

THE CONGRESS OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES

Resolution 493 (2023)^{1 2} Delivering on the Reykjavik Summit: revised Congress priorities, working procedures and structures

1. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe (“the Congress”) represents 130 000 local and regional communities and their elected officials in the Council of Europe’s member States, ensuring their voices and concerns are reflected in the Organisation’s activities aimed at promoting and defending democracy, the rule of law and human rights at all levels.

2. At the beginning of each new mandate, the Congress draws up an overall framework for its future work and activities, providing a direction and defining priority areas to fulfil its core missions. This reflection is based on consultation of its members and of the national and European associations of local and regional authorities.

3. The Congress determines the main issues to be addressed and opportunities to be explored and defines the strategic orientations of its work to address the evolving problems and challenges facing local and regional authorities.

4. It also takes on board the priorities of the Secretary General and the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe – including the priorities of its rotating presidency and those of its member States – and refers to the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as part of the wider Council of Europe contribution to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals.

5. When adopting its priorities for 2021-2026 in March 2021, the Congress confirmed, as its core missions, the monitoring of local and regional democracy, the observation of local and regional elections, substantial thematic contributions to address current, future and persistent challenges, and the implementation of co-operation programmes in specific member States.

6. The Congress welcomes the commitment shown in favour of local and regional democracy and the role of local and regional elected representatives in defending democracy, human rights and the rule of law within their communities by the Heads of State and Government at the 4th Summit of the Council of Europe held in Reykjavik on 16 and 17 May 2023.

7. In order to align its priorities with the decisions of the 4th Summit, the Congress considers it necessary to adopt revised priorities for the period from October 2023 until the end of the current mandate in 2026.

8. To better respond to the challenges identified by the summit, the Congress will strengthen its monitoring of local and regional democracy and respect of the rule of law, as an important element of an early warning system to signal possible democratic erosion in member States.

9. The Congress will implement a new strategy for the protection of human rights at local and regional levels and strengthen its contribution to the execution of judgments of the European Court of Human Rights relating to the activities of local and regional authorities.

10. The Congress will contribute to reinforcing climate and environmental action by local and regional authorities and to strengthening the recognition of a safe environment as a fundamental right.

11. Regarding its thematic priorities, the Congress will focus on:

- a. fostering democracy;
- b. promoting and protecting human rights;
- c. preparing and effectively responding to crises;
- d. reducing inequalities in society;
- e. taking action on environmental issues;
- f. supporting the digital revolution.

12. The Congress adopts the revised priorities for 2023-2026, as appended, which will be implemented through the Congress’s statutory meetings, the working programmes of its chambers and committees as well as its co-operation activities under the supervision of its Bureau.

13. In this respect and in order to better meet these objectives, the Congress adopts new terms of reference for its three committees, as appended, and renames them accordingly:

a. the Committee on the Monitoring of the Implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government becomes the Committee on the Monitoring of the Implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and on the Respect of Human Rights and the Rule of Law at Local and Regional Levels (“Monitoring Committee”). In particular:

i. the committee will be the legal arm of the Congress in charge of promoting human rights and the rule of law at local and regional levels and protecting local and regional democracy through the monitoring of the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the observation of elections;

ii. the committee will monitor the situation of local and regional democracy in all member States, ensure the effective implementation of the principles of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (ETS No. 122) and its Additional Protocol on the right to participate in the affairs of a local authority (CETS No. 207) and prepare reports and recommendations following the observation of local and regional elections;

1. Debated and adopted by the Congress during the 45th Session on 24 October 2023 (see document [CG\(2023\)45-12](#)), co-rapporteurs: Bernd VOEHRINGER, Germany (L, EPP/CCE), and Harald SONDEREGGER, Austria (R, EPP/CCE).

2. Due to their size, the appendices to this Resolution are not reproduced here. They are available online (see [Resolution 493 \(2023\)](#)).

- iii. it may provide support to local and regional authorities in their efforts to implement judgments of the European Court of Human Rights and comply with the European Convention on Human Rights (ETS No. 5), including through capacity-building and awareness-raising activities;
 - iv. a methodology on how to best include monitoring of human rights in the framework of the regular monitoring procedure will be developed in co-operation with experts and academics;
 - v. furthermore, the committee will contribute to upholding the rule of law at the subnational level.
- b. the Committee on Governance becomes the Committee on Governance, Civic Engagement and the Environment (“Governance Committee”). In particular:
- i. the committee will consider issues relating to governance and the functioning of local and regional authorities, such as citizen participation, especially among young people, at local and regional levels as well as issues relating to the protection of the environment to counter the harmful effects of the triple planetary crisis of pollution, climate change and loss of biodiversity, considering that human rights and the environment are interlinked and that a clean, healthy and sustainable environment is essential to the full enjoyment of human rights;
 - ii. it will also consider issues relating to culture and cultural heritage and deal with the educational, cultural and ethical challenges raised notably by diversity, seeking to identify suitable policy responses at local and regional levels.
- c. the Current Affairs Committee becomes the Committee on Social Inclusion and Human Dignity (“Social Inclusion Committee”). In particular:
- i. the committee will consider the role of local and regional authorities in promoting social cohesion and inclusion, in combating discrimination and violence against women and vulnerable groups, in supporting youth and youth policies and in addressing radicalisation and societal polarisation, with a view to safeguarding fundamental rights at subnational level and to ensuring equality;
 - ii. it will also identify emerging challenges at the subnational level with a potential impact on human rights or local and regional democracy, including media freedom, access to information, social care, migration, human trafficking, digitalisation and the development of new technologies such as artificial intelligence;
 - iii. the committee’s work will also focus on topical issues, developments and emergencies, as well as crises affecting local and regional authorities in Council of Europe member States, with a view to recommending concrete responses.
14. Under the guidance of their respective chairs, who co-ordinate the work of the committees and provide political input, the work of each committee will focus on promoting and defending local and regional democracy, within the framework of their specific terms of reference. This work will take into account a human rights perspective that will

be developed through the work of a standing rapporteur on human rights and that will be based on the values of the Council of Europe and the rights guaranteed in particular by the European Convention on Human Rights, the European Social Charter (revised) (ETS No. 163) and any other relevant Council of Europe standards. The work will also support the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its relevant Sustainable Development Goals. In accordance with their respective terms of reference, the three committees will be entitled to work on any matter of current affairs.

15. The Congress adopts the Congress Human Rights Strategy, as appended. In line with this strategy, human rights will be mainstreamed and proactively addressed by all Congress bodies. The Congress Bureau will appoint a standing rapporteur on human rights and two deputy standing rapporteurs on human rights. The standing rapporteur and the two deputies must stem from the three committees, one from each committee, in order to facilitate the mainstreaming of human rights throughout the Congress’s work. They will work in a co-ordinated manner based on the new human rights strategy. In particular:

- a. the current position of “spokesperson” on human rights shall be replaced by the new position of standing rapporteur (and two deputies); with the political impetus given by the Reykjavik Summit to the localisation of human rights, the creation of a new human rights portfolio is needed;
- b. unlike a spokesperson dealing with one topic, the standing rapporteur shall have a cross-cutting role when it comes to human rights. The standing rapporteur shall also report back directly to the Bureau;
- c. the standing rapporteur shall facilitate the work on human rights in the committees, lead study visits, represent the Congress at external events related to human rights, make declarations when needed and work with other Council of Europe entities on their portfolios;
- d. the standing rapporteur will become the natural figurehead on human rights and make the work of the Congress on this pillar of the Council of Europe more visible.

16. With these revised priorities, the Congress will continue to transmit the work and values of the Council of Europe as closely as possible to its citizens. It will actively implement the decisions of the summit within the framework of its competences in a complementary manner with the other bodies of the Council of Europe and in close co-operation with its institutional partners at local, regional and European levels.

17. A work plan outlining how these revised priorities are to be implemented will be produced at the beginning of 2024 after the budget negotiations and Council of Europe re-organisation have been finalised and announced.

18. The new committee structures and the posts of standing rapporteur on human rights and two deputies will be established after the adoption by the Congress of the necessary amendments to its Rules and Procedures at its 46th Session in March 2024.