Trainer's Manuals were developed for onboarding trainings and capacity development of local elected representatives, to be implemented by the AKM Training Centre to ensure sustainability of knowledge sharing.

Keynote speech by Jelena Drenjanin, Chair of the Congress Governance Committee, on Congress recommendations on fighting sexism at the FemArt Festival, one of the largest women's rights festivals in the region, organised to empower women and girls and to promote equal participation in all spheres of life.

Publications and tools

Handbook on Open Local Government and Public Ethics in Kosovo* [[English](#)¹⁰¹ | [Albanian](#)¹⁰² | [Serbian](#)¹⁰³]

Guide on Preventing and Combatting Sexism in Local Politics in Kosovo* [[English](#)¹⁰⁴ | [Albanian](#)¹⁰⁵ | [Serbian](#)¹⁰⁶]

II. Multilateral projects implemented in the framework of specific partnerships

Project title	Thematic programme “Strengthening institutional frameworks for local governance” ¹⁰⁷
Dates	January 2015 – December 2017
Budget	1 352 089 €
Funding	European Union and Council of Europe under the Partnership for good governance between the European Union and the Council of Europe for Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Republic of Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus (2015-2017) ¹⁰⁸
Objectives	Supporting the ongoing process of local self-government reform in the beneficiary countries; Promoting the adoption of ethical standards and practices by local elected representatives in the region; Supporting the alignment of local administrations' financial and human resources management with European standards, led in co-operation with the Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform.
Main activities	Three meetings of the Steering Committee of the thematic programme; Introductory conference in Tbilisi, Georgia, with around 100 participants from the 6 Eastern Partnership countries (local elected representatives, members of the

¹⁰¹ <https://rm.coe.int/handbook-ogpe-kos-en/1680a4ef84>

¹⁰² <https://rm.coe.int/handbook-ogpe-kos-sqi/1680a4ef85>

¹⁰³ <https://rm.coe.int/handbook-ogpe-kos-srp/1680a4ef86>

¹⁰⁴ <https://rm.coe.int/guide-on-combatting-sexism-kos-en/1680a4ef81>

¹⁰⁵ <https://rm.coe.int/guide-on-combatting-sexism-kos-alb-17-12/1680a4ef82>

¹⁰⁶ <https://rm.coe.int/guide-on-combatting-sexism-kos-srb/1680a4ef83>

¹⁰⁷ Thematic programme jointly implemented with the Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform, a unit of the Directorate General of Democracy of the Council of Europe Secretariat.

¹⁰⁸ <https://www.coe.int/en/web/congress/european-union-council-of-europe-partnership-for-good-governance>

Congress, experts, representatives of central authorities, representatives of national associations of local and regional authorities and civil society);

Study on the roles and responsibilities of mayors and local councillors in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus;

Seven national “Mayors, Leaders for change” workshops for 14 Armenian, 9 Georgian, 20 Moldovan and 19 Ukrainian mayors, on defining and leading successful public policies based on ethical values and standards;

Regional seminar on "Local public ethics: from vision to action", Kyiv, Ukraine, with around 80 participants (local elected representatives, members of the Congress, experts, representatives of central authorities, representatives of national associations of local and regional authorities and civil society);

Regional seminar on "Citizen participation: an essential tool in local democracy", Chisinau, Republic of Moldova, with around 50 participants (local elected representatives, members of the Congress, experts, representatives of central authorities, representatives of national associations of local and regional authorities and civil society);

Five meetings of the Community of practice on local democracy in the Eastern Partnership countries in Strasbourg, France, Kyiv, Ukraine, and Tbilisi, Georgia;

Twelve municipalities (in Armenia, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine) selected (benefiting from support from their peers and input from experts) to implement local initiatives for more efficient and accountable governance;

Conference on local governance in Georgia and the effectiveness of the institutionalised mechanisms for citizen participation, for around 65 participants (representatives of central and local authorities, officials, international organisations, NALAG, members of the Congress and experts);

Study on institutionalised citizen participation: assessment of existing mechanisms in Georgia, developed on the basis of working groups with experts and providing recommendations to amend the Code of Local Self-Government in Georgia;

Signature of a Memorandum of Understanding between NALAG, CALM and AUC;

Further exchanges between mayors and their respective national associations were organised during the 5th Open Government Summit in Tbilisi, Georgia from 16 to 19 July 2018;

A workshop ‘Open Governance at Local Level: Cities Take Action’ was organised as a side event to the OGP Summit on 17 July 2018, allowing for the exchange of practices and experiences between peers from Georgia and Ukraine;

Meeting and peer reviews on “Sharing the vision: local democracy and ethical governance in practice” for 3 Moldovan mayors implementing local initiatives and 7 mayors from the municipalities of the Stefan Voda district;

Handbook on ‘Transparency and citizen participation in Ukraine’ is used as a basis for the development of new activities within the Congress project ‘Strengthening democracy and building trust at local level in Ukraine’, the e-learning tool and training curricula for local councillors;

Management of change: a tool guide for local and regional authorities available in English, Armenian, Georgian, Romanian and Ukrainian;

Country-specific Handbooks on transparency and citizen participation for local and regional representatives in Armenia, Georgia, Republic of Moldova and Ukraine (available in English and in their respective national languages);

Meeting on “Local initiatives: Managing and communicating the change”, Tbilisi, Georgia, with around 30 participants (mayors and project co-ordinators for the local initiatives on ethical governance and transparency, representatives of national associations of local and regional authorities, and experts);

Regional conference for exchange of good practices following the implementation of initiatives supported by the Congress, Tbilisi, Georgia, with around 100 participants (local elected representatives, experts, representatives of central authorities, representatives of national associations of local and regional authorities and civil society).

Publications and tools *Roles and responsibilities of mayors and local councillors in Armenia, Azerbaijan,*

Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus [[English](#)¹⁰⁹ | [Russian](#)¹¹⁰];
Institutionalised citizen participation: assessment of existing mechanisms - Georgia [[English](#)¹¹¹ | [Georgian](#)¹¹²];
Management of Change: A tool guide for local and regional authorities [[English](#)¹¹³ | [Armenian](#)¹¹⁴ | [Georgian](#)¹¹⁵ | [Romanian](#)¹¹⁶ | [Ukrainian](#)¹¹⁷];
Handbook on Transparency and Citizen Participation in Armenia [[English](#)¹¹⁸ | [Armenian](#)¹¹⁹];
Handbook on Transparency and Citizen Participation in Georgia [[English](#)¹²⁰ | [Georgian](#)¹²¹];
Handbook on Transparency and Citizen Participation in the Republic of Moldova [[English](#)¹²² | [Romanian](#)¹²³];
Handbook on Transparency and Citizen Participation in Ukraine [[English](#)¹²⁴ | [Ukrainian](#)¹²⁵].

III. Projects implemented in the framework of the Council of Europe's policy towards neighbouring regions

A. Completed projects

MOROCCO

Project title	Strengthening democratic governance at local and regional level in Morocco
Dates	April 2019 – December 2021
Budget	€ 294 000 (funding secured until 31 December 2021)
Funding	Neighbourhood Partnership with Morocco 2018-2021 ¹²⁶
Objectives	<p>Strengthening the legal framework of Morocco through the implementation of the law on regionalisation and its rightful application by the sub-national authorities;</p> <p>Helping the national associations of local and regional authorities to become key players in facilitating decentralised co-operation and dialogue between the central, regional and local levels of government;</p> <p>Enhancing the capacities of elected representatives and administration staff to assume their new competences and providing sustained training to support their continuous learning.</p>
Main activities	Granting of the status of “Partner for local democracy” to the Kingdom of Morocco by the Congress on 2 April 2019. Participation of the delegation of Moroccan

¹⁰⁹ <https://rm.coe.int/168071b235>

¹¹⁰ <https://rm.coe.int/168071b345>

¹¹¹ <https://rm.coe.int/geo-institutionalised-citizen-participation-eng/1680784817>

¹¹² <https://rm.coe.int/geo-institutionalised-citizen-participation-kat/1680784818>

¹¹³ <https://rm.coe.int/tool-guide-management-of-change-eng-web-version/16807848d6>

¹¹⁴ <https://rm.coe.int/management-of-change-hye-web/1680786ae4>

¹¹⁵ <https://rm.coe.int/management-of-change-kat-web/1680785c77>

¹¹⁶ <https://rm.coe.int/management-of-change-ron-web/1680786ac6>

¹¹⁷ <https://rm.coe.int/management-of-change-ukr-web/16807850ef>

¹¹⁸ <https://rm.coe.int/handbook-arm-eng/168078a58c>

¹¹⁹ <https://rm.coe.int/handbook-armenia-hye/168078bbe6>

¹²⁰ <https://rm.coe.int/handbook-georgia-eng/1680786b7d>

¹²¹ <https://rm.coe.int/handbook-georgia-kat/1680793678>

¹²² <https://rm.coe.int/handbook-moldova-eng/168078406b>

¹²³ <https://rm.coe.int/handbook-moldova-ron/1680788ff5>

¹²⁴ <https://rm.coe.int/handbook-ukraine-eng/168078406c>

¹²⁵ <https://rm.coe.int/handbook-ukraine-ukr/168078541c>

¹²⁶ The Neighbourhood Partnership with Morocco 2018-2021 document available at: <https://rm.coe.int/neighbourhood-partnership-2018-2021-with-morocco/168090801d>

representatives in the 36th Congress Session;
 Meeting of the Congress President and Vice-Presidents with a Moroccan delegation composed of representative of the DGCL (General Directorate of Local Authorities) of the Moroccan Ministry of the Interior), the Moroccan delegation to the Congress (members of ARM, AMPCC and AMPPP) as well as the Consul General and Vice-Consul of Morocco;
 Contribution to the National Seminar on Advanced Regionalisation in Agadir, Morocco, on 20 December 2019;
 Creation of the websites of two associations (AMPCPP and ARM) and upgrading of the website for AMPCC;
 Support for the associations' members trainings (consultants framework contract);
 Congress guidelines and publications on public ethics and corruption prevention, as well as recommendations on consultation, were made accessible to local elected representatives through translation into Arabic.
 Support in applying the principle of Public Ethics in the political life at the local and regional levels;
 Expert support for the revision of the legislative framework, in particular for provinces and prefectures;
 Participation of the secretaries of the three national associations of territorial elected representatives in the webinar "The ELDW in the digital age";
 Webinar on Public Ethics and prevention corruption;
 Webinar on consultation mechanisms between local authorities and central government;
 Legislative support on participatory democracy, local finances and status of elected representatives;
 Expert and peer support to newly elected women, following local, provincial and regional elections in September 2021

MOROCCO

Project title	Strengthening local and regional democracy in Morocco
Dates	January 2016 – December 2017 ¹²⁷
Budget	196 770 €
Funding	Neighbourhood Partnership with Morocco 2015-2017 ¹²⁸
Objectives	<p>To strengthen the implementation of local and regional democracy in Morocco by enhancing the capacities of local elected representatives and their associations;</p> <p>To promote and raise awareness of European standards of local and regional democracy.</p> <p>To enhance 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;</p> <p>To bring legislative assistance and expertise in drafting and implementing legislation concerning decentralisation and local and regional governance; and assisting with the electoral process and, where applicable, observing local and regional elections;</p> <p>To raise awareness and train local and regional elected representatives and their officials, with a particular focus on the role of women and young local leaders;</p> <p>To strengthen the role and capacities of associations of local and regional authorities (especially in terms of leadership);</p> <p>To enhance the capacities of local and regional associations to defend their</p>

¹²⁸ Funded by Norway, Estonia, France, Italy, Liechtenstein, Malta, Monaco and Portugal. The document is available at <https://rm.coe.int/16802f7c60>

interests, particularly in the regionalisation process;

To support the development of participatory democracy, with a particular focus on the role of young people, women and civil society.

Main activities

Study visit during the 32nd session of the Congress (Strasbourg, 27 to 30 March 2017);

Study on the role of national associations of local and regional authorities in the national consultation mechanisms in Europe, with a view to the development of such a mechanism in Morocco and Tunisia;

Study on the powers and responsibilities of local and regional authorities in Morocco and their training resources, with a view to the setting up of a training mechanism for local and regional elected representatives (future project);

Study on the modalities of the organisation of study visits for local and regional elected representatives;

Arrangements between the Regions of Morocco (ARM) and Région Grand Est for the organisation of a study visit of Moroccan elected representatives and administrators;

International conference “Building an inclusive community: integrating migrants, fighting violent extremism, involving citizens”, organised with the city of Rabat (Rabat, 20 - 22 November 2017);

Parliamentary colloquy “Regionalisation in Morocco: opportunities and challenges for consolidating decentralised governance”, organised with the Moroccan Parliament (Rabat, 28 - 29 November 2017);

Meeting with a Moroccan delegation, composed of representatives of the Moroccan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, of the DGCL (General Directorate of Local Authorities), of the Moroccan Ministry of the Interior, as well as the Consul General and Vice-Consul of Morocco. In 2018, Morocco submitted request for the Partner for Local Democracy status with the Congress, approved by the Bureau on 18 June 2018 for adoption by the Congress.

TUNISIA

Project title

Promoting local governance in Tunisia

Dates

April 2019 – December 2021

Budget

€346 096 (secured funding until December 2021)

Funding

Multiple donors funding the Council of Europe [Neighbourhood Partnership with Tunisia 2018-2021](#)¹²⁹

Objectives

To support the development of the legal and electoral frameworks allowing for the implementation of decentralisation;

To strengthen capacities of the national association of local and regional authorities to ensure its regular participation in framing national policies within a sustainable institutional framework'

To reinforce knowledge and leadership capacities of elected representatives while also enhancing confidence and trust in local authorities.

Main activities

Roundtable “Café of women elected representatives” organised during the Tunis Forum on Gender Equality on 24 April 2019 allowing for the exchange of good practices between local elected women from both sides of the Mediterranean.

Participation of the Congress Vice-President in a Seminar on the role of the High Instance of Local Finances in the decentralisation process in Tunisia.

Participation of the Congress Vice-President in the second General Assembly of the

¹²⁹ The Neighbourhood Partnership with Tunisia 2018-2021 document available at: <https://rm.coe.int/prems-119218-gbr-1501-neighbourhood-partnership-with-tunisia-2018-2021/16808e4515>

FNVT, 22 November 2019.

Grant to the FNVT for the recruitment of two staff members in charge of communication, advocacy and relations with the members.

Study on the internal organisation and functioning of associations of local authorities.

Finalisation of a training module on the prevention of conflict at the local level.

Expert support to the media coverage of the General Assembly of the FNCT.

Awareness-raising and information of the members of the FNCT during the General Assembly on 26 September 2020 in Hammamet, including dissemination of the “public ethics collection” of the Congress.

Congress guidelines and publications on public ethics and corruption prevention, as well as recommendations on consultation, were made accessible to local elected representatives through translation into Arabic.

Expert support to reinforce the internal capacities of the FNCT through detailed analysis of its current political and administrative organisation with recommendations

Grant to the FNCT for the recruitment of three staff members and creation of a Department on Communication, Advocacy and Relations with members

Webinar on the promotion of ethics and the fight against corruption and the promotion of ethics at the local level, 16 October 2020.

Recruitment of 2 long-term experts to support the drafting and implementation of the advocacy and communication strategy of the Federation.

Webinar on consultation mechanisms between local authorities and central government, 24 November 2020, expert study on the establishment of consultation in Tunisia, based on a European benchmark; drafting and agreement on a memorandum on consultation mechanisms

Support to the implementation of a national evaluation of the decentralisation process from the viewpoint of municipalities; and dissemination of its outcomes through a report with recommendations, December 2020 – May 2021

Expert support to the revision of the Code of local finances in co-operation with the Higher Authority on Local Finances, November – December 2021

Webinar on the role of local authorities in fighting climate change, April 2021

Training on internal control within municipalities, July 2021

TUNISIA

Project title	Promoting local and regional democracy in Tunisia
Dates	January 2016 – December 2017 ¹³⁰
Budget	99 358 €
Funding	Neighbourhood Partnership with Tunisia 2015-2017 ¹³¹
Objectives	<p>To enhance political dialogue between European elected representatives and their Tunisian counterparts and increase decentralised co-operation between local and regional authorities on the two sides of the Mediterranean;</p> <p>To provide legislative assistance and expertise in drafting and implementing legislation concerning decentralisation and local and regional governance; and assisting with the electoral process and, where applicable, observing local and regional elections;</p> <p>To Raise awareness and train local and regional elected representatives and their officials, with a particular focus on the role of women and young local leaders;</p> <p>To strengthen the role and capacities of associations of local and regional authorities (especially in terms of leadership);</p> <p>To support the development of participatory democracy, with a particular focus on</p>

¹³¹ Funded by Norway, Estonia, France, Italy, Monaco and Portugal. The document is available at <https://rm.coe.int/16802f7dfa>

the role of young people, women and civil society.

Main activities

Revision of the Charter of the National Federation of Tunisian Towns and preparation of a manual of internal procedures and rules (in progress);

Study visit during the 32nd session of the Congress (Strasbourg, 27-30 March 2017);

Study on the role of national associations of local and regional authorities in national consultation mechanisms in Europe, with a view to the development of such a mechanism in Morocco and Tunisia;

International conference on "Women in local politics" (Tunis, 26-27 September 2017) intended to promote the exchange of knowledge and better practices regarding the role of women in politics at local level and the building of their capacities, with a view to the next local elections;

Legislative assistance towards the draft Code of local authorities submitted to the Assembly of the Representatives of the People and a workshop organised with the participation of Tunisian and Congress experts to exchange on and debate the draft code, as well as decentralisation;

Expert support to the drafting of eight implementation decrees of the Code of Local authorities (in progress);

Training of Trainers of the Training and Support Centre for Decentralisation in conflict management and political mediation (Tunis, 16-18 November 2017);

Training for the staff of the National Federation of Tunisian Towns (FNVT) in project management (Tunis, November 2017).

Drafting of a training module on prevention and management of conflict at municipal level (January-February 2018);

Activities in Tunisia not funded by the voluntary contribution

Mission of electoral assessment of the 6 May 2018 municipal elections (Tunisia, 4-6 May 2018);

Participation in Franco-Tunisian local elected representatives meetings organised by the Institut Français and the National Federation of Tunisian Towns (FNVT) (Tunis, 20-21 October 2018);

Participation in the General Assembly of the National Federation of Tunisian Towns (FNVT) (Mahdia, 8 December 2018).