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Congress Activity report

(end November 2016 to end March 2017)

**Communication by the Congress Secretary General
at the 1284th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies**

on 19 April 2017

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Communication by the Secretary General of the Congress

1284th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies - 19 April 2017

In addition to the regular exchanges of views the Deputies hold with the President of the Congress it is my duty and pleasure to inform the Ministers' Deputies twice a year about the results of the Congress Session – this time the one held in March -, about the on-going work and about the working conditions in the Congress.

The activity report, prepared to accompany the oral communication and available on the Congress website, covers the last five months since the end of November 2016. It shows that beyond of the sessions, much of the work is being done in field missions and cooperation programmes, in the committees, in the co-ordination with the intergovernmental sector and with our external partners. The concrete results of all this work will surface at a later stage.

32nd Session (27-30 March 2017)

The overarching topic for the two Sessions in 2017 is “Decentralised policies for the successful integration of migrants”

A compendium of texts adopted during the 32nd Session in March – Recommendations and Resolutions - has been sent as usual to the Committee of Ministers. Informative and relevant additional substance can be found also in the explanatory memoranda appended to the adopted texts.

Ministers from Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Malta, Portugal and Cyprus took part in the Session. Their presence shows the relevance of the political dialogue to give concrete follow-up to the Congress recommendations in reforms undertaken by many member states. On behalf of the Congress I would like to thank the Ambassadors of these member States for their support in organising these visits and exchanges of views with Congress members.

The list of the 42 youth delegates who took part in the Session is also appended to the report. They were coming from 42 member States. During the year, they will work on concrete projects to be presented at the October Session. Among others, the youth delegates will present the Congress toolkit against radicalisation to their municipal councils in 42 cities. They will also propose interreligious / intercultural projects to these councils and the Congress will facilitate their contact with the mayors.

The topics of the reports debated during the Session are listed in the activity report. Major themes discussed included:

Migration and integration

Three debates took place:

- in the Plenary: The role of local authorities facing migration
- in the Chamber of Regions: “Border regions facing migration flows”
- in the Chamber of Local Authorities: “Reception of unaccompanied child migrants in European cities”

The main message resulting from these debates is that member state governments should include Local and Regional Authorities as strategic partners to address the challenges and solve the problems arising from receiving, transiting and integrating migrants and refugees.

Local and Regional Authorities have the knowledge and also the access to civil society, which are also indispensable in receiving and integrating migrants at local level

Problems and failure with local populations arise mostly when the municipalities and regions are not involved in a timely and meaningful manner.

Recurring issues from monitoring an election observation

Since 2010/2011 monitoring of the Charter of Local and Regional Self Government is a regular assessment of the situation of local democracy in all 47 member states. This regular monitoring of local and regional democracy and the observing of local and regional have enabled the Congress to identify trends which concern several countries or even the whole continent.

During the March Session, Congress members discussed and approved a report based on the findings and the recommendations adopted by the Congress on monitoring and observation activities in the period 2010 – 2016. Globally, the issues found now as being recurrent for the monitoring activities, are more or less the same as the ones which were presented in the previous period 2010 - 2013.

Provisions of the Charter for which national (and sometimes regional, in federal countries) authorities have difficulties to apply in a proper way include:

- Inadequacy of financial resources for local and regional authorities (Art. 9);
- restricted definition, allocation and exercise of local competences (Art. 3 and 4); and
- lack of consultation by central government before enacting territorial reforms, before changing the attribution of competences or before adopting other legislation which has an impact on local authorities, (Art. 4);

In addition to these “usual suspects” the Congress assessment showed two new issues:

- The first is the use of languages in local communities. The Congress decided to prepare a report on this issue which is not only a legal but mainly a matter of the actual functioning and the interaction of local authorities with their residents in multi-lingual municipalities and / or regions. This report is foreseen for 2018. In October 2017, the Session will also debate a report on 25 years of European Charter of Regional and Minority Languages.
- The second new recurring issue concerns the absence of direct applicability of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in domestic legal systems. It seems crucial to the Congress to remind states that ratifying a treaty means committing oneself to comply with its provisions beyond the act of committing. This is the basis of international law and from this point of view the recurring issues exercise provided by the Congress is very relevant.

The Congress will come back to the Committee of Ministers to hold reflections on how to address all these recurring issues which are indeed challenges for democracy in European societies and in member states.

Local democracy is never granted. Its achievements have to be defended on a daily basis. Member states are confronted with serious challenges such as corruption, territorial reforms and reshuffling of competences. The Congress is convinced that the principle of subsidiarity is the proper guideline to address these challenges. And with its work the Congress does contribute to addressing these challenges in the institutional framework of the Council of Europe and within member states.

Application of the ECLSG in member states

The report adopted during the Session states as main finding that the ECLSG is generally respected in the member States. Problems occur mostly in countries where also human rights are not fully granted and/or respected. This shows once more the inter-dependence of Human Rights, Democracy and Rule of law. The Congress will continue to address this issue in its contacts with national governments.

Local democracy in Turkey

Based on two fact finding visits and on two substantial debates in October 2016 and March 2017, the Congress adopted a report with a recommendation and resolution on the situation of mayors and councillors in Turkey, and, in particular, on the detention of elected mayors and their replacement by mayors appointed by the central authorities (co-rapporteurs Anders Knape (Sweden, EPP/CCE) and Leen Verbeek (Netherlands, SOC)).

The major conclusions of the adopted report are detailed in the activity report under III.B.

The Congress also asks the Committee of Ministers to invite the Turkish authorities to take appropriate measures to ensure that Congress members and Turkish members of the Group of Independent Experts on the European Charter of Local Self-Government are free to carry out their work and can circulate freely for this purpose.

The Congress welcomes in this regard the establishment of a procedure to guarantee that “any person co-operating and interacting with this Organisation is free and safe to do so”, as announced by Secretary General Jagland in this Committee on 5 April 2017.

On-going work

Human Rights at local level

Within the Congress Human Rights Action Plan, a committee of experts is currently working on a Human Rights Manual for Local Authorities and an International Colloquium on the Challenges in the Implementation of Human Rights at Local Level will take place in Middelburg, the Netherlands, on 3 October 2017.

Fighting corruption and promoting ethics

As follow-up to the topic of the 2016 sessions “transparency and ethics”, the Congress has pursued its work to fight corruption and promote ethics in full complementarity to Council of Europe action.

The work is done in close cooperation with GRECO and a joint conference has been organised beginning of the year with the Committee of the Regions. Reports are currently under preparation on procurement; protecting whistle-blowers; nepotism (recruitment of staff), conflicts of interests; revision of the code of conduct for the political integrity of local and regional elected representatives.

The 1999 European Code of Conduct on the political integrity of local and regional representatives is currently being updated.

In the context of the current discussions about allegations of corruption the members of the Congress were reminded about the respective provisions in the Congress Rules and Procedures (rule 60 and 61) and the procedures in case of “non-conformity with CoE principles” and “action or declaration which would cause damage to the reputation and integrity of the Congress.”

Partnership for local democracy

Complementing the neighbourhood policy of the Council of Europe, the Congress has increased its cooperation with Tunisia and Morocco. High level delegations from these two countries took part in the Session and the Status of Partner for local democracy has been offered jointly to the national authorities and the associations of elected representatives of local authorities. The Congress will accompany the two countries on on-going and future reforms for local democracy.

The Congress stands ready to observe local elections in Tunisia later this year, if it is invited to do so and if extra-budgetary funding is available.

The Congress will regularly inform the Committee of Ministers and its Rapporteur Groups (GR-EXT and GR-DEM) on its activities in these two countries.

Cooperation activities

Concrete co-operation activities are organised in the framework of the Council of Europe Action Plans and are presented in detail in the activity report.

Ten years of the Memorandum of Understanding between the CoE and the EU:

The Congress has a new basis for its high level co-operation with the Committee of the Regions: an “3 + 3” annual meeting (the President and the two Presidents of the Chambers for the Congress and the President, the first vice-President and the President of the CIVEX committee for the CoR) in addition to regular meetings of Secretary Generals

The objective is to avoid duplication and create synergies. The Congress invites the CoR to participate in election observation and the CoR associates the Congress to the Task Force Ukraine and invites Congress rapporteurs to present findings of monitoring reports to the CoR commissions.

A joint conference on fighting corruption was organised on 28 February 2017 in Brussels. The results of this conference and more information about the co-operation between the two institutions representing local and regional authorities will be presented to the Ambassadors and to the members of the European Parliament in Strasbourg: during a joint event organised by the EU delegation to the CoE and the Congress on 5 July.

Working Conditions / Budget and resources

The Congress undertook its reform in 2010, in complementarity to the reform of the Council of Europe undertaken by Secretary General Jagland

Congress work is guided by its priorities for 2017-2020 adopted in October 2016 and by the challenges for the Organisation and for Europe as discussed in CM and indicated by the SG in his annual reports

The Congress implements the local dimension indispensable for combatting radicalisation, creating inclusive societies, sustainable civil society as fabric for democratically resilient states. It tried to contribute to implementing the Council of Europe priorities at local level and received appreciation and positive feedback to continue. This support is not reflected in the figures of the budget.

To deliver, to perform properly its missions, the Congress needs appropriate resources. Its needs are outlined in the report and the recommendation adopted during the Session

The report shows a decrease of the share of the budget of the Congress in the budget of the CoE since 2010: from 2,9 % in 2010 to 2,7 % in 2017

Congress members request a return to 3% of the Council of Europe budget in order to be useful and to continue to be able to contribute to the performance of the organisation

In addition to the resources in the ordinary budget, voluntary contributions are needed for:

- Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma inclusion
- Election observation in Tunisia
- Congress Human Rights Action Plan
- Work against radicalisation

Introduction

This report covers the period from end November 2016 to the beginning of April 2017. Its aim is to give an overview of the activities of the Congress in this period, including the first plenary session of 2017. This report is presented along with the communication of the Congress Secretary General Andreas Kiefer to the Ministers' Deputies on 19 April. It is made available on the website of the Congress, in a file dedicated to the political dialogue of the Congress with the national governments: <http://bit.ly/congress-political-dialogue>

On 10 December 2016, the former President of the Congress Jean-Claude Frécon passed away and tributes were paid to him on several occasions - including in the Committee of Ministers in December 2016, at the Parliamentary Assembly Session in January 2017 and at the Congress Session in March 2017.

Jean-Claude Frécon, President of the Congress until October 2016, member of the Council of Europe Parliamentary Assembly and French Senator, passed away at the age of 72 following a heart attack. Congress President Gudrun Mosler-Törnström conveyed the condolences of all the members of the Congress to his family and loved ones. She praised the boundless commitment of a "true activist for local democracy", and added; "we have lost not only a great President of our assembly but also a very dear friend who was loved by all."

Speaking on behalf of the Congress President at the funeral of Jean-Claude Frécon on 13 December 2016 in the Church of Pouilly-Les-Feurs, Andreas Kiefer said: "I last saw Jean-Claude Frécon in Strasbourg on 2 December. He was just leaving the meeting of the Congress Bureau and was running to get to the meeting of the Municipal Council in Pouilly les Feurs. Jean-Claude's engagement in both local and European affairs is summed up in this departure from one of the capitals of Europe to the village de Pouilly where he had his roots. This active European, who remained firmly anchored in rural France, always had two balls in the air, and spent his whole life juggling between his European, national and local commitments. I believe I can claim that Jean-Claude drew all his energy for his work at national and European level from his involvement at local level. His passing is a great loss for all of us who knew him not only as a kind and warm-hearted colleague but also as a faithful and enthusiastic friend".

I. POLITICAL AGENDA

Exchange of views of the President with the Ministers' Deputies of the Council of Europe, Strasbourg, 11 January 2017.

In her first exchange of views after her election in October 2016, Congress President Gudrun Mosler-Törnström underlined that local democracy in the Council of Europe was 60 years old this year. Indeed the Conference of Local Authorities of the Council of Europe – predecessor of the Congress – held its first session in Strasbourg on 12 January 1957 and the President recalled that 1957 was also the signature of the treaties of Rome and the creation of the European Communities. She stressed that the Congress has increased in political maturity and operational capacity and has become a reliable partner and a valuable support for national governments and public policies. She reiterated the message to national authorities that local authorities should be made full partners in addressing current challenges and should be consulted and involved when governments draft their policies.

Official visit of the Congress President pays to the Republic of Serbia 11 - 14 January 2017

At the invitation of Serbian Prime Minister Aleksandar Vučić, the Congress President visited Belgrade, Novi Sad and Indija, accompanied by the Secretary General of the Congress Andreas Kiefer. They held high-level meetings with First Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Ivica Dačić, with Minister of Public Administration and Local Self-Government Ana Brnabić and with the Mayor of Belgrade Siniša Mali. The discussions focused on the on-going reforms of local self-government and the decentralisation strategy, both projects implemented with the support of the Council of Europe and the Congress. The Congress President also met the Serbian delegation to the Congress and had a discussion at the Faculty of Law of the University of Belgrade.

The President of the Government of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, Igor Mirović, presented the policies implemented in the field of protection of minorities, gender equality and citizen's participation in this autonomous Northern Serbian territory. Discussions in Novi Sad and Indija with mayors Milos Vučević and Vladimir Gak and members of the respective city councils completed the picture of an innovative, modern and citizen-oriented region. The official visit ended with an exchange with members of the board and the management of the National Alliance for Local Economic Development (NALED) about innovation of local administration and governance in Serbia and the Balkans.

Meeting of the President of the Congress with the President of Cyprus Strasbourg, 24 January 2017

In the margins of the first part session of the Parliamentary Assembly the President of the Congress met the President of Cyprus Nicos Anastasiades, in the presence of Ioannis Kasoulides, Cyprus Minister of Foreign Affairs and Chairman of the Committee of Ministers. While affirming his strong belief in subsidiarity, the President stated that Cyprus will undertake the necessary reforms to reinforce its local democracy and is happy to benefit from the expertise of the Congress in this regard. Ms Mosler-Törnström recalled that the Congress had adopted a report on the situation of local and regional democracy in Cyprus, in October 2016, after a monitoring visit to the country and was ready to support in the process of implementing these recommendations.

Meeting of the High Level Group between the Congress and the European Committee of the Regions Paris, 31 January 2017

The meeting of the High Level Group was part of the broader context of cooperation between the two bodies and aimed to define thematic priorities to be implemented in 2017. Chaired by Congress President Gudrun Mosler-Törnström and Committee of the Regions President Markku Markkula, the participants exchanged views on the situation at local and regional level in Turkey, Ukraine and Poland. They also reviewed decentralisation in Ukraine. Gudrun Mosler-Törnström welcomed the involvement of the Congress in the work of the Task-Force set up by the Committee of the Regions to support the reform process in the country.

The two institutions will also strengthen their collaboration through the activities of the Conference of Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP). In this regard, the Congress welcomed the efforts made by the Committee of the Regions for continuing the promotion of specific tools and reports on roles and responsibilities of mayors and local councilors in the countries of Eastern Partnership.

Statement by the Congress President on the reintegration of Morocco into the African Union 1st February 2017

The Congress President stated that the Kingdom of Morocco had recently embarked on the ambitious work of regionalisation, decentralisation and the strengthening of local and regional democratic governance, to which the Congress has made its contribution. In this context, she welcomed the reintegration of Morocco into the African Union after 33 years of absence. She said that the Congress stands ready to accompany Morocco and the other countries of the African Union with its expertise and its own tools, such as the European Charter of Local Self-Government, and hoped that Morocco will very soon become a Partner for Local Democracy, a status established by the Congress in October 2014.

Bilateral meetings of the President with Cyprus authorities Nicosia, 9 February 2017

Before the meeting of the Congress Bureau in the framework of the Cyprus chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, President Mosler-Törnström held political meetings with Demetris Syllouris, President of the House of representatives, Ioannis Kasoulides, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Constantinos Yiorkadjis, Mayor of Nicosia and Ionas Nicolaou, Deputy Minister of the Interior as well as Andreas Kitromilides, President of the Union of Cypriot Communities and Alexis Galanos, President of the Union of Cypriot municipalities. They mainly discussed the situation of local democracy in Cyprus and its reform.

The President emphasised the readiness of the Congress to support the Cyprus authorities and the national associations in this process in order to strengthen local democracy in the country. The President was informed that the draft law on administrative reforms that is currently before the Parliament intends to reduce the number of municipalities and amalgamate communities, municipalities and services, to make economies of scale, increase the autonomy of local authorities in the country, improve their financing and reinforce the services they provide to citizens. The report on the situation of local democracy in Cyprus adopted by the Congress in October 2016 was considered in the process of preparing the draft law.

Statement by the Congress President on Georgia Strasbourg, 21 March 2017

Reacting to recent electoral events in Georgia, the Congress President declared: 'The 'de facto' authorities of the Abkhazia region in Georgia have just organised elections. In the meantime, the self-proclaimed 'President' of South Ossetia has announced that a referendum will be held in April on the name to be given to this region. These initiatives are illegal and will do nothing to help restore Georgia's legitimate sovereignty over these two regions, but will just contribute to further isolating these regions from the international community.' She concluded that the Congress had always shown its commitment to the territorial integrity of member states and believed that this integrity is the first guarantee of a positive development of the regional dimension in the countries.

II. ACTIVITIES OF THE CONGRESS BODIES

A. 32nd SESSION OF THE CONGRESS

The overarching theme of the two 2017 sessions is “Decentralised policies for the successful integration of migrants”.

The first session of the year, from 28 to 30 March, included in particular debates examining the role of local authorities facing migration as well as the reception of unaccompanied child migrants in European cities and how border regions deal with migration flows (see IV. A.).

The agenda of this 32nd Session also included debates on “The quality of democratic participation at regional level”, “The role of youth policies and youth work at local and regional levels in supporting young people’s transition to autonomy and working life”, “Developments in human rights at local and regional levels”, and “Open data for better public services”.

During a discussion on “The fight against anti-Gypsyism” Congress members were invited to sign a “Declaration of Mayors and Elected Local and Regional Representatives of Council of Europe member States against anti-Gypsyism” (see IV. G.)

Two statements were made by representatives of guest delegations from Morocco and Tunisia on the topic of the Congress’ South-Mediterranean Partnership. The two delegations had previously met with the Congress President, the Presidents of the two Chambers and the Congress Thematic Spokesperson on the South-Mediterranean Partnership and held an exchange of views with Congress members. Their participation as invited guests in this session was expected to be their first step towards receiving the status of Partner for Local Democracy, established by the Congress in October 2014 (see VII).

Reports on local and regional democracy in Estonia, Finland, Iceland and Malta were examined in the presence respectively of Mihhail Korb, Minister of Public Administration of Estonia, Jari Partanen, State Secretary for the Ministry of Local Government and Public Reforms of Finland, Jón Gunnarsson, Minister of Transport and Local Government of Iceland and Stefan Buontempo, Parliamentary Secretary for Local Government of Malta.

Reports on the observation of local elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina, on those held in the Popular Assembly of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia were examined as was a checklist for preventing the misuse of administrative resources during electoral processes at local and regional levels.

The Congress fact-finding mission on the situation of local elected representatives in Turkey was discussed and a resolution and a recommendation on the situation of mayors and councillors in Turkey, focusing in particular, on the detention of elected mayors and their replacement by mayors appointed by the central authorities was adopted (see III. B.)

This session was an opportunity to review the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government by the 47 member States through both a comparative analysis of its implementation and an analysis of the recurring issues identified in assessments following monitoring and election observation missions between 2010 and 2016.

Ioannis Kasoulides, Minister for Foreign Affairs of Cyprus and Chair of the Committee of Ministers, and Thorbjørn Jagland, Secretary General of the Council of Europe also held exchanges of views with the Congress members.

Ioannis Kasoulides, Chair of the Committee of Ministers and Cypriot Minister for Foreign Affairs informed the Congress that Cyprus was currently planning to reform its local government system and referred to the recommendation on local democracy in Cyprus adopted by the Congress in October 2016. He also drew attention to the numerous areas in which both the Cypriot authorities and the Congress were working, in particular with regard to the prevention of radicalisation, integration of refugees and migrants, and in taking action against Anti-Gypsyism. He also mentioned the crisis in

Turkey following the failed coup d'Etat in July 2016 and said that it was the Cypriot Chairmanship's aim "to assist the Turkish authorities to overcome the difficulties the country is facing, while ensuring compliance with our common standards with regard to human rights, democracy and the rule of law".

Thorbjørn Jagland stressed the importance of local and regional authorities to the Council of Europe's work to enhance human rights, rule of law and democracy across the continent. The Secretary General highlighted the key role of the Congress in providing concrete responses to issues facing Europe, in particular in addressing human rights at local level, intercultural issues and promoting the integration of migrants. He emphasised the need to ensure voting rights for displaced persons and drew attention to the situation of unaccompanied refugee minors who he said had more right than anybody else to protection and education.

During this session, the Congress also welcomed 42 youth delegates from 42 countries as participants in its work (see IV. B.) and marked the 10th anniversary of European Local Democracy Week (see IV.H.).

The Congress' yearly magazine the "State of the Congress 2016" was distributed at this session together with a publication to mark the 60th anniversary, on 12 January 1957, of the first meeting of the "European Conference of Local Authorities", the forerunner of our Congress.

B. THE BUREAU

Strasbourg, 1-2 December 2016

The Bureau approved the draft agenda of the 32nd Session of the Congress (28-30 March 2017), the terms of reference of committees and the Congress' contribution to the Cypriot chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers. The Bureau members also appointed the rapporteurs for the Bureau and Congress thematic spokespersons for the period 2017-2018 and held a broad exchange of views with the Secretary General of the Council of Europe, with whom they discussed, among other issues, relations with Turkey, the Russian Federation and Ukraine.

The Bureau also heard a statement by the Chair of the Group of Independent Experts (GIE), Angel Manuel Moreno Molina, and it considered, in particular, the work of the GIE in the framework of the monitoring and election observation missions. Finally, the Secretary General's Special Representative on Roma issues, Valeriu Nicolae, presented the 'Dosta! & UEFA Respect' campaign aimed at combatting racism in football stadiums. At the end of the meeting, the Bureau members donned the Campaign t-shirt to symbolise their commitment to the fight against discrimination towards Roma.

Nicosia, 10 February 2017

The Bureau met in Nicosia in the context of the Cypriot Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe. On the agenda of meeting was the preparation of the Congress's 32nd session, changes in national delegations and opportunities for co-operation with the countries on the southern shore of the Mediterranean – the South-Med partnership - as well as the observation of the local elections in Finland and the situation in Turkey and Ukraine. Members also approved draft texts for presentation to the March session, on the Congress's budget and resources for the 2018-2019 biennium and on the revision of Rule 64 of the Rules and Procedures. Further appointments of Bureau rapporteurs and Congress thematic spokespersons were made and the Bureau individually examined five requests for partnership status with the Congress and decided to grant them with specific conditions in each case.

Strasbourg, 27 and 30 March 2017

The Bureau met twice in the framework of the Congress' 32nd session. In addition to examining the final aspects of the session, approving changes in the national delegations and the resolution on members' credentials, the Bureau discussed the situation in Turkey, Congress co-operation activities and the latest committee meetings and approved new terms of reference. The Bureau was also given detailed information on the Congress budgetary evolution between 2010 and 2017, examined and

granted two new requests for partnership status and agreed in principle to an assessment mission of reduced scope to observe the elections of the Municipal Council of Yerevan (Armenia).

C. THE CHAMBERS

The Chamber of Local Authorities

The Chamber of Local Authorities held its 32nd Session on 29 March 2017. In his communication President Anders Knape highlighted the collaboration of the Chamber with national associations and the overall political dialogue concerning the monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the observation local elections: He also stressed that, in a context of an unprecedented influx of refugees, cities are in the front line and have to ensure the welcoming and integration of migrants. He also welcomed the actions of the Congress to fight corruption at the grassroots' level, especially the preparation a new Code of Conduct for local elected representatives and appointed officials as well as the collaboration with the European Committee of the Regions on corruption issues.

The Chamber held a debate on “The reception of unaccompanied child migrants in European cities” (see IV. A.)

The Chamber also examined a report and a recommendation on local democracy in Malta in the presence of Stefan Buontempo, Malta's Parliamentary Secretary for Local Government and in Iceland, in the presence of the Minister of transport and Local Government of Iceland, Jon Gunnarsson (see III. A.).

The Chamber of Regions

The Chamber of Regions held its 32nd Session on 29 March 2017. In her communication, President Gunn-Marit Helgesen put the accent on the Congress role in promoting regionalisation and regional self-government for contributing to democratic stability. She stressed the need of enhancing complementarity and synergies between regions and other tiers of government, with a view to provide citizens with good services, build sound economies and fair access to social and cultural rights. She also committed to continue the strong ties of the Chamber with the European Organisations representing the regions in Europe.

The session of the Chamber was structured around 3 items: “Direct democracy / e-democracy”; “Border regions facing the migration crisis” and an information item on the Congress electoral mission that took place from 17 to 21 November 2016 in the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagaouzia (Republic of Moldova).

For the first debate guest speakers and members of the Chamber presented concrete examples on how regions can adopt legal provisions and launch initiatives for promoting and guaranteeing citizens participation. The “Code of good practice for civil participation” of the Council of Europe and the Venice Commission's opinions on public participation, referendums and popular initiatives, inspired and have been used for the contents of regional laws on citizen's participation. In order to improve the quality of democratic participation at regional level, the speakers underlined the urgency for the regions to broaden participation and better consider public opinion, by providing transparent and effective rules for e-democracy tools. Several representatives of Youth Regional Councils, invited as guest speakers, contributed to the debate.

The Chamber held a round table on “Border regions facing migration” (see IV. A.)

D. THE COMMITTEES

Monitoring Committee

The Monitoring Committee met in Athens (Greece) on 16 February 2017. Kostas Poulakis, Secretary General of the Ministry of Interior, Georges Patoulis, President of the Central Union of Municipalities

of Greece (KEDE), and Michalis Angelopoulos, Vice-President of the Congress, Mayor of the Island of Samos and Head of the Greek delegation to the Congress, addressed the participants prior to the opening of the meeting by Leendert Verbeek (Netherlands, SOC), Chair of the Committee.

The meeting agenda included discussions in view of approval of several reports on the situation of local and regional democracy in Finland, Iceland, Estonia, and Malta, and on the observation of elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina, as well on the fact-finding mission in Turkey, the recurring issues concerning the situation of local and regional democracy in Europe, and the list of criteria for evaluating compliance with international standards and good practices for preventing the misuse of administrative resources during electoral processes at local and regional levels.

The members of the Committee also examined a report on the role of local authorities in dealing with migration and the 2016-2017 working plan on human rights at local and regional levels.

The Committee met again on 28 March, in Strasbourg, during the 32nd Session. It discussed the situation of local democracy in Poland and decided to re-examine this subject on the occasion of the next meeting in view to considering a possible fact finding visit. The Committee also took note of an information report on the observation mission of elections of the Popular Assembly of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia in the Republic of Moldova conducted on 20 November 2016. A general presentation on the European Charter on Local self-government was also delivered to the Committee members.

The next meeting of the Committee will be held on 27 June in Kharkyv (Ukraine).

Governance Committee

At its meeting on 28 March, in Strasbourg, during the 32nd Session, the Governance Committee elected, by acclamation, Robert Saunders (United Kingdom, ECR) as fifth vice-president.

Under the presidency of Jean-Louis Testud (France, EPP/CCE), the Committee examined a report on “A better future for Europe’s rural regions”, which examines the variety of situations in rural areas and gives an overview of the evolution of rural policies as well as the major challenges facing many rural areas. As part of this review, the Committee held an exchange of views with Vanik Berberian, President of the Association of French Rural Mayors. The final version of the draft report, resolution and recommendation will be examined, with a view to approval, by the Committee at its meeting on 4 May 2017.

The Committee exchanged views on several texts prepared in the framework of the Congress Roadmap of Activities for the prevention of corruption and the promotion of public ethics at local and regional levels. It discussed a draft report on “Making public procurement at local and regional level,” exploring the nature of local government corruption, identifying the systemic risks of corruption in the procurement sector and proposing policy recommendations to reduce vulnerability to these risks.

It also examined a preliminary draft report on “The protection of whistle-blowers”, which reviews whistle-blower protection in Europe, and as its potential applications at the local and regional levels. In particular, the report examines the applicability of the 2014 Committee of Ministers “Protection of whistle-blowers” recommendations in a local and regional context. The Committee also examined two preliminary draft reports, on “Nepotism (recruitment of staff)” and on the “Revision of the European code of conduct for the political integrity of local and regional elected representatives”.

Finally, the Committee approved draft terms of reference for a report on the “Fair distribution of taxes in transfrontier areas”.

The next meetings of the Committee will be held on 4 May 2017 in Eupen (Belgium), and on 18/19 October 2017, in Strasbourg, during the 33rd session.

Current Affairs Committee

The Current Affairs Committee met in Venice (Italy) on 9 March 2017, under the presidency of Gabriele Neff (Germany, ILDG). Simone Venturini, the city’s deputy mayor responsible for social

cohesion, employment, spatial development and infrastructure, addressed participants before the opening of the meeting.

The Committee looked at and revised its report “From Reception to Integration: the role of local and regional authorities facing migration” and adopted the report “Forever young? The role of youth policies and youth work at local and regional levels in supporting young people’s transition to autonomy and working life”. It received an update on the progress of the report on regional and minority languages in Europe which will be on the agenda of the 33rd session of the Congress in October 2017.

The Committee also discussed the situation of Roma and Travellers with a view to approving a resolution on the revised Charter of “European Political Parties for a Non-Racist Society” and a declaration against anti-Gypsyism to be opened to the signature of mayors and elected local and regional representatives in all Council of Europe member states.

The Committee met again on 28 March, in Strasbourg, during the 32nd Session and heard a presentation on the Council of Europe Enlarged Partial Agreement on Cultural Routes and the interest of such routes in terms of territorial development.

Its next meeting will be in Belgrade (Serbia) on 14 June 2017.

III. MONITORING OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL DEMOCRACY

A. MONITORING ACTIVITIES

The core mission of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities is the effective monitoring of the situation of local and regional democracy in member States by assessing the application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, adopted in 1985.

In the context of this evaluation, the Congress made three monitoring visits and adopted four Recommendations between end November 2016 and end March 2017.

Monitoring visits

Switzerland 23 to 25 January 2017

The Congress delegation examined the situation on local and regional democracy in the light of the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, ratified by the country in 2005. Co-rapporteurs Marc Cools (Belgium, ILDG) and Dorin Chirtoaca (Republic of Moldova, EPP/CCE), focused on the developments occurred since the last Congress monitoring visit in May 2009. High level meetings were held, in particular with the Federal Councillor of Department of Finances, Ueli Maurer and the President of the Council of States of Switzerland, Ivo Bischofberger. The delegation also met representatives of local and regional authorities of the cities of Bern, Zurich and Oetwil an der Limmat as well as representatives of the Canton of Zurich and the Canton of Jura, in particular with Alec Von Graffenried, Mayor of Bern, Corine Mauch, Mayor of Zurich and vice-chair of the Swiss Union of Cities and Towns, Paul Studer, Mayor and Chair of the municipality council of Oetwil an der Limmat and Nathalie Barthoulot, President of the Government of the Republic and Canton of Jura and Minister of Interior.

Serbia 28 February- 2 March 2017

The Congress delegation examined the situation on local and regional democracy in the light of the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, ratified by the country in 2007. Co-rapporteurs Lucia Kroon (Netherlands, EPP-CCE) and Sören Schumacher (Germany, SOC), focused on the developments occurred since the last Congress monitoring visit in June 2010. High level meetings took place, in particular with the State Secretary in charge of Public Administration and Local Self-Government, Željko Ožegović, as well as the State Secretary in the Ministry of Finance, in

charge of European Union affairs, Jelena Stojovic. The delegation also met representatives of local and regional authorities as well as representatives of the Autonomous Province of Vojvodina, notably Nihat Bisevac, Mayor of Novi Pazar, Miloš Vučević, Mayor of Novi Sad, and Milan Garašević, Mayor of Kovačica Municipality.

Italy

21-23 March 2017

The Congress delegation examined the situation on local and regional democracy in the light of the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, ratified by the country in 1990. Co-rapporteurs Jakob Wiene (the Netherlands, EPP-CCE) and Stewart Dickson (United-Kingdom, ILDG), focused on the developments in the field of local democracy occurred since the adoption of the last Congress recommendation on local and regional democracy in Italy in March 2013.

High level meetings were held, in particular with the Minister for Regional Affairs and Autonomies, Enrico Costa, the Undersecretary of Ministry of Interior, Gianpiero Bocci, as well as the Undersecretary of Economy and Finances, Paolo Baretta.

Recommendations adopted

Iceland

During the 32nd Session the Congress adopted Recommendation 402 (2017) on the state of local democracy in the country following a monitoring visit in June 2016. This is second monitoring report since the ratification of the European Charter of Local Self Government in 1991. The report presented by the co-rapporteurs Jakob Wiene (Netherlands, EPP/CCE) et Zdenek Broz (Czech Republic, ECR), underlines the generally satisfactory level of local democracy in the country. It praises recent developments fostering local self-government, including the promotion of the involvement of local authorities in national decision-making as well as increased inter-municipal co-operation and citizen participation in local authorities. Nevertheless, the report draws attention to possible enhancements, in particular the clarification of the division of responsibilities between central government and local authorities and a direct applicability of the Charter in the domestic legal system.

Malta

During the 32nd Session the Congress adopted Recommendation 400 (2017) on local democracy in the country following a monitoring visit from 22 to 24 November 2016. This is the third monitoring report since Malta ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 1993. The report presented by co-rapporteurs Stewart Dickson (United Kingdom, ILDG) and Risto Rautava (Finland, EPP-CCE) expressed satisfaction with certain amendments made to Malta's legislation, improving local democracy, since the last official monitoring visit in 2010. It stresses however that local governance in Malta faces numerous challenges in terms of non-compliance with the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. The Congress is particularly concerned about the lack of explicit or direct recognition of the principle of local self-government in domestic legislation and in the Maltese Constitution. The report also mentions the excessive involvement of central government in local affairs and the lack of meaningful consultation between central government and local authorities.

Estonia

During the 32nd Session the Congress adopted Recommendation 401 (2017) on local democracy in Estonia following a monitoring visit to the cities of Tallinn, Paide and Jõhvi from 6 to 8 September 2016. The report prepared by rapporteurs, Henrik Hammar, (Sweden, EPP/CCE) and Leendert Verbeek, (Netherlands, SOC) welcomes the initiatives of the Estonian institutions to start a territorial reform process on local and state level and revision of the revision of the State Budget Law that strengthens the interaction between the state and local authorities on budgetary items. The Congress nevertheless recommends that the Estonian authorities clarify their legislation concerning the distribution of functions between local government and State and that they change the domestic legislation in order to give local authorities more financial autonomy “

Finland

During the 32nd Session the Congress adopted Recommendation 396 (2017) on local and regional democracy in Finland following a monitoring visit to the country in May 2016. The Congress rapporteurs, Artur Torres Pereira (Portugal, EPP/CCE) and Karim Van Overmeire, (Belgium, NR), expressed their satisfaction with the general situation of local democracy in Finland and highlighted the culture of consultation and close cooperation between Finnish central and local authorities. The rapporteurs supported the creation of a second tier of local government that fosters decentralisation at regional level, in accordance with the previous recommendations of the Congress. They welcomed in particular the intention of the Finnish authorities as confirmed by Jari Partanen, State Secretary at the Ministry of Local Government and Public Reforms of Finland, to extend the application of the Charter to the regional level of government that will be practically established in 2019. They called on the Finnish government to ensure that new regional authorities have freedom of action with regard to their own resources.

B. FACT FINDING MISSIONS

Turkey

From 18 to 20 December 2016, the Congress co-rapporteurs on Turkey Anders Knappe (Sweden, EPP/CCE) and Leen Verbeek (Netherlands, SOC) carried out the second part of their fact-finding mission to Turkey, to investigate the recent detentions of elected mayors and their replacement by government appointees in over 40 municipalities. They held a series of meetings in Ankara, Istanbul and Diyarbakır, including meetings with Vice Minister of the Interior Sebahattin Ozturk, Deputy Undersecretary of the Ministry of Justice Selahaddin Mentek, local elected representatives, a government-appointed mayor, lawyers, associations of municipalities and NGOs. The rapporteurs presented the report of their mission to the Monitoring Committee at its meeting in Athens in February 2017 and to the 32nd plenary session.

In the recommendation adopted during the Session (Rec 397 (2017)), the Congress asks the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe to invite the Turkish authorities to rescind the legislative measures on “mayors appointed by the central authorities” and restore the capacity of municipal councils to choose a replacement mayor. It also points out that the arrest of a local elected representative must be a decision duly substantiated in domestic law, taken in conformity with the standards of the Council of Europe and, in particular, with the European Convention on Human Rights. The Congress also calls for Turkish legislation to be revised, in order to align its definition of terrorism with European standards, notably the case law of the European Court of Human Rights.

In addition, the Congress calls for a revision of the ministerial instructions of 11 November 2016 with a view to decriminalising the appointment of co-mayors. In this connection, it has agreed to put the review of the situation of Nurhayat Altun, member of the Turkish delegation of the Congress, on the agenda of its Bureau meetings until the end of legal proceedings. “Co-mayor” of Tunceli, Ms Altun was arrested on 17 November 2016 and is being held in Kocaeli F-type prison.

Belgium

On 2 and 3 February 2017, the Congress rapporteurs on local and regional democracy in Belgium, Henrik Hammar (Sweden, EPP/CCE) and David Eray (Switzerland, ILDG) carried on a fact finding visit to Belgium in order to clarify the functioning of the organs of local democracy in a context of linguistic diversity in the communes “with facilities” in the Flemish region around Brussels. They held meetings with local and regional elected representatives and with the Vice-Minister-President of the Government of Flanders and Flemish Minister for Local and Provincial Government, Civic Integration, Housing, Equal Opportunities and Poverty Reduction, Liesbeth Homans.

C. OBSERVATION OF LOCAL AND REGIONAL ELECTIONS

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

missions are conducted further to the invitation of the national authorities or competent electoral bodies and they complement the political monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. Follow-up to Congress' recommendations prepared further to observation missions is provided by a post-electoral dialogue.

Observation missions

Finland

A delegation of the Congress undertook a visit to Finland from 5 to 10 April 2017, to observe the local elections scheduled for 9 April. Headed by Congress Rapporteur Lelia Hunziker (Switzerland, SOC), the delegation included 23 participants from 18 Council of Europe Member States. Prior to Election Day, preparatory meetings were held on 6 and 7 April in Helsinki, with a particular focus on the current territorial reform and implications for the local elections on Sunday. For this purpose, the delegation exchanged views with the Director of the election administration of Ministry of Justice, Arto Jääskeläinen, the Minister of Local Government and Public reforms, Anu Vehviläinen, as well as the Mayor of Helsinki, Jussi Pajunen.

On Election Day, 9 April, the Congress deployed 10 teams to visit some 150 polling stations in Helsinki, Tampere, Vaasa, Joensuu, Oulu, Kuopio, Jyväskylä and Rovaniemi. The delegation welcomed the Finnish well-established system of voters' registration, recently also based on a sound computer population register. The Congress also praised that only individuals who are permanently residing in a specific municipality have the right to vote at local level.

However, the Congress noticed some possible improvements, as a more consistent system of sealing of the ballot boxes and a strengthened role of independent candidates at the local and regional level. Regarding the issue of the regional administrative reform in Finland, the Congress' delegation expressed its concerns, in particular as regions will be given new responsibilities without the necessary financial autonomy, which could result in a sort of decentralisation of centrally allocated funds instead of real regionalisation.

Adopted texts

Elections for the Popular Assembly of the Autonomous Territorial Unit of Gagauzia (Republic of Moldova)

An Information Report was presented by Congress' Rapporteur Sevdia Ugrekhelidze (Georgia, EPP/CCE) during the 32nd Session, following an assessment mission of reduced scope carried out to monitor the vote in the Autonomous Territorial Unit (ATU) of Gagauzia on 20 November 2016. It underlines that the new legal framework, adopted in 2015, remedies major shortcomings identified in previous reports and was generally well implemented. The efforts by the authorities to improve the quality of voters' lists and the level of preparation of the election administration are major factors of improvement regards the electoral process. The Congress likewise welcomes the ban on foreign funds for campaign purposes as well as the establishment of the Central Election Commission of ATU Gagauzia as a permanent body. However, there were allegations concerning vote buying, misuse of administrative resources and the lack of a real level playing field for all candidates, in particular in the media. Moreover, even though the new Electoral Code brought substantial improvements, there is still a need for further amendments in order to reconcile the respective legislations of Gagauzia and the Republic of Moldova.

Local elections in Bosnia-Herzegovina

During the 32nd Session the Congress adopted a Report (CG32(2017)16) and a Recommendation on the observation of the local elections which were held in Bosnia and Herzegovina on 2 October 2016. The elections took place against the backdrop of ethnic tensions following the referendum of 25 September 2016 in Republika Srpska, organised only one week prior to the local vote, and which concerned the National Day of the entity. According to the Rapporteur Stewart Dickson (United Kingdom, ILDG), voting was held – with the exception of a few violent incidents in particular in Srebrenica and Stolac – in a calm and orderly manner overall. The general electoral management at

the level of the Central Election Commission was professional and some procedural improvements have been made, for example with regard to the counting process and the system of so-called “tendered ballots”. Amendments to the Election Law brought also a 40 per cent quota of the underrepresented gender on candidates’ lists for Municipal Councils.

In its Recommendation the Congress proposes to step up training and achieve de-politicisation of commissions at the level of polling stations. It also refers to the recurring issue of quality of voters’ lists and reiterates the implementation of Congress’ Recommendation 369 with regard to amending the situation of voting rights at local level of individuals residing de facto abroad. Efforts should also be made in order to ensure a real level playing field of all candidates. More general, allegations of vote-buying and of misuse of administrative resources should be taken seriously by the authorities of Bosnia and Herzegovina.

IV. THEMATIC ACTIVITIES

The Congress supports local authorities in the performance of their duties in respect of their citizens and it supports them in their search for solutions to the challenges they face, in particular in terms of security, integration, dialogue and participation, respect for fundamental human and social rights, and the inclusion of vulnerable populations.

It initiates reflections and projects on these topics and contributes actively to the work being done in this connection within the Council of Europe and at European level.

A. REFUGEES AND MIGRANTS

During the 32nd Session, the Congress adopted a report on the role of local authorities in reception and integration of migrants and held two debates on “The reception of unaccompanied child migrants in European cities” and “Border regions facing migration”.

The report prepared by György Illes (Hungary, ILDG) and Yoomi Rentröm (Sweden, SOC) was debated by the plenary session in presence of Tomáš Boček, Special Representative of the Secretary General on migration and refugees, and Malgorzata Galinska (Poland), youth delegate. The report emphasizes the need for all levels of government to co-ordinate their response in order to put in place efficient reception policies that also ensure respect for human rights. The conclusion reached by Congress members is that local authorities are in the front line when it comes to dealing with the increase in the number of migrants and refugees arriving in Europe and must have adequate resources to meet these needs.

During the debate on the reception of unaccompanied child migrants, held by the Chamber of Local authorities, the Congress highlighted the difficult position of mayors, who become the “guardians” of these unaccompanied young people, whom they must protect and help to become integrated in the host society. The participants underlined the lack of solidarity between European countries and the need for member states to provide greater financial support. The problems mentioned included the insufficient number of interpreters, the risks linked to sexual exploitation and violence, and the fact that reception facilities were full to overflowing. In the light of these challenges, several positive local initiatives were presented, for example the assistance and training offered to young people arriving in cities until they come of age and families who were willing to take in children.

During the round table on “Border regions facing migration” held by the Chamber of Regions, the guest speakers and members of the Chamber presented their own concrete experiences and analysis of the major difficulties encountered by border regions in facing the migration emergency, highlighting successful solutions and main issues for a sound strategy. The debate was centred on both migrants’ reception and their displacements from one region to another within Europe. The relevant European Associations representing the regions in Europe - the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR) and the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE), contributed to this debate. In the absence of a coherent policy at the European level, the Chamber highlighted the

key role regions must play in complementarity and in coordination with other tiers of governments for defining and implementing policies

B. INTERCULTURAL DIALOGUE

Intercultural Cities conference Limassol, 27-28 March 2017

Bert Bouwmeester (Netherlands, ILDG), Congress substitute spokesperson on Radicalisation-related Activities, contributed to the Conference “Building diverse communities based on shared values – the Intercultural cities approach”. He presented the role of the Congress in the prevention of radicalisation and promotion of inclusive societies and its contribution to interfaith dialogue, referring to the Congress toolkit on organising intercultural and interreligious activities.

C. YOUTH PARTICIPATION

European Youth Festival 2016 Graz, 30 November 2016

Eunice Campbell-Clark (UK, SOC) , Vice-President of the Congress, delivered a video message to the Festival on the theme “Digital creativity improving society”, Recalling that this fifth jubilee year of the European Youth Award takes place under the patronage of the Congress, she outlined Congress actions in this field, including a resolution adopted in 2015 in which it asks local authorities to create the opportunities for young citizens and elected representatives to enter into dialogue in order to strengthen the links between them and to explore participation modalities such as co-management.

Participation of youth delegates in the 32nd Congress session

During the 32nd Session, the Congress welcomed 42 youth delegates between the ages of 16 and 30, from 42 countries. The youth delegates took part in all the debates and meetings alongside Congress members. This is a continuation of an initiative started in 2014 that has proven to be a good practice in directly involving young people in local and regional decision making.

The Congress seeks to continue to build on the success of this exercise by exploring how to implement Council of Europe and Congress youth policy on promoting the participation of young people in decision and policy making. To this end, in addition to their participation in the session, for the second year running the youth delegates will develop grassroots projects to be conducted in the period between the two 2017 sessions and to be presented to the Congress during the October session.

D. CHILDREN’S RIGHTS

27th meeting of the Network of Contact Parliamentarians to stop sexual violence against children Florence, 1 December 2016.

The Congress was represented by its Spokesperson on Children, Johan van den Hout (Netherlands, SOC). Speaking about the Pact of Towns and Regions to Stop Sexual Violence against Children which was launched by the Congress in 2012 and which comprises policies and initiatives to guide local and regional authorities”, he said that even if the One in Five Campaign of the Council of Europe officially ended last year, the Congress will pursue its efforts to promote the Campaign and the Pact. e referred to the statement issued by the Congress President, Gudrun Mosler-Törnström on the occasion of the European Day on the protection of children against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse (18 November) which calls on local and regional authorities to fight against these crimes. Since 2015, the Congress has been organising a biannual seminar for national associations of local and regional authorities to explore ways of cooperation and to encourage them to sign the Congress Pact. The next Seminar will be held in Serbia in 2017.

E. FIGHT AGAINST CORRUPTION

In the framework of the Roadmap of Activities for preventing corruption and promoting public ethics at local and regional levels, adopted at the 31st session, the Congress has developed its fight against corruption at several levels:

Thematic reports

At its 32nd session, the Congress adopted a "Checklist for compliance with international standards and best practices preventing misuse of administrative resources during electoral processes at local and regional level". The Checklist aims at identifying risk areas of potential misuse of administrative resources, assessing the implementation of the legal framework and drawing the attention of stakeholders to specific instances of misuse.

Reports on "Making public procurement at local and regional level", "The protection of whistle-blowers", "Nepotism (recruitment of staff)", "Conflicts of interests" and "Open Government" are being developed.

Code of conduct

The Congress has undertaken to revise and update the 1999 European Code of Conduct on the political integrity of local and regional representatives. The Advisory group on revising the Code, composed of four experts and the Congress Secretariat, held its first meeting on 1st March 2017 in Brussels.

Joint conference of the Congress and the European Committee of the Regions on the prevention of corruption Brussels, 28 February 2017

The conference addressed the strategies and showcase good practice as well as the benefits of cooperation at local and regional levels. Participants examined the issue of public ethics at local and regional levels, in the context of the Congress' work to revise the European Code of Conduct on the political integrity of local and regional representatives..

Speaking at the conference, President Mosler-Törnström reaffirmed the Congress commitment in this field, in particular, through its Roadmap which is a comprehensive and long-term approach to corruption prevention, promoting rigorous governance frameworks and the development of common standards. She explained that local and regional authorities have seen their budgets and competences increase, but control and disciplinary mechanisms are still lacking, opening the doors for possible abuse.

F. GENDER EQUALITY

Declaration of the President on the International Women's Day Strasbourg, 8 March 2017.

Guðrun Mosler-Törnström stated that "8 March is a date of special significance for all women and also for all those who, woman or man, are fighting for greater gender equality in our societies. As the first woman elected to the position of President of the Congress, I feel a special responsibility to take up this cause. During my mandate as President, I will place all my experience and my energy into encouraging and promoting the participation of women in political life at local and regional level"

61st session of the Commission on the Status of Women, New York, 16 March 2017

The Congress President held a speech during the session of the UN Commission and underlined that engaging with women at the local level is the surest way to secure the participation of women at all levels of government. Considering women are still largely underrepresented in local and regional councils, Ms Mosler-Törnström set out different solutions such as the implementation of quotas. She

gave the example of the Congress which managed, thanks to a 30 per cent quota requirement, from 2011 to 2016, to increase the percentage of women from 31% to 42% among its' members.

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

After ten Roma had been elected into local councils in Bosnia and Herzegovina in October 2016, a follow-up workshop was organised in December 2016 to address specific challenges for the new councillors. The workshop focused on solving problems they regularly encounter in their daily work, providing them with political and legal expertise.

The European Alliance of Cities and Regions for the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers has also supported activities pursued by the Council of Europe/European Commission Joint Programme "ROMACT" in the Czech Republic, where the Community Action Groups (CAGs) have been supported in order to reduce stereotypes concerning Roma.

The Alliance Taskforce supported the drafting of Resolution 415 (2017) on the "Charter of European Political Parties for a Non-Racist Society (Revised)" which was proposed by the Special Representative of the Council of Europe Secretary General for Roma Issues Valeriu Nicolae and presented for adoption by John Warmisham (UK, SOC), Congress Spokesperson for Roma Issues during the 32nd Congress Session.

Furthermore, a "Declaration of mayors and elected local and regional representatives of Council of Europe member states against anti-Gypsyism" was opened for signature during the 32nd session. 55 elected representatives from 27 Council of Europe member States signed it. This Declaration was initiated by the SRSG for Roma issues and by John Warmisham and gives local and regional elected representatives the chance to explicitly stand up against anti-Gypsyism. In particular, by signing it, they commit themselves individually to "defending human rights and democratic principles and to rejecting all forms of discrimination, violence, harassment, incitement to hatred and hate speech against Roma and Travellers and any other form of anti-Gypsyism".

H. EUROPEAN LOCAL DEMOCRACY WEEK (ELDW)

The 2016 edition of the ELDW took place from 10 to 16 October with the participation of 86 municipalities from 23 member states. The annual co-ordination meeting was held in Strasbourg, on 30 January 2017, with the participation of mayors, local councilors, presidents of associations and local coordinators of the project. The meeting was chaired by Gaye Doganoglu (Turkey, EPP/CCE), Vice-President of the Congress and Spokesperson of the ELDW. The assessment of the 2016 edition, the presentation of good practices, the discussion on the main theme for 2017 and the certification award ceremony for "12-Star" partners were the main points on the agenda.

In addition, an exchange of views was held on the preparation of the 10th anniversary of the ELDW, due in October 2017, with a discussion on the main focus of this 10th edition. To this end, a draft concept paper was examined which was later adopted by the Congress Bureau. The main challenges identified are to globally increase the number of partners and involve municipalities from all 47 member states of the Council of Europe. These can be tackled by reinforcing the Congress' promotional activities, including a three minute video clip which has been produced and already presented at the 32nd Session.

The ELDW 2017 theme "*Citizen participation, consultation and commitment: for a thriving local democracy*" was approved by the Congress Bureau on 10 February. The official Week of Local Democracy will take place between 9 and 15 October 2017.

To assist the partaking local and regional authorities and their associations in the preparation of their Democracy Week, a concept note on the 2017 theme, a compilation of thematic ideas, a list of Council of Europe reference texts, as well as the logo in 36 languages and an updated version of the information leaflet (in several languages) have been made available on the official website of the

ELDW. Most recent developments and updates on the participating cities can be followed on Twitter (@democracy_week) and Facebook (“European Local Democracy Week”).

To mark the 10th anniversary of the ELDW, a plenary debate was held on 28 March 2017 during the 32nd Session, with the participation of ELDW Spokesperson Gaye Doganoglu and representatives from two long-standing ELDW partners, Stockton on Tees (United Kingdom) and Katowice (Poland). This debate clearly illustrated how ELDW partners see the benefits of their participation in successive editions. All Congress members and national associations of local and regional authorities were invited to become active partners of the Week.

I. MISCELLANEOUS

Council of Europe Conference of Ministers responsible for Sport Budapest 29 November 2016

Gabriele Neff; Chair of the Current Affairs Committee, represented the Congress in this 14th conference. with a view to exchanging information on areas of Congress cooperation with EPAS (European Partial Agreement on Sport), namely activities promoting integration through sports, in particular integration of refugees and migrants at local level.”

Human Rights Conference Seoul (South Korea), 5 December 2016

Delivering the keynote speech the opening of the Conference on “Human Rights Standards and local governance”, Congress Secretary General Andreas Kiefer said that human rights provisions do concern a considerable part of the daily tasks of local and regional authorities be it civil, political, economic, social or cultural rights. He presented the Congress Human Rights Action Plan based on the preparatory work done by Congress members at the 2015 Graz Human Rights Conference and the work of the Monitoring Committee. Many speakers referred to the strong preventive effect of Council of Europe standards and highlighted the need for local politicians and administrations to contribute to the respect of human rights for the benefit of all.

27th Conference of the Supreme Council for Islamic Affairs Cairo (Egypt), 11 March 2017

Speaking at the conference on “The role of leaders and decision makers in spreading the culture of peace and confronting terrorism”, Congress Secretary General stated that peace – and an inclusive society - cannot be obtained through security measures which can only achieve public order. He said sustainable peace can be achieved with people learning to live together with their differences and to achieve this local leaders who are ready to work with the citizens in order to make it a reality are needed.

Participants adopted the 'Cairo Document for Spreading Peace' which recommends using all available awareness-raising means to disseminate the culture of tolerance and stand up to extremism. Many of the declaration’s recommendations are fully in line with the Congress guidelines against radicalisation and its toolkit for interreligious dialogue.

V. INSTITUTIONAL CO-OPERATION WITHIN THE COUNCIL OF EUROPE

A. THE INTERGOVERNMENTAL SECTOR

The Committee of Ministers

The Congress President and Secretary General hold regular exchanges of views and communications with the Ministers’ Deputies. The Congress also takes an active part in the chairmanships of the Committee of Ministers.

The President held an exchange of views with the Ministers' Deputies on 11 January 2017 (see I.).

Directorate General of Democracy

The Congress cooperates closely with the Directorate General of Democracy and its Centre of Expertise for Local Government. Together they implement the regional project to strengthen the capacities of local authorities within the countries of Eastern Partnership (2015-2017) and the creation of synergies in existing bilateral projects in Albania, Armenia and Ukraine (See under VII.). Regular coordination meetings continue to be held in the Secretariat.

B. THE PARLIAMENTARY ASSEMBLY

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

C. THE EUROPEAN COMMISSION FOR DEMOCRACY THROUGH LAW (VENICE COMMISSION)

The Congress is working in close co-operation with the Venice Commission, particularly in the field of election observation and the monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. The Council for Democratic Elections (CED) is a platform for electoral cooperation between the Venice Commission, in its capacity as legal body, the Parliamentary Assembly and the Congress, as political organs responsible for election observation in their respective areas. Congress' member Jos Wiene (Netherlands, EPP/CCE) is currently Chair of the CDE.

Speaking at the 109th Plenary Session of the Venice Commission, Leen Verbeek, Chair of the Congress monitoring Committee, advocated deeper co-operation with the Venice Commission. He outlined recurring issues identified by the Congress including inadequate financial resources for local and regional authorities, the restricted definition of their competences and the lack of consultation with regard to central government. He underlined that the absence of direct applicability of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in domestic legal systems was a new and particularly worrying problem, stressing the risk of re-centralisation in member States. With regard to transversal problems identified during missions to observe local and regional elections. Mr Verbeek referred to the misuse of administrative resources during electoral processes as the most pressing issue.

Mr Verbeek also presented the fact-finding mission organised in 2016 by the Congress in Turkey in order to examine the situation of local elected representatives in this country, mentioning that the Venice Commission's work on Turkey has helped in the preparation of the Congress report. He informed that the draft resolution in this report, if adopted on 29 March at the Congress Session, will be asking the Venice Commission to prepare a legal opinion on the issues raised (see III. B.).

At the 110th Plenary Session of the Venice Commission on 10 March 2017, President Gudrun Mosler-Törnström informed the members of the Venice Commission about Congress activities to address corruption and migration issues at the grassroots' level and highlighted the fields of cooperation between both institutions.

D. THE NORTH-SOUTH CENTRE

The Congress pursued its participation in the quadrilogue governance of the North-South Centre and its commitment to contribute to the Centre's activities. The Congress was represented by its Secretariat at the Bureau and Executive Committee meetings of the Centre on 10 March 2017 in Strasbourg. The Congress South-Med Partnership Programme was presented on this occasion, so as to ensure every possible synergy with the activities of the Centre.

VI. EXTERNAL COOPERATION AND PARTNERSHIPS

The Committee of the Regions of the European Union

Co-operation between the Congress and the Committee of the Regions of the European Union is ongoing between the Plenary Sessions of the two institutions.

On 31st January 2017, the President of the Congress, the Presidents of its two Chambers, the President of the Committee of the Regions and its 1st Vice-President met in Paris for the annual “High Level Group” meeting. This was the second such meeting in this new format which allows for closer political coordination and exchange of information on mutual priorities and between the two bodies (see I.)

On 22-23 February 2017 in Malta, Piero FASSINO (Italy, SOC) contributed on behalf of the Congress to the Eighth plenary session of the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM), where he presented the Congress South Mediterranean Partnership initiative and attended the related Conference on Migration.

In the framework of its anti-corruption Roadmap adopted at its 31st session, the Congress co-organised with the Committee of the Regions, on 28 February 2017, in Brussels, a conference on 'The Role of Local and Regional Authorities in Preventing Corruption and Promoting Good Governance' (see IV. E.)

European Associations of local and regional authorities

The Congress pursues a close cooperation with the main associations and organisations representing territorial authorities in Europe in particular via the participation and input from Congress representatives to a number of events.

For the CALRE - the Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies - André Antoine, Chair of the CALRE “Working Group on Interactive Democracy” and President of the Parliament of Wallonia contributed, as guest speaker, to the Chamber of Regions debate on “Direct Democracy and e-Democracy”. Carolina Darias San Sebastian, Co-Chair of the CALRE “Working Group on Migrations” and President of the Canary Islands Parliament, contributed as guest speaker to the Chamber Regions debate on “Border regions facing the migration crisis”.

For the AEBR - the Association of European Border Regions-, its President, Karl-Heinz Lambertz, gave a detailed picture of the challenges that border regions are facing concerning migration.

For the AER - the Assembly of European Regions - Gloria Vitaly, President of the AER Youth Network contributed to the debate on “Direct Democracy and e-Democracy”.

The Bureau of the Chamber of Regions decided to continue close contacts with the Youth Regional Parliaments (in particular of Belgium, Spain, Italy, Switzerland and United-Kingdom), in cooperation with the AER Youth Network.

As for the European Association for Local Democracy (ALDA), on 3 March 2017, Congress Vice-President Dorin Chirtoaca (Republic of Moldova EPP/CCE), took part in the inauguration of the ALDA Local Democracy Agency in Cimislia in Moldova. The Congress played a major role in setting up Local Democracy Agencies which have into a network of 11 Agencies in 8 countries that contribute to the strengthening and development of good local governance in Europe.

National Associations of local and regional authorities

Central Union of Municipalities of Greece (KEDE) Thessaloniki, 3 December 2016

Speaking at the annual conference of KEDE the Congress President welcomed closer co-operation between KEDE and the Congress and stressed the importance of strengthening consultations

between local and central authorities, as well as local competences and financing, particularly for island municipalities. She expressed her hope that Greece and the Congress would soon enter into post-monitoring dialogue on these issues.

General Assembly of the Communities Association of Armenia Yerevan, 24 February 2017

More than 400 Armenian mayors, members of the Communities Association of Armenia (CAA), gathered to adopt a new Charter (statute), developed with support of the Congress and to elect the Association's President and governing bodies (see VII)

VII. COOPERATION PROGRAMMES AND ACTION PLANS

The aim of the Congress' co-operation activities is to assist a number of member States in implementing the recommendations adopted by the Congress to provide a practical response to the problems identified in the course of monitoring and post-monitoring activities and the observation of elections.

These activities are carried out within the framework of the action plans of the Council of Europe, in close co-operation and synergy with the other entities within the Organisation.

They rely notably on peer exchanges in areas where the Congress can offer specific experience and know-how, such as the role and the responsibilities of local and regional political representatives.

Albania

Within the Council of Europe project "Strengthening Local Government Structures and Cooperation of Local Elected Representatives", the Congress supports the on-going decentralisation process and the consolidation of the principles of good governance, in particular the will of the Albanian national authorities to strengthen the right of local authorities to be consulted, one of the important principles of the European Charter of Local Self-government.

Substantive work was made in this endeavour and led to the inclusion of the right of local authorities to be consulted in the National Crosscutting Strategy on Decentralisation and Local Governance 2015-2020. In addition, the organic Law on Local Self-Government provided for the creation of a consultative body. Extensive consultations were held to draft the internal rules of this Consultative Council, which was launched on 17 January 2017, with representation of the Congress Secretary General,¹ and it is now operational. Representatives of all associations representing local authorities could express their joint concerns regarding the draft law on local finances during the Consultative Council first meeting.

This successfully initiated process needs more time to turn into a structured platform which will effectively serve the interests of local authorities through regular and pluralistic dialogue, and co-operation among all LGUs. The Congress continues to assist the Albanian Government in strengthening the Consultative Council and organises peer-to-peer exchanges for mayors, until the end of the project on 30 June 2017.

Armenia

The Congress was responsible for the component "Strengthening local elected representatives' leadership", within the project "Support for the consolidation of local democracy in Armenia" funded by the Danish Government, which came to an end on 31 December 2016. The Congress' component aimed to strengthen local elected representatives' capacities and know-how, to engage in a constructive dialogue amongst themselves, with national authorities and with citizens. The activities

¹ Following a Council of Ministers' Decision on "Issues subject to consultation and structure, procedure, form, manner of organisation and functioning of the Local Self-government and Central Government Consultative Council", on 21 December 2016.

implemented supported the networking and exchange of good practices between different beneficiaries of the programme.

The project's closing event, on 5 December 2016, provided the opportunity for all Armenian beneficiaries and stakeholders (mayors, councillors, young local leaders, representatives of central authorities and the Parliament, Local Government Associations and NGOs) to share results and experiences. The common conclusion highlighted the contribution of this intervention to increased knowledge of European local democracy standards, and to strengthened leadership skills for mayors and local councillors, leading to a closer interaction between them, and to greater involvement of citizens in community development and local decision-making. The programme contributed to creating a space of "learning by doing". The principles, guidelines and methods to steer participatory processes, developed during the programme, can be applied to future projects.

The Congress also pursued the implementation of the project "Institutional support to the Communities Association of Armenia (CAA)", funded by the Government of Switzerland as a part of the programme "Improvement of the local self-governance system" and co-ordinated by the Swiss Agency for Development and Co-operation (SDC). The project, which aims to enhance the capacities of the CAA and enable it to become an active stakeholder in the governance system of the country, was proposed for extension from 1 May 2017 until 31 December 2018, based on the overall progress achieved and the positive mid-term review.

On 24 February 2017, the CAA organised its first General Assembly in a number of years, with the participation of more than 400 mayors – members of the CAA, as well as Davit Lokyan, Minister of Territorial Administration and Development. The new Statute of the Association, revised as part of the project, was adopted and elections of the President and statutory bodies were held in accordance with the new rules. The Congress welcomed this event as a major step in the Association's organisational development, noting that the strong participation of mayors was a sign of a positive dynamic within the CAA.

The project activities planned for 2017 focus on strengthening the organisational development of the CAA, its public image and visibility, as well as on achieving its financial sustainability and improving its advocacy capacity within the framework of a consultation mechanism.

Ukraine

The Congress project "*Promoting Local Democracy in Ukraine*" aims to improve the implementation of democratic principles in Ukraine by enhancing the institutional and leadership capacities of local authorities, and disseminating nation-wide best practices of local democracy. It builds on the post-monitoring roadmap signed between the Congress and the Ukrainian government in May 2015.

The Congress participates in the change which Ukraine has embarked on by creating a community of local development actors empowered as drivers of change. The peer work with the contribution and experience from experts and local politicians from Council of Europe member States aims to translate reforms into a renewed governance at the local level.² Debates within activities revolve around the principles of local self-government, the current reforms in the country, measures to increase the transparency and accountability of local authorities when answering to the needs of their citizens, and various ways to further engage at local level.

In total, the activities implemented within the 2015-2017 Action Plan for Ukraine³ involved 120 mayors and 135 local councillors, including heads of local councils, who strengthened their institutional and leadership capacities; and 148 young local leaders who were inspired to get further engaged at local level. Local initiatives implemented by participants following the events are being monitored and the good practices identified will be further disseminated.

² Congress members and experts who shared their experience with the participants were from Albania, Armenia, Finland, Georgia, Italy, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Poland, Serbia, Slovenia, Switzerland, the United Kingdom, in addition to members of the Ukrainian delegation to the Congress.

³ 7 workshops – Mayors leaders for change; 3 workshops – Councillors: everyday actors of local democracy; 7 seminars – Young local leaders: driving force of local democracy.

The Congress will organise similar activities and networking events until the summer 2017, as well as thematic roundtables to discuss future legislation, in co-operation with national associations of local and regional authorities. In addition, a call for proposals for mayors involved in the project is about to be launched. The selected municipalities will benefit from expert support, peer reviews and a small grant to implement local initiatives aimed at enhancing transparency and accountability.

EU/CoE programmatic co-operation framework for the Eastern Partnership countries

Since the beginning of 2015, and within the thematic programme V.2 on “*Strengthening institutional frameworks for local governance*”, the Congress⁴ has worked towards further establishment of a transparent, reliable and efficient local self-government, in line with the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, in Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine.⁵

The Congress activities in the region support the on-going process of local government reform and place ethics and transparency at the forefront of its work with local elected representatives as leaders for change. Peer exchanges at country-specific and regional levels enabled 60 local elected representatives from Armenia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, Ukraine and Belarus to identify and apply effective tools and methodologies to enhance local governance, to develop citizen-oriented policies and work in a more inclusive manner. Twelve municipalities from Armenia, Georgia, Moldova and Ukraine were selected in December 2016 to implement local initiatives on efficiency, accountability and integrity in local governance. Joint grants agreements with the Council of Europe have been signed on 1st March 2017. These municipalities will receive support through coaching and peer reviews.

In addition, following the 3rd meeting of the Community of practice on local democracy in the Eastern partnership countries on 2 March 2017, concrete proposals for additional country-specific activities were put forward.⁶ Thematic roundtables will be organised in partnership with the national association of local authorities: in Georgia on citizen participation, and in particular the general assemblies of settlements; and in Moldova on local public finance and financial autonomy. These activities will enable a better response to, and implementation of, Congress monitoring recommendations and roadmaps.

South-Med Partnership

Following the visits to Tunis and Rabat in November 2016, the Congress elaborated a South-Mediterranean Partnership programme, to enable local and regional authorities in the countries of the southern Mediterranean to benefit from the Congress’s expertise and the experience of its members.

With an initial focus on Morocco and Tunisia, the South-Med Partnership was approved by the Congress Bureau at its meeting in Nicosia, Cyprus, on 10 February 2017. It sets out five priority areas for co-operation:

- enhancing political dialogue and promoting decentralised co-operation between local and regional authorities on the two sides of the Mediterranean, in the context of the countries’ potential accession to Partner for Local Democracy status of the Congress;
- legislative assistance and expertise in the Congress’s areas of responsibility, in particular in drafting and implementing legislation concerning decentralisation and local and regional governance, as well as assistance with the electoral process and, where applicable, observing local and regional elections;
- awareness-raising and training for local and regional elected representatives and their staff through the development of specific programmes;
- strengthening capacities of associations of local and regional authorities;
- supporting the development of participatory democracy, with a particular focus on the role of young people, women and civil society.

⁴ In partnership with the Directorate General of Democracy and its Centre of Expertise for local government reform.

⁵ Since Belarus is not member of the Council of Europe, it is not a signatory of the European Charter for Local Self-Government.

⁶ The Community of practice on local democracy in the Eastern partnership countries gathers together representatives of national associations of local authorities, experts and civil society who share their knowledge, experience and know-how.

At its meetings on 1 December 2016 and on 10 February 2017, the Congress Bureau appointed Piero Fassino (Italy, SOC) as Spokesperson on the South-Mediterranean Partnership and Michail Angelopoulos (Greece, EPP/CCE), Xavier Cadoret (France, SOC) and Artur Torres Pereira (Portugal, EPP/CCE) as substitute spokespersons.

During its 32nd session, the Congress hosted high-level delegations from Morocco and Tunisia, made up of representatives of local and regional authorities and their associations, government ministries, national parliaments and constitutional bodies. The purpose of their visit was to renew political dialogue; introduce the delegations to the work of the Congress and allow them to establish contact with its members, in the perspective of the status of Partner for Local Democracy; and discuss possible cooperation projects in the field of local and regional governance in those countries.

The delegations had an exchange of views with Congress members and meetings the Congress President and the President of the Chamber of Local Authorities, Chairs of Committees, and the spokespersons on the South-Med Partnership. Mohamed Boudra, President of the Moroccan Association of Presidents of Communal Councils (AMPCC), and Mokhtar Hammami, Director General of Local Authorities at Tunisia's Ministry of Local Affairs and the Environment took the floor in the plenary session to present the regionalisation and decentralisation processes in their countries and the challenges for their local and regional authorities. In addition, Saloua Demnati, President of the Committee on Cooperation, Partnership and Moroccans worldwide in the Regional Council of Tanger-Tetouan-Al Hoceima (Morocco), intervened in the Chamber of Regions on the topic of border regions facing migration flows.

As a result of bilateral meetings and discussions, several specific projects were identified and will be pursued, aimed at strengthening the capacities of national associations of local authorities, training capacities and citizen participation, as well as in the field of electoral and legislative assistance.

The Congress also reaffirmed its readiness to observe local elections in Tunisia scheduled for December 2017, at the invitation of Tunisian authorities.

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: 32ST Session (28-30 March 2017)

I. **Agenda:**

<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016806f9e11>

II. **Summary of reports:**

<https://rm.coe.int/CoERMPublicCommonSearchServices/DisplayDCTMContent?documentId=09000016807012ca>

III. **List of Resolutions and Recommendations adopted at the 32st Session of the Congress**

Resolutions adopted:

- Resolution 410 (2017) - **Verification of new members' credentials and new appointment procedures**
- Resolution 411 (2017) - **From reception to integration: the role of local and regional authorities facing migration**
- Resolution 412 (2017) - **Recurring issues based on assessments resulting from Congress monitoring and election observation missions (reference period 2010-2016)**
- Resolution 413 (2017) - **Comparative analysis on the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 47 member States**
- Resolution 414 (2017) - **Forever young? The role of youth policies and youth work at local and regional levels in supporting young people's transition to autonomy and working life**
- Resolution 415 (2017) - **Charter of European Political Parties for a Non-Racist Society (Revised)**
- Resolution 416 (2017) - **Fact-finding mission on the situation of local elected representatives in Turkey**
- Resolution 417 (2017) - **Open data for better public services**
- Resolution 418 (2017) - **Revision of the Rules and Procedures of the Congress**

Recommendations adopted:

- Recommendation 393 (2017) - **The budget and resources of the Congress for the next biennium (2018-2019)**
- Recommendation 394 (2017) - **From reception to integration: the role of local and regional authorities facing migration**
- Recommendation 395 (2017) - **Recurring issues based on assessments resulting from Recurring issues based on assessments resulting from (reference period 2010-2016)**
- Recommendation 396 (2017) - **Local and regional democracy in Finland**
- Recommendation 397 (2017) - **Fact-finding mission on the situation of local elected representatives in Turkey**
- Recommendation 398 (2017) - **Open data for better public services**
- Recommendation 399 (2017) - **Observation of local elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina (2 October 2016)**
- Recommendation 400 (2017) - **Local democracy in the Republic of Malta**
- Recommendation 401 (2017) - **Local democracy in Estonia**
- Recommendation 402 (2017) - **Local democracy in Iceland**

Appendix 2: Communication of Congress President Gudrun Mosler-Törnström - 28 March 2017



Last October, I received from the hands of the outgoing President, Jean-Claude Frécon, the relay baton of the presidency of the Congress, in the spirit of an action collectively led by the successive presidents. I will take up again this metaphor of the relay race that he developed when presenting the results of his mandate and in my turn, in October 2018, I will pass the baton to my successor. But what is this relay made of? Above all, it is the conviction that local and regional authorities are responsible for carrying out a considerable share of public action in our States. And to be able

to carry out this action in an effective and beneficial way for all citizens, communities need the appropriate means, that is to say the appropriate budgets, competences, laws and legal protection.

In short, I am convinced, and I want to share this conviction with you, that our role is important to our societies, that we must carry it on the ground with dynamism and enthusiasm, and that this is what brings us here together, in our Assembly. But let us be realistic, we have not all arrived at the same point in our respective countries. Some countries are more advanced than others in terms of the quality of local and regional public action, but whatever the situation may be, I remain convinced that we share the same view of the usefulness of our action and its necessity. For if we, members of the Congress, do not have this conviction, what is our purpose?

I sometimes find a lack of commitment on the part of some delegations to defend their own prerogatives vis-à-vis the central governments and I would like to reiterate today, at the opening of this first session in 2017, that we are the representatives of the two hundred thousand territorial communities and not of their governments. Certainly we work closely with central governments and we will continue to do so, but we are not here to represent our governments. We are the representatives of local and regional governments, serving the citizens. It is this conviction that should act as our compass.

Dear colleagues, I ask you sincerely and solemnly: be relentless activists in favour of the self-governance of cities and regions. The Europe of democracy and the Europe of values are in danger. Jean-Claude Frécon, in his speech last March, said that "the clouds are gathering over Europe". He was making a very pessimistic, but also very realistic, diagnosis of the situation in our member States and, in particular, the situation of local and regional democracy. When I see elected mayors arrested and replaced by civil servants, when I see powers transferred to the central government on the pretext of saving money, when the wind of recentralisation blows, I feel that the great ambition that is ours, the one we have been defending for exactly 60 years within the Council of Europe, is undermined.

But this is not an inescapable fate, dear colleagues, and this is the meaning I want to give to my chairmanship. Nothing is written in stone and everything is possible, It simply depends on our ability to mobilise and invest ourselves in order to convince our capitals, in order to convince the Committee of Ministers here in Strasbourg that the crises we are going through can be overcome by collective, concerted and concrete action to which we can and must contribute.

Local and regional authorities have an eminently strategic role to play in all our States. How can they be convinced if we in Congress are not the enthusiastic bearers of this message?

Dear Colleagues, I invite you to mobilise against any form of retreat of local self-government and any form of defeatism. We must and we can reverse the trend in order to continue to make progress towards local and regional self-government and, by doing so, we will make a contribution, I believe, to the democratic stability of our continent.

Appendix 3: Communication of Ioannis Kasoulides, Minister for foreign affairs of Cyprus, Chair of the Committee of Ministers



Madame President, members of the Congress, ladies and gentlemen,

It is a particular pleasure for me to address you here today on the occasion of the 60th anniversary of your Congress. I welcome the opportunity to have a dialogue with you to present the priorities of the Cypriot Chairmanship and provide information on some of the political issues which have retained the attention of the Committee of Ministers in the last months.

Before doing so, I would like to extend a warm welcome to the representatives of Morocco and Tunisia who are attending your Session today for the first time. As a country which has close historical and cultural ties with its neighbours from the Mediterranean basin, Cyprus is very pleased that the Council of Europe has developed a fruitful partnership with Morocco and Tunisia.

It was a great pleasure for Cyprus to host the Bureau of the Congress in Nicosia on 10 February. Madame President, I was particularly delighted to receive you at the Ministry. This event provided a good opportunity to promote the work of the Congress in Cyprus, as well as to enhance the relationship and co-operation between local authorities in Cyprus and the Congress.

The meeting of the Bureau was preceded by a Conference on “Inter-municipal cooperation and good governance: Cyprus and European experience”, organised in co-operation with the Centre of Expertise for Local Government and the European Committee on Democracy and Governance. The Conference allowed for exchanges on good practices on local government reform and the presentation of the Inter-municipal Co-operation capacity building tool developed by the Council. It was a very useful exchange, as Cyprus is currently considering local government reform, and very pertinent following the adoption by the Congress of its Recommendation on Local Democracy in Cyprus last October. Another International Conference is being held this week in Limassol on the theme “Towards a new governance of diversity: building on successful local experiences” which I hope will give rise to some practical conclusions.

Distinguished Members of the Congress,

We are currently in a changing and uncertain world, facing strong, though not unprecedented, challenges to our collective European achievements. At this time, it is important for Europe to stand fast, firmly rooted in our common values. To do so, we must work together, fostering dialogue, synergies and cooperation at all levels of government so as to ensure the maximum impact of this Organisation’s core mission.

I note that this resolve is reflected in the priorities of the Cypriot Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, as well as in the priorities adopted by the Congress for the period 2017-2020. Our programmes have similar axes on deepening on the values of the Council of Europe, bolstering inter-institutional co-operation, and enhancing relations with the countries in our vicinity. We have expressed our determination to work for building inclusive societies; to fight extremism, terrorism and xenophobia; to encourage democratic citizenship and participation, at all levels of government. I welcome the continued co-operation between the Committee of Ministers and the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and I am particularly pleased to be able to hold this dialogue with you today.

It is the strong conviction of the Cypriot Chairmanship that the challenges currently before Europe can only be addressed by upholding the pillars upon which the Council of Europe is founded -

safeguarding democracy, promoting human rights and fundamental freedoms and upholding the rule of law. In this perspective, **strengthening democratic security** is the underlying theme of the priorities of the Chairmanship of Cyprus. The **enhancement of democratic security** in Europe is a *sine qua non*. We need to invest in stable and democratic institutions, transparent and fair processes, pluralistic and inclusive societies that foster tolerant and democratically active citizens.

To that end, the priority of the Congress to enhance the quality of local and regional democracy, including by raising awareness of human rights at local and regional level and promoting ethics and transparency, are particularly important and necessary. I would like to commend the specific priority the Congress has attributed to preventing corruption at local and regional level, as indeed very topical and important, in restoring public trust in governments.

Strengthening democratic security in Europe is crucial, not least in the light of the series of bloody terrorist attacks which we have witnessed over the last months, and indeed years. Last week we witnessed the horrific terrorist attack in London. In a public statement which I made in my capacity as Chair of the Committee of Ministers, I strongly condemned it and underlined that “this tragedy confirms once again the need for our democracies to stand firm against terrorism with full respect for the rule of law. We must also ensure that our values of human rights and tolerance prevail in our societies over the hate that terrorists seek to diffuse.” The numerous terrorist attacks which have taken place in an outside Europe and which have claimed a lot of victims, require us to act with even greater determination. This remains a priority for the Committee of Ministers, which is currently updating its *Guidelines for the support of the victims of terrorism*, with a view to their adoption during the Ministerial Session in May in Nicosia.

The Council of Europe has indeed developed several tools for strengthening international co-operation in the fight against terrorism, the most recent being the *Protocol on Foreign Terrorist Fighters*. We hope that it will soon have enough ratifications to allow for its entry into force.

Recently, we have also seen unprecedented manifestations of violent terrorist attacks against monuments of cultural significance. The Chairmanship of Cyprus attaches great importance to the protection of cultural heritage. The terrorists’ aim is both to raise funds for their terrorist activities, through the illicit trafficking of artefacts, and to uproot the cultural and ethnological connection of the local population from their land. However, such manifestations constitute an attack on the shared history and cultural identity of humanity as a whole and render our collective determined reaction more compelling. We therefore welcome another important development in combating terrorism, which is the preparation by the Organisation of a *new Convention On Offences Relating To Cultural Property*. This will be the first international treaty on criminal measures and sanctions against unlawful activities in the field of cultural heritage, which we hope will be adopted at the next session of the Committee of Ministers in Nicosia on 19 May. During its Chairmanship, Cyprus has organised a number of events in Strasbourg, New York, London and other fora, to promote the Convention and encourage accession to this instrument.

In furthering the priority of the protection of cultural heritage, Cyprus is pleased to host the launch of the European Cultural Heritage Strategy for the 21st Century which will take place in Limassol on 6 to 7 April 2017.

Building synergies is necessary in fostering democratic security. The challenges I referred to earlier reach beyond our borders, and it is therefore crucial that we continue to cultivate our neighbourhood policy and continue to enhance our cooperation with our international partners, in the interest of security for all. The debate you had yesterday on South-Mediterranean co-operation was very timely, and I am sure the dialogue will continue in a constructive and concrete manner beyond the session this week. Cyprus has taken the opportunity of the Chairmanship to invite our Southern neighbours to various events that it has organised, such as the Ministerial Meeting of Ministers of Education on creating a culture for democracy. We will also host the *Fifth Intercultural Workshop on Democracy* organised by the Venice Commission, with the participation of our Southern partners.

With regard to international organisations, I would make a specific mention that 2017 marks the 10th anniversary of the Memorandum of Understanding which gave a new impetus to the cooperation between the Council of Europe and the European Union. This co-operation has been particularly fruitful, both from a political and a technical standpoint, and has allowed for a high number of activities

to take place, in pursuit of our common goals. I am sure that co-operation will continue to go from strength to strength in the future.

A further related matter considered by the Committee of Ministers, concerns the fight against radicalisation leading to extremism, an area in which the Congress is playing an active role, primarily through the strategy on *preventing radicalisation and manifestations of hate at grass-roots level*. I would like to encourage you in this important work, as it is at the grassroots level that this problem has to be addressed primarily.

An important tool in this fight is the development of democratic culture and the education of democratic citizens. These aspects have been addressed at the Ministerial Conference of the Ministers of Education, which took place in Nicosia, on 23-24 March 2017.

The Ministers of Education also had the opportunity to discuss valuing diversity and dialogue in learning, as well as the integration of migrants through education. Migration on a large scale and refugee flows is one of the issues that Europe has had to deal with in recent years. We must address it in full respect of our common values and commitments, bearing in mind the need to protect vulnerable groups in our society. I therefore welcome the theme that you have chosen for your work in 2017, which is “Decentralised policies for the successful integration of refugees,” and the adoption of “building safe and inclusive societies that respect diversity” as a priority for the period 2017-2020.

I would take this opportunity to inform you that in early April, the Committee of Ministers will be examining a draft Council of Europe Action Plan on protecting refugee and migrant children in Europe. I hope that the measures taken by all the stakeholders concerned in implementing this Action Plan will further the protection of the many children who are victims of the circumstances in which they find themselves.

Looking to fostering inclusive, tolerant and democratic societies, the Chairmanship of Cyprus attaches great importance to youth empowerment and participation. I welcome the Congress commitment to encouraging young people – through the youth delegates here in this hall, but also through its activities.

The Cypriot Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers considers it very important to establish the conditions which will enable everyone, without discrimination, to have full access to fundamental rights and freedoms. We are particularly concerned about helping to improve the quality of life of persons with disabilities and increasing the possibilities for them to take an active part in the life of the community. I am therefore very pleased that the new Council of Europe Disability Strategy to cover the period 2017 to 2023 has just been launched in Nicosia.

Finally, I welcome the fact that the fight against anti-Gypsyism is on your agenda this afternoon. In this respect I can inform you that a progress report on the implementation of the Thematic Action Plan on the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers will soon be examined by the Committee of Ministers. This is an area where responsibilities lie heavily with local and regional authorities and I applaud the efforts already made by many municipalities. However these efforts must continue as there is still a long way to go to ensure that Roma and Travellers can live their lives with dignity, without discrimination and with full access to their fundamental rights.

Ladies and gentlemen,

Let me now move on to a number of political matters which have featured prominently on the agenda of the Committee of Ministers, since Cyprus took over the chairmanship. One of these is the crisis situation in Turkey resulting from the failed coup d'état of July last year. In February, the Committee of Ministers heard from the Minister of Justice of Turkey on the intended Constitutional amendments and the measures to be adopted by Turkey in response to Council recommendations. Our aim is to assist the Turkish authorities to overcome the difficulties the country is facing, while ensuring compliance with our common standards with regard to human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The debate which you will have on the situation of local democracy in Turkey later today is of particular relevance in this context.

With regard to the conflict in Georgia, the Committee is continuing to closely monitor the situation on the ground, in particular by means of the valuable information provided by the Secretary General in his regular reports.

I hope that 2017 will be a year of progress in the settlement of the conflict in Georgia, as well as in the other geographical areas of the Council of Europe where there are conflicts and tensions. Of course I am thinking first and foremost of Ukraine, but also of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and of the situation in the Transnistrian region of the Republic of Moldova.

Ladies and gentlemen,

I should like to conclude on a very positive note which is of course to congratulate the Congress on the 10th anniversary of the European Local Democracy Week (ELDW). This has been a real success story and I am sure it is an event that will continue to thrive. Today's political climate is one of uncertainty. Many are disenchanted with democratic processes, with politics, with politicians. Populism is on the rise. It is therefore more important than ever that democratic participation is promoted and fostered at grassroots level, for it is local government which is closest to our citizens and which has the capacity to strengthen or restore trust and enthusiasm in our democratic processes. I wish you all every success for this year's special edition of the Local Democracy Week!

Thank you for your attention. I am at your disposal to reply to your questions.

Appendix 4: Youth Delegates



Youth delegates	Country	Activity/profession	Organisation/structure
QEJVANI Olta	Albania	Lecturer Coordinator Legal Consultant	"Aleksander Moisiu" University, Durrës "Children Today" Centre
VILA PORTE Miquel	Andorra	Student / Investment analyst	UOC
HARUTYUNYAN Arpina	Armenia	Social Activist, Head of Procurement Unit	Gitec Consult GmbH
TIEFENBACHER Wanda	Austria	Research Associate	European Training and Research Centre for Human Rights and Democracy
ZEYNALOVA Aysun	Azerbaijan	Deputy Chairwoman	National Assembly of Youth Organizations of the Republic of Azerbaijan
ISERIC Harun	Bosnia and Herzegovina	Student	European Law Students' Association Sarajevo
TSOLOVA Iva	Bulgaria	Bulgarian Youth Delegate to the United Nations	United Nations Association of Bulgaria
KLASIC Nikola	Croatia	Law student	Student Union Zagreb
FILIPPOU Rene	Cyprus	Public Relations Officer	Cyprus Youth Diplomacy
JORDANOVA Anna	Czech Republic	Student, volunteer, young politician	Chairwoman of the Young Democrats (Mladí demokraté) for the district Brno (a national organisation of students and young people)

MATACHE Narcis George	Denmark	Student/Youth Leader/Local Politician	Aalborg University / European Youth Denmark / Danish Social Democrat Party
TSEKANINA Arina	Estonia	Project Manager	NGO VitaTiim
PAAVILAIONEN Linda-Riina	Finland	Secretary General	Young Christian Democrats
BAILHACHE Edouard	France	Student	none
ENDELADZE Diana	Georgia	Member / Intern / Student	Young Diplomatic Club of Georgia/ Transparency International Georgia/ Tbilisi State University
SOSA POPOVIC Lara	Germany	Student	Universität Konstanz
BAKIRIS Konstantinos	Greece	Student	AEGEE Europe European Student's Forum
VOLOM Andras	Hungary	Youth Delegate of Hungary to the UN / Student	Hungarian UN Youth Delegate Program Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade of Hungary
ISEBARN Tinna	Iceland	Secretary General	The Icelandic Youth Council
O'DRISCOLL Liam	Ireland	Student and Volunteer	Foróige, the National Youth Development Organisation
MILLAURO Francesca	Italy	Councilor and Student	Comune di Agira
PLATE Kristiana	Latvia	Student	NGO "Club "The House" Youth of United Europe"
BARANOVAITE Kristina	Lithuania	Project Leader	NGO Let's Do It (DAROM)
QUARING Manuel	Luxembourg	Student	National Youth Council of Luxembourg
STICEA Mihaela	Republic of Moldova	Student	The Moldovan State Institute of International Relations
MRVALJEVIC Darko	Montenegro	Project manager	Municipality of Danilovgrad
VAN DER SLUIJS Laurens	Netherlands	Directive Board Member (Treasurer)	European Student Think Tank
HALAND Amanda Louise Bolann	Norway	Student	Bergen Cathedral School
GALINSKA Malgorzata	Poland	Student Polish teacher for foreigners	Polskie Forum Migracyjne

FERREIRA Frederica	Portugal	Student of Philosophy Member of a local youth council President of a youth association	Youth Council of Póvoa de Varzim Associação Ethos, Pathos, Logos
HOLOTA Anamaria	Romania	Student	Forumul Tinerilor din România (The Youth Forum of Romania).
PHILIPPOV Alexey	Russian Federation	NGO Leader Student CEO	Youth Inner Power/Plekhanov Russian University of Economics
MJALKOVIC Predreg	Serbia	Lawyer Activist	Pančevo City Administration
MIHALKO Metus	Slovak Republic	Member	Rada mládeže Prešovského kraja
MATJASIC Matic	Slovenia	Student	City Youth council of Maribor ("Mestni Madinski svet Maribor")
BIOSCA ALONSO Alba	Spain	Volunteer in Model EU in Romania University Student	NGOs: Càlam and Nexes Interculturals de Joves Both
GUSTAFSSON HALL Gabriel Alexander	Sweden	Junior medical doctor	Junior Medical Doctors Union of Gotland, Sweden
URECH Frederic	Switzerland	Student & SEO Content Manager (part-time)	Jugendsession Session des Jeunes Sessione dei Giovani
JOVANOVSKA Dragana	"The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"	Secretary general of Center for Intercultural Dialogue	Center for Intercultural Dialogue (CID)
POLAT Basak	Turkey	Teaching assistant	Association for the Support of Contemporary Living, Six Dots Foundation for the Blind
SYMONOVA Mariia	Ukraine	International relations/communications and GR specialist. Manager in the CSO.	Eastern Partnership Civil Society Forum Clean universities anti-corruption campaign; Reanimation Package of Reforms (Youth Policy group)
WEAVER Christian	United Kingdom	Barrister	Nottingham Law School / The Honourable Society of Lincoln's Inn

Appendix 5: Declaration of mayors and elected local and regional representatives of Council of Europe member states against anti-gypsyism



At the 32nd Congress Session a “Declaration of Mayors and Elected Local and Regional Representatives of Council of Europe Member States against anti-Gypsyism” was presented by John Warmisham the Congress Spokesperson for Roma Issues. The Congress and the Alliance call mayors and elected representatives of local and regional authorities to sign this Declaration, to affirm their explicit opposition to anti-Gypsyism.

I, AS MAYOR / ELECTED LOCAL AND REGIONAL REPRESENTATIVE,

Taking note of the call made by the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities and by the Special Representative of the Secretary General of the Council of Europe on Roma Issues to all local elected representatives to take a clear stand against anti-Gypsyism,

Having regard to the international human rights instruments signed and/or ratified by Council of Europe member States, in particular the European Convention on Human Rights (ECHR) and its Protocols, the (Revised) European Social Charter, the Framework Convention for the Protection of National Minorities and the Declaration and Plan of Action on combating racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism and intolerance ("Vienna Declaration") adopted by the World Conference on Human Rights in 1993, to the Strasbourg Declaration on Roma (2010) and the Thematic Action Plan for the Inclusion of Roma and Travellers by the Council of Europe;

Having regard to Article 1 of the United Nations Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), which defines racial discrimination as “[...] any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, colour, descent or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise on an equal footing of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other field of public life [...]”;

Taking into consideration General Policy Recommendation (2011) no. 13 of the European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI) on combating anti-Gypsyism and the discrimination of Roma;

Having regard to Resolution 333 (2011) of the Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe on Roma inclusion as a challenge for local and regional authorities, to Resolution 366 (2014) on the empowerment of Roma youth through participation, to Resolution 403 (2016) on the situation of Roma and Travellers in the context of rising extremism, xenophobia and the refugee crisis in Europe and to the Final Declaration of the Summit of Mayors (2011);

Recognising that anti-Gypsyism is a specific form of racism;

Bearing in mind that, according to these international human rights instruments, political freedoms must not be allowed to be abused to exploit, cause, or initiate prejudice on the grounds of race, colour, ethnic origin or nationality or for the purpose of seeking to gain the sympathy of the electorate for prejudice on such grounds;

Being aware of the special tasks and responsibilities of local and regional authorities as actors in the democratic political process, providing a platform for and integrating different views into the process of political decision-making, thereby enabling society to resolve conflicts of interest and of opinion between various social groups through dialogue rather than through opting out and conflict; and selecting representatives at various levels for active participation in the political process;

Convinced that the representation of ethnic minority groups, especially Roma and Travellers, in the political process is an integral part of the democratic process, since political parties are, or should strive to be, a reflection of society;

COMMIT MYSELF TO:

- defending human rights and democratic principles and to reject all forms of discrimination, violence, harassment, incitement to hatred and hate speech against Roma and Travellers and any other form of anti-Gypsyism;
- refusing to display, to publish or to have published, to distribute or to endorse in any way views and positions which stir up or incite, or may reasonably be expected to stir up or to incite, hostility or division between people of different ethnic or national origins, and to deal firmly with any anti-Roma and anti-Traveller sentiments and behaviour within our own ranks;
- refraining from any forms of political alliance or co-operation at all levels with any political parties or local and regional authorities which incite or attempt to stir up racial or ethnic prejudices and racial hatred;
- striving for the fair representation of Roma and Travellers at all levels of democracy with a special responsibility for the head of the local and regional authority to stimulate and support the recruitment of candidates from these groups for political functions at local and regional level;
- further pledging to take appropriate action to ensure that all persons working for local or regional authorities are aware of and will act at all times in accordance with the above principles.

Appendix 6: Partnership status granted by the Bureau of the Congress

Organisation	Type of status and reference to the Congress Rules and Procedures	Date of the Bureau's decision
Assembly of European Regions (AER)	Statutory Partner with the Congress (Rule 68)	10 February 2017
Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)	Statutory Partner with the Congress (Rule 68)	10 February 2017
Association of Kosovo Municipalities (AKM)	Guest Observer with the Chamber of Local Authorities (Rule 71)	10 February 2017
Lev Sapieha Foundation (Belarus)	Guest Observer with the Congress (Rule 71)	10 February 2017
Council for Co-operation of Local Self-Governance Bodies under the Council of the Republic of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus	Guest Observer with the Congress (Rule 71)	10 February 2017
China International Friendship Cities Association (CIFCA)	Guest Observer with the Congress (Rule 71)	10 February 2017

As part of its monitoring of local and regional democracy in Europe, the Congress maintains a regular dialogue with member states of the Council of Europe. The Committee of Ministers, which includes the 47 Foreign Ministers of these states, the Conference of Ministers responsible for local and regional authorities, as well as its Steering Committees – like the one on Local and Regional Democracy (CDLR) – are partners in this regard.

Several times a year, the President and the Secretary General of the Congress provide the representatives of the 47 member states in the Committee of Ministers with a record of its activities and hold an exchange of views.



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The Council of Europe is the continent's leading human rights organisation. It comprises 47 member states, 28 of which are members of the European Union. The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities is an institution of the Council of Europe, responsible for strengthening local and regional democracy in its 47 member states. Composed of two chambers – the Chamber of Local Authorities and the Chamber of Regions – and three committees, it brings together 648 elected officials representing more than 200 000 local and regional authorities.