



THE CONGRESS OF
LOCAL AND REGIONAL AUTHORITIES
COUNCIL OF EUROPE

ACTIVITY REPORT

Communication by the
Congress Secretary General

at the 1154th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies
(April 2012 – November 2012)

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Activity Report of the Congress

Communication by Andreas Kiefer, Congress Secretary General at the 1154th meeting of the Ministers' Deputies (April 2012 – November 2012)

INTRODUCTION

Since the last communication to the Deputies in May 2012, the Congress has continued the implementation of its priorities in the promotion and strengthening of local and regional democracy, the expansion of political and institutional dialogue and the development of cooperation and partnerships.

As part of the monitoring of the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-government in the Member States, the Congress adopted recommendations on local and regional democracy in "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" and Azerbaijan and carried out visits in six countries - Ukraine, Hungary, Spain, Georgia, Denmark and Ireland. It observed the local elections in Serbia, Armenia and Bosnia and Herzegovina. It has been actively involved in the action plan of the Council of Europe on Ukraine and the development of an action plan for Armenia. It has increased its cooperation programme with Albania - the launch of the project will take place by the end of 2012 with the financial support of Switzerland. It also participated in the action plans for Morocco and Tunisia in the framework of the Council of Europe policy towards neighbouring regions. It developed the project on the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion and adopted a Pact of cities and regions against sexual violence against children in the context of the One in Five Campaign.

The objective of the Congress is to ensure that activities are followed up with concrete actions on the ground. To this end, it continues to develop operational post-monitoring activities and cooperation with its partners.

The Congress has included its own political and structural reform in the broader context of the reform of the Council of Europe. This reform process is based on an ongoing assessment of the impact of its recommendations and the concrete added value of its activities in the lives of the local authorities which it represents. This process has allowed it to position itself as an active and determined partner both within the Organisation and with regard to the Member States.

The new Presidency of the Congress, elected in October 2012, confirmed these orientations. In his first speech at the 23rd session, the newly-elected President, Herwig Van Staa, expressed his determination to implement the Priorities 2013-2016 adopted at the same session, to help improve the quality of democracy and human rights at local and regional level and to assist local authorities to fulfill their duties to their citizens, especially in the current economic and financial crisis.

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1. The political agenda of the Congress

- **Conference on the European citizen's initiative** (Salzburg, 3-4 May 2012)

The Congress Secretary General took part in the first Conference on European Democracy (EUDEM). Representatives of the Committee of the Regions, the Economic and Social Council of the EU, experts, researchers and representatives of civil society met in a first interdisciplinary conference to discuss the implications of the new instrument of citizens' initiatives provided for by the Lisbon Treaty.

- **Communication to the Ministers' Deputies** (Strasbourg, 9 May 2012)

The Congress Secretary General addressed the Ministers' Deputies in the framework of the institutional dialogue and presented a written communication (CG(22)20). He underlined the more efficient and implementation-oriented monitoring of local and regional democracy undertaken in member states as a result of the Congress' recent reform, the monitoring reports and recommendations serving now as a starting point in the Congress' post-monitoring co-operation activities. This takes place bilaterally and with Congress contributions to Council of Europe co-operation programmes in particular concerning Albania, Ukraine, Roma issues and projects in Morocco and Tunisia.

- **122nd Ministerial Session of the Committee of Ministers** (Strasbourg, 23 May 2012)

Congress President Keith Whitmore presented the Congress' involvement in the Council of Europe's policy towards neighbouring regions, in particular towards Morocco and Tunisia. He underlined that the Congress is pursuing two types of intervention: immediate assistance to help establish an adequate legal framework for a real local and regional democracy, and support for initiatives on democratic governance and co-operation with newly elected local representatives.

- **Official visit to Croatia** (4-6 June 2012)

President Whitmore, accompanied by the Secretary General of the Congress, conducted this official visit upon the invitation of the Croatian Government. They held high-level meetings with, amongst others, the Deputy Prime Minister for Home, Foreign and European Policy, Neven Mimica, and Minister of Public Administration Arsen Bauk, with the reform of local and regional democracy in Croatia being one of the topics they discussed. In Dubrovnik, the main topic of discussion was the successful activities to prevent sexual violence against children implemented by Dubrovnik County (Zupanja) and Dubrovnik city, notably in the framework of the Council of Europe campaign '1 in 5'. Among the other items on the agenda were Roma inclusion, cross-border co-operation, city diplomacy and the situation of local authorities in Croatia.

- **Official visit to Austria** (26-28 August 2012)

The President and the Secretary General met with the Chairman and the Vice-Chairman of the Austrian delegation to the Congress, the Chairman of the Austrian Association of municipalities, Helmut Mödlhammer, and held an exchange of views with the Child-Protection-Centre and the Commissioner for integration of the city of Salzburg. They had also a meeting with the President of the Salzburg region, Gabi Burstaller.

- **4th General meeting of the National Associations of Local and Regional Authorities** (Strasbourg, 13 September 2012)

Since 2006, this meeting takes place every two years to reinforce consultation and partnership between the Congress and the national associations. President Whitmore stressed the role of the national associations as an "early-warning system", being able to

draw attention to the challenges faced by local and regional authorities and raise alarm over possible problems in the implementation of the European Charter of Local Self-Government. To enhance this co-operation, the fourth General Meeting discussed plans for possible joint action in three fields in particular: the impact of the world financial recession on local and regional authorities, co-operation programmes with member states and with neighbouring non-member states of the Council of Europe, ethics, transparency and the fight against corruption for good local and regional governance. Participants made their contribution to the draft priorities of the Congress for 2013-2016, and held a debate on the concrete actions that the national associations and the local and regional authorities can conduct in the context of the Council of Europe 1 in 5 Campaign on the fight against sexual exploitation of children.

- **31st Council of Europe Conference of Ministers of Justice** (Vienna, 19-21 September 2012)

President Whitmore took part in this conference on the subject of “Responses of justice to urban violence”. He underlined that citizens expect effective action in their defence against violence first and foremost from local authorities. He said the Congress is convinced that the political and social response to urban violence must be fostering dialogue, building partnerships, engaging citizens – especially young people and minority groups.

- **9th Council of Europe Conference of Ministers Responsible for Youth** (St Petersburg, 24 September 2012).

The conference looked in particular at identifying innovative youth policies at a time when young Europeans are experiencing increasing challenges due to demographic changes and the current economic situation. The President of the Congress underlined that the active participation of young people in decisions and actions at local and regional levels is essential if more democratic, inclusive and prosperous societies are to be built.

- **25th General Assembly of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR)** (Cadiz, 27 September 2012)

A high-level Congress delegation, chaired by its President, took part in this General Assembly. President Whitmore said that the Congress is convinced that the way out of the crisis requires decentralisation, democracy and development. He presented the Council of Europe and the Congress initiatives to limit the impact of the financial and economic crisis on local and regional communities. The CEMR represents over 55 national associations of local or regional government from more than 40 countries. Participants were also informed about the recent developments of the current edition of the European Local Democracy Week.

- **World Forum for Democracy** (Strasbourg, 5-11 October 2012)

The Congress took an active part in the World Forum for Democracy, which welcomed leading international figures to identify new lines of action for strengthening democracy all over the world. Congress representatives, including its President and Secretary General as well as Leen Verbeek (Netherlands, SOC), Queen's Commissioner of the Province of Flevoland and representative of the Chamber of Regions and John Warmisham (United Kingdom, SOC), Councillor of Salford and coordinator of the European Local Democracy Week, Andrée Buchman (France, SOC), Regional Councillor of Alsace, Jean-Pierre Liouville (France, SOC), Vice-President of the Regional Council of Lorraine, Philippe Receveur (Switzerland, EPP/CD), Minister of the Environment of the Canton of Jura and expert in cross-border co-operation, participated in the plenary session and in various round tables and thematic conferences. At a debate on “democracy and globalisation”, the President called for a new model of participatory democracy, based on citizen participation and involving all residents – minorities, foreigners, and migrants – and providing them with direct access to institutions of power. He emphasised the crucial role of local and regional authorities in this new framework.

- **2nd Conference of Ministers Responsible for Social Cohesion** (Istanbul, 11 October 2012)

At this Conference, President Whitmore stressed that local and regional authorities have the primary responsibility for the well-being of their communities, and that social cohesion is essential for avoiding growing tensions between cultural groups at the local level. Speaking in support of the Council of Europe's "New Strategy for Social Cohesion", the President also praised the efforts of the Turkish authorities in signing the Council of Europe Convention on preventing and combating violence against women and domestic violence.

- **New Congress leadership elected** (Strasbourg, 16-17 October 2012)

The Congress voted-in its renewed leadership at its 23rd Session. Its new President is Herwig Van Staa (Austria, EPP/CD). It also elected sixteen Vice-Presidents, the Presidents of its two Chambers and the Presidents of the three Committees (see appendices).

- **Conference on "local communities in the European multi-level governance system"** (Bolzano, 25 October 2012)

The Congress was represented at this Conference of researchers in the field of federalism by its Secretary General who presented the role of the Congress in the implementation of the European Charter on Local Self-government. He stressed that the Congress's objective is to create a single, unified space of common standards in the field of local democracy in Europe and underlined the need to examine during monitoring exercises, the situation and relevance of present reservations to the Charter.

Albanian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers and territorial democracy
(May-November 2012)

By placing the promotion of local and regional democracy among the priorities of its Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers, Albania highlighted the importance of the local dimension for strengthening democracy in general and bringing the country closer to the rest of Europe. The programme on local democracy devised by Albania, with the active participation of the Congress has been structured around several conferences and events with the participation of the President and members of the Congress.

In addition to the Bureau meeting in Tirana on 14 June, followed by discussions between the Congress President and the President of Albania Bamir Topi, Prime Minister Sali Berisha and Parliament Speaker Jozefina Topalli, several seminars and conferences were organised in Tirana. These notably included a seminar on "The state of regionalisation in Albania: progress and challenges" on 27 July, a seminar on the "Role of local communities for the protection of human rights" on 6 September and an international seminar on 5 October on "Strengthening citizens' democratic participation in decision-making at local level" which launched the European Local Democracy week in Albania.

Furthermore, the Albanian Chairmanship organised a high-level conference on 30-31 October on "the role of decentralisation on the consolidation of democracy in Albania and European integration". This conference brought together representatives of the Albanian Government, members of Parliament, EU speakers and representatives of local and regional authorities in Albania and Europe, as well as from civil society, the business community and academics and donors. The Congress was represented by four of its members and its Secretary General, who took part in various thematic sessions.

Finally, the Albanian Chairmanship held a high-level conference on 9 November on "Diversity in Europe: a strength for the future" attended by Vice-President of the Congress, Helena Pihlajassaari (Finland, SOC), and its Secretary General. This conference was followed by a ceremonial handover of the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers to Andorra, which was attended by President Van Staa. The President welcomed the decision of the next Chair, together with the following chairmanships of Armenia and Austria, to also make the promotion of local and regional democracy their common priority, as Albania had.

2. Co-operation within the Council of Europe

In the spirit of the Council of Europe reform, the Congress embarked on increased dialogue and close co-operation with its institutional partners within the Organisation.

a. The intergovernmental sector

i. Action Plans

The Congress has included projects on local and regional democracy in the Council of Europe action plans for Albania, Armenia and Ukraine.

It contributes also to the new Council of Europe policy towards neighbouring regions and has established relations in the context of this co-operation with Morocco and Tunisia (see below, para.6 b).

ii. European Committee for Local and Regional Democracy (CDLR)

The newly elected President of the Congress, Herwig Van Staa, will meet the members of the CDLR at their meeting on 19-20 November and will discuss with them topics of common interest.

iii. Ad hoc Committee of Experts on Roma Issues (CAHROM)

The Congress is represented at meetings of the Committee by the Secretariat and its thematic rapporteur on the Roma / Travellers John Warmisham (UK, SOC). At the third meeting, from 22 to 25 May 2012 in Skopje and Ohrid, Mr Warmisham presented the state of implementation of the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma inclusion.

iv. Others

The Congress is also represented in the Committee of Ministers' Rapporteur groups such as the GR-DEM, the GR-EXT, the GR-H and the GR-SOC as well as in other Steering Committees and Committee of Experts of the Council of Europe - including the Steering Committee on Human Rights (CDDH), the European Steering Committee on Youth (CDEJ), the Steering Committee on cultural diversity and intercultural dialogue (CDDI), the European Committee for social cohesion (CDCS) and the Group of Specialists on child-friendly justice (CJ-S-CH) - through its thematic rapporteurs or its Secretariat.

b. The Parliamentary Assembly

The Congress continues to develop synergies with the various Council of Europe entities, in particular with the Parliamentary Assembly, in order to increase their co-operation in areas of common interest.

In the follow-up to the Kyiv Conference of Ministers responsible for local and regional authorities in 2011, discussions were held to coordinate future activities of the two assemblies with respect to citizen participation and the promotion of human rights at the local level.

The results of the European Best Practice Award for Coastal Towns were announced jointly by the PACE President and the President of the Congress, on 26 April 2012, at a ceremony during the Parliamentary Assembly session in Strasbourg (see below under 5.c. "highlighting good practices")

c. The Commissioner for Human Rights

The Congress has developed close relations with the Council of Europe's Commissioner for Human Rights in the fields of awareness raising and protection of human rights at local level. Informal consultations may, in particular, be held in the context of monitoring of local and regional democracy.

Commissioner Nils Muižnieks addressed the 23rd session of the Congress (October 2012). He said that local and regional authorities should be more actively involved in the protection of human rights by drawing attention to action to be taken, including on Roma inclusion, migration and the inclusion of human rights in budgeting in the context of austerity programmes.

d. The European Commission against Racism and Intolerance (ECRI)

The Congress followed the activities of the Commission, in particular the seminar with national specialised bodies to combat racism and racial discrimination (Strasbourg, 31 May-1 June 2012) and was represented in the 58th meeting of the Commission (Strasbourg, 19-22 June 2012) by its thematic rapporteur on the fight against racism at local and regional level Sherma Batson (UK, SOC).

e. The European Commission for Democracy through Law (The Venice Commission)

The Congress has an outstanding co-operation with the Venice Commission in particular in the field of election observation, the monitoring of the Charter and the programmes of co-operation with neighbouring regions.

It took part on 2-3 July in Tirana in a conference on the experiences by Council of Europe institutions and member countries in implementing the Venice Commission's Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters – adopted in 2002. The Congress representative Gudrun Mosler-Törnström (Austria, SOC), Vice-President of the State Parliament of Salzburg, underlined that the Code of Good Practice in Electoral Matters is a field guide and a source of information and inspiration for Congress observers. She demonstrated how the five principles of Europe's electoral heritage – universal, equal, free, secret and direct suffrage – are taken into account and followed-up by Congress reports and recommendations.

The Monitoring Committee has strengthened its co-operation with the Venice Commission on issues of local and regional democracy. Lars O. Molin (Sweden, EPP/CD), Chair of the Monitoring Committee, regularly represents the Congress at meetings of the Venice Commission. This gives him the opportunity to inform the Commission of the follow-up given by the authorities of the countries visited during the monitoring procedure to the opinions of the Venice Commission on local and regional democracy. Furthermore, these opinions are also taken into account by Congress rapporteurs during their visits and in recommendations adopted by the Congress.

The institutional co-operation activities with Morocco and Tunisia are conducted in close collaboration with the Venice Commission. The Congress has participated in several hearings and meetings of the Venice Commission with the National Constituent Assembly (ANC) of Tunisia on the draft Constitution. The Commission has also been involved in the discussions held by the Congress with the Moroccan Parliament on the draft law on advanced regionalisation.

f. Council of Europe Conference of INGOs

The Congress President took part in the roundtable on "Council of Europe bodies' 2012 Commitments on democracy" organised by the Conference of INGOs on 26 June in Strasbourg. He outlined the essential elements needed for a democratic model based on active participation and stressed that civil society organisations are key partners of local and regional authorities in building conditions to achieve participation.

The Conference of INGO's also participates in the European Local Democracy Week organised every year by the Congress.

3. Monitoring local and regional democracy

a. The monitoring activities

The activities relating to the monitoring of the European Charter of Local Self-Government are still a high priority for the Congress. The more frequent and more regular visits, since each member state is now to be visited and evaluated every five years, involve more political dialogue and co-operation with the states concerned.

The Congress also focuses on the evaluation of the implementation of its recommendations made in the framework of the monitoring and the setting up of new forms of co-operation to address specific problems raised during visits.

i. Adopted recommendations

During the **23rd Session** (October 2012), the Congress adopted two recommendations on local and regional democracy in the following countries:

- **"The former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia"** (17 October 2012)

The report and Recommendation 329 (2012) presented by the two co-rapporteurs Simon James (United Kingdom, ILDG) and Andrée Buchmann (France, SOC) evaluate the development of local and regional democracy in the country since the Congress' last recommendation in 2007. Overall, the Congress noted with satisfaction that the measures taken since the adoption of Recommendation 217 (2007) represent significant progress towards local democracy and decentralisation of higher quality, and to the proper functioning of the co-operation between municipalities and the central government. They note, however, the disparity of wealth and development between urban and rural communities and highlight the need to improve legislation regarding the competence of local authorities and financial equalisation.

- **Azerbaijan** (17 October 2012)

The report and Resolution 345 (2012) and Recommendation 326 (2012) presented by the co-rapporteurs Jos Wielen (Netherlands, EPP/CD) and Gudrun Mosler-Törnström (Austria, SOC), assess the evolution of local democracy in Azerbaijan since the monitoring report by the Congress in 2003. While the Congress welcomes the establishment of three national associations of local authorities, it regrets, however, that they do not have an active role in representing the interests of municipalities. In addition, the Congress noted that the recommendations addressed to national authorities in 2003 have not been implemented and that no timetable has been set for implementing them. In addition, the rapporteurs were very concerned about the failure to respect the majority of the provisions of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, ratified by Azerbaijan.

In its Resolution, the Congress requested its Bureau to consider inviting the Minister of Justice of Azerbaijan, in his capacity as Minister responsible for local government, to speak at

its October 2013 session to indicate the measures that the Government intends to take to implement the principles of the Charter. In addition, it invites its Monitoring Committee to organise urgently in Baku, a seminar on the application of the Charter in Azerbaijan in co-operation with national, local and regional authorities, NGOs working in the field of local democracy as well as to perform a follow-up visit mid-term to take stock of the situation of local and regional democracy in light of the adopted recommendation and assess progress in the meantime. The Congress finally asked the Committee of Ministers to consider the recommendation in the framework of its activities in Azerbaijan.

ii. Visits carried out

Since April 2012, the Congress has carried out six local and regional monitoring visits in the following member States:

- **Ukraine** (21-23 May 2012)

The Congress delegation led by Fabio Pellegrini (Italy, SOC) and Pascal Mangin (France, EPP/CD) carried out this third general monitoring visit to the country since it ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 1997. The delegation met the Mayor of Kyiv, Leonid Chernovetskyi, the Head of Kyiv City State Administration, Oleksandr Popov and members of his staff. Meetings were also held with local authorities' associations, with Municipal Councillors of the cities of Simferopol and Chernivtsi, with members of Ivano-Frankivsk Council and Region and with Ministers and Members of Parliament of the Autonomous Republic of Crimea. The delegation held a final exchange of views with Maryna Stavnychuk, Advisor to the President of Ukraine and Head of the Main Department of Constitutional and Legal Modernisation. The second part of the visit is scheduled for April 2013.

- **Hungary** (23-25 May 2012)

The Congress delegation led by Artur Torres Pereira (Portugal, EPP/CD) and Devrim Çukur (Turkey, SOC) carried out a first general monitoring visit to the country since it ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 1994. Meetings were held with the Hungarian delegation to the Congress and with representatives of local associations. An exchange of views with the Secretary of State for Municipal Affairs and with the President of the Constitutional Court also place, as well as meetings with Mayors and Municipal Councillors of the cities of Budapest, Gödöllő, Szentes and Szeged and with members of the National Parliament.

- **Spain** (5-8 June 2012)

The Congress delegation composed of two rapporteurs on local and regional democracy, Marc Cools (Belgium, ILDG) and Leen Verbeek (The Netherlands, SOC) took place at a time when Spanish authorities were considering modifying the basic legislation governing local authorities. The second part will take place in November 2012

- **Georgia** (11-13 June 2012)

The Congress delegation led by Ian Micallef (Malta, EPP/DC) and Helena Pihlajasaari (Finland, SOC) carried out the second general monitoring visit to the country since it ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government in 2004. The members of the delegation visited the Autonomous Republic of Adjara where they met the Head of the Government and the Minister of Finance, as well as the Mayors of Batumi, Kobulete, Khelvachuri and Shvakhevi. They also had an exchange of views with the judges of the Constitutional Court of Georgia in Batumi. The delegation met with the Georgian delegation to the Congress and the representatives of the National Association of Local Authorities, as well as with the President and members of the national parliament and the Mayors of Tbilisi and Rustavi.

- **Denmark** (3-5 October 2012)

The Congress Rapporteurs Julia Costa (Portugal, EPP/CD) and Jean-Pierre Liouville (France, SOC) held meetings in Copenhagen, Vallensbæk, Sorø and Maribo. They had meetings with the Minister of the Economy and the Interior, the Deputy Permanent Secretary of Finance, the Speaker of the Danish Parliament, the President of the Supreme Court, and representatives of Dragør and Lolland municipalities as well as the Zealand region, the Faeroe islands and Greenland. The report on the situation of local and regional democracy in Denmark will be submitted for approval at a meeting of the Congress's Monitoring Committee in 2013.

- **Ireland** (3-5 October 2012)

The Congress Rapporteurs Michael Cohen (Malta, SOC) and Merita Jegeni Yıldız (Turkey, EPP/CD) held meetings in Dublin, Nava and Cork. The delegation met with the Minister of Environment, Community and Local Government, the mayors of Dublin and Cork (county and city), councillors from Meath and Trim, and the Chief Justice of the Supreme Court. They also had an exchange of views with the national associations of local authorities and members of Parliament. The report on the situation of local and regional democracy in Ireland will be submitted for approval at a meeting of the Congress's Monitoring Committee in 2013.

iii. Post-monitoring activities

The Congress is determined to better assess the follow-up given to its recommendations in the framework of the monitoring of local and regional democracy in member States. It has started to organise specific activities in member States to step up dialogue with and between authorities and to assess progress made in respect of the conclusions of the monitoring.

It launched this new post-monitoring process on 4 September 2012 in Bosnia and Herzegovina with a high-level meeting entitled "Empowering local governments through legislative reform: recommendations by the Congress of the Council of Europe". The meeting chaired by Lars O. Molin (Sweden, EPP/CD), Chair of the Monitoring Committee and opened by the Mayor of Sarajevo, Alija Behmen aimed at discussing ways to best implement the Congress's recommendations made following the two monitoring visits to Bosnia and Herzegovina in 2011. Lars O. Molin stressed that the post-monitoring the Congress wants to establish is not some kind of supervision procedure, but a collective assessment work between peers (elected representatives and members of government) whether at national or local and regional level.

This meeting was preceded on 22 May 2012 in Sarajevo by a presentation by the Congress Secretary General on Congress monitoring activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina at a meeting of the Working Group on "Western Balkans" of the Committee of the Regions. The Congress proposes to contribute to the strengthening of the basis on local democracy in Bosnia and Herzegovina by assisting the authorities to revise or elaborate legislation related to local self-government, in particular by clarifying the distribution of competences, enhancing intergovernmental and inter-municipal co-operation and interaction, and by increasing provision of effective services oriented towards citizen satisfaction.

In this area in particular, the Congress works in close co-operation with the Council of Europe external offices.

b. Observation of local and regional elections

Since 2010, the Congress has been taking steps to widen the scope of its observation activities. Congress election observation now includes assessments on the political system, the legal conditions and the media landscape as well as information collected at the pre-electoral stage, in particular concerning the electoral campaign.

The Congress is also focusing more intensely on the concrete follow-up to Congress recommendations resulting from election observation missions.

Furthermore, emphasis is placed on regular training sessions for Congress members. This training is usually carried out in co-operation with the Congress's strategic partners in the field of election observation, notably with the EU Committee of the Regions, but also with national associations of local self-government. A recent example of successful collaboration in this field was the training session held in February 2012 in London, in partnership with the UK Local Government Association.

- **Local and provincial elections in Serbia (6 May)**

A delegation of the Congress headed by Nigel Mermagen (United Kingdom, ILDG) observed the local and provincial part of the elections carried out on 6 May 2012. Among the members of this delegation were also representatives of the EU Committee of the Regions. For the first time, three elections – at presidential, parliamentary and grassroots level – were held concurrently throughout the country. The delegation found improvements in the legal framework and the electoral system of Serbia which had positive effects on the identification of local leadership. But matters of concern remain the infringement of the secrecy of the vote, the lack of transparency of media ownership and the situation of the Roma minority which seems to be particularly vulnerable to possible electoral malpractices.

The report adopted at the 23rd session (October 2012) stated that the elections – with the exception of some incidents – were conducted in an overall orderly manner in – mostly – well-organised polling stations. However, the fact that three elections were organised on the same day has led to the fact that the local elections were largely overshadowed by the national vote. In its Recommendation 348 (2012), the Congress insisted also on the need to improve the equipment at polling stations where, in general, simple cardboard separations, rather than polling booths, were still in use.

- **Partial local elections in Armenia (9 September and 23 September 2012)**

A delegation of the Congress, headed by Henry Feral, (France, EPP/CD) - including also members of the EU Committee of the Regions - carried out a mission to observe partial local elections in this country. Following the observation of partial local elections held on 9 September, the Congress delegation confirmed that the voting process was well organised and elections on both dates were conducted in an orderly fashion and with a satisfactory level of voter participation. However, the delegation noted with regret the lack of commitment of political parties in Armenia with regard to local governance. The delegation recognised that this was a result of various factors, such as lack of financial resources, staff and candidates, but criticised the fact that political parties do not pay enough attention to democracy and governance at local level. Also, the Congress delegation called for greater involvement of civil society as a whole in these matters.

The report will be examined at the 24th Session in March 2013.

- **Elections in Bosnia and Herzegovina (7 October 2012)**

A delegation headed by Congress Rapporteur Amy Koopmanschap (Netherlands, SOC) – including members of the EU-Committee of the Regions and a member of the French Association of the Council of European Municipalities and Regions – carried out an observation mission to Bosnia and Herzegovina (BiH) from 4 to 8 October 2012 and observed the vote on 7 October. Two weeks prior to this date a pre-electoral visit was organised.

The delegation stated that the elections were prepared and conducted in an overall satisfying manner, although some issues of genuinely democratic elections remain to be addressed, in particular the influence of parties on the composition of polling station committees and the role of domestic observers, the registration process and the scope of liberality of the electoral law in this respect, as well as the issues of assistance for voters who cannot exercise their voting right alone and family voting. Also, the delegation recommended reconsidering the use

of so-called “tendered” or unconfirmed ballots for those voters who are not on the voters’ lists but claim the right to vote in a specific municipality.

The report will be examined at the 24th Session in March 2013.

4. Institutional activities

a. Meetings of the Bureau

- **Strasbourg, 15 May 2012**

The Bureau heard a report of the activities and meetings of the President, as well as the reports of the Presidents of the two Chambers.

The Bureau reviewed a first draft report on the priorities of the 2012-2016 Congress. Changes in national delegations, follow-up of the 22nd session and preparation of the 23rd, the first findings of the election observation in Serbia (6 May 2012), observation of local elections planned in Armenia (September 2012) and in Bosnia and Herzegovina (October 2012), co-operation activities and proposals of the British Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers in respect of local and regional democracy in the Council of Europe and the future priorities of the Albanian Chairmanship were also on the agenda.

- **Tirana, 14 June 2012**

The Bureau meeting took place in Tirana, in the framework of the Albanian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers. Following a meeting with the Congress President, the Mayor of Tirana, Lulzim Basha, addressed the Bureau and Deputy Minister of the Interior Ferdinand Poni presented the priorities of the Albanian Chairmanship.

The report on the Congress priorities 2013-2016, was approved, to be discussed at the 4th General Meeting of National Associations of Local and Regional Authorities of the Member States on 13 September 2012.

The President gave a report of his participation in the 112th session of the Committee of Ministers on 23 May. The debates focused inter alia, on the implementation of the policy of the Council of Europe towards neighbouring regions and, in this context, the Congress initiatives including the preparation of a “partner for local democracy status” for, in the first instance, associations and elected local and regional Authorities of Morocco and Tunisia.

The progress of the project of a European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma inclusion, including the presentation of the concept to the European Commission and the discussions held in the context of a possible support from it, were also communicated to the Bureau.

- **Strasbourg, 14 September 2012**

Members of the Bureau discussed in particular the Congress priorities for 2013-2016, amended after the consultation of the national associations during their general meeting of 13 September, in view of their adoption at the 23rd Session.

Under the item on co-operation activities, a draft resolution on the role of the Congress in the new Council of Europe policy towards neighbouring regions was approved.

Other items on the agenda included the preparation of the 23rd Session, the project of the European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma inclusion, the observation of local and regional elections, the Congress’ contribution to the ONE in FIVE Campaign of the Council of Europe as well as an exchange of views with representatives of the Council of Europe Development Bank.

- **Strasbourg, 15 and 18 October 2012**

The Bureau adopted a draft recommendation and resolution on the observation of local and regional elections in Serbia and was informed about the first conclusions of the election observation in Armenia (9 and 23 September 2012) and in Bosnia and Herzegovina (7 October 2012). It was also informed of the outcome of the consultative meeting of cities and regions and other stakeholders for the inclusion of Roma, held on 25 September 2012, and the implementation of the programme of the Congress with the Albanian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers as well as the programme of the forthcoming Chairmanship by Andorra.

It heard the communication from the President of the Congress and the reports by the newly elected Presidents of the Chambers.

The schedule of the Bureau meetings and the sessions in 2012 and 2013 was presented.

b. Plenary sessions

- **23rd Session** (Strasbourg, 15-18 October 2012)

During this renewal session, the Congress elected a new President, the new President of both Chambers and the heads of its three committees. It also elected the vice-presidents and vice-chairs of these bodies (see appendices). Those elected to the presidency will remain in office for 2 years.

National delegations were also renewed. The term of office of the 636 members of the Congress, is, for the first time, four years

The Congress also adopted its priorities for the next four years. From 2013 to 2016, the activities of the Congress will be organised primarily around three main objectives: Strengthening the quality of local and regional democracy and human rights in Europe, countering the new challenges posed by the economic and financial crisis and developing co-operation and partnerships.

The session examined reports on the situation of local democracy in "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" and in Azerbaijan, following monitoring missions conducted by the Congress in these two countries in December 2011 and April 2012 and on the conduct of local elections in Serbia in May 2012.

The development of local and regional democracy beyond the borders of Europe, in the context of the Council of Europe policy towards neighbouring regions and, in particular, changes underway in the Arab countries were the subject of two debates, in the presence of the Deputy Mayor of Rabat and the Secretary of the Venice Commission. Several texts were adopted calling for the implementation of practical tools to strengthen co-operation with these countries. The Congress also called on the Committee of Ministers to examine the possibility of opening the European Charter of Local Self-government to accession by countries from the southern Mediterranean, especially Morocco and Tunisia. Furthermore, it decided to take the administrative and regulatory measures necessary for the adoption – in due course of a status of "partner for local democracy" for local elected representatives from neighbouring countries that are not Council of Europe member States.

Various components of territorial democracy were also examined, in particular, "the participation of foreigners in local politics", "the governance of macro-regions in Europe", "the right of local communities to be consulted by other levels of government" and "Second-tier local authorities – intermediate governance in Europe".

Two debates, one on regional areas of legislation and action to combat sexual exploitation and sexual abuse against children and one on youth and democracy were also held.

Among those who took part were the Minister of Regional Affairs of Estonia, Siim Kiisler, the Deputy Minister of Interior of Albania, Ferdinand Poni, the Commissioner for Human Rights of the Council of Europe, Nils Muižnieks and the Deputy Secretary General of the Council of Europe, Gabriella Battaini-Dragoni.

The Estonian Minister of Regional Affairs addressed the Congress as part of an exchange of views on the progress of local democracy in Estonia. Following the adoption of a recommendation by the Congress in 2010, the Minister presented the current situation in Estonia, where the government has implemented severe measures at the state and local levels to control the recession.

The Deputy Minister of Interior of Albania emphasised the strong commitment of his country to the strengthening of democracy at local and regional levels. He also stressed the important role that the Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers had for his country and said the government will continue its efforts beyond the end of this Chairmanship.

c. The Statutory Forum

Composed of the heads of national delegations and the members of the Congress Bureau, the Forum was set up as part of the recent reform of the Congress, replacing the Standing Committee. It addresses the strategic aspects of the activities of the Congress.

The Statutory Forum met on 17 October 2012, during the 23rd Session. It adopted the new election procedure of the Secretary General presented by Nataliya Romanova (Ukraine, ILDG).

d. The Chamber of Local Authorities

On 26 April, the Congress Vice-President and President of the Chamber of Local Authorities, Jean-Claude Frécon (France, SOC) paid a visit to San Marino to examine the possible signature of the European Charter of Local Self-Government by this member state. During his stay, he met the Foreign Minister, Antonella Mularoni, the Secretary of State for Relations with Municipal Councils (Giunte di Castello), Augusto Casali, the Captains Regent Maurizio Rattini and Italo Righi as well as San Marino's delegation to the Congress.

At the 23rd Session (October 2012), the Chamber re-elected Jean-Claude Frécon (France, SOC) as its President and elected seven Vice-Presidents (see appendices). It considered and adopted the reports and the corresponding resolutions and recommendations on local democracy in "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" and on the local elections in Serbia. It also held a debate on the participation of foreigners in local political life.

e. The Chamber of Regions

The Chamber organised on 1 June 2012 in Innsbruck an International Conference on "Regions with legislative powers in Council of Europe and European Union - challenges and strategic goals". Topics such as regionalisation in Europe, regional action in the fields of democracy, transparency and human rights and cross-border co-operation were discussed. Special attention was devoted to the development of various systems of regional democracy (federal countries, regionalised countries, regions with special status) and to the representation and role of regional governments and parliaments within the Council of Europe and its intergovernmental bodies.

On 27 July 2012, the Chamber of Regions co-organised in Tirana an International Seminar on "The State of Regionalisation in Albania: Progress and Challenges". The Chamber was represented by its President, Herwig Van Staa and by the Secretary General of the Congress.

On 10 October 2010, the Chamber co-organised, in collaboration with the General Council of the Bas-Rhin, a conference on cross-border co-operation in the framework of the World Forum for Democracy organised by the Council of Europe.

During the 23rd Session, the Chamber elected Nataliya Romanova (Ukraine, GILD) as its Chair and proceeded to the election of the seven Vice-Presidents (see appendices). It discussed and adopted two reports, one on "the governance of large regions in Europe" and the other on "regional legislation and the fight against sexual exploitation and sexual abuse of children" as well as the corresponding resolutions and recommendations.

On 8-9 November 2012 in Berlin, the newly elected President of the Chamber represented the Congress in the General Assembly and Annual Conference of the Association of European Border Regions (AEBR).

f. The Committees

i. The Monitoring Committee

The Committee on the Honouring of Obligations and Commitments by member states of the European Charter of Local Self-Government (the Monitoring Committee), was set up in October 2010 as part of the reform of the Congress structures. At its meeting on 16 October 2012 during the 23rd Session, the Committee re-elected Lars O. Molin (Sweden, L, EPP/CD) as its Chair and also elected five Vice-Presidents: Devrim Cukur (Turkey, SOC), Irene Loizidou (Cyprus, EPP/CD), Jos Wiene (Netherlands, EPP/CD), Andrée Buchmann (France, SOC) and Alexander Uss (Russian Federation, EPP/CD).

The committee is responsible for monitoring the application of the Charter and following institutional developments in Europe's regions, for preparing reports on the situation of local and regional democracy in the countries that have ratified the European Charter of Local Self-Government and for monitoring specific questions related to local and regional democracy in member States.

The committee held a meeting on 6 July 2012 in Vannes (France) during which it approved two draft recommendations on local and regional democracy in "the former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia" and Azerbaijan. During this meeting, a seminar took place on how to improve the monitoring activities, with, among others, a presentation by a member of the Group of Independent Experts on the key provisions of the Charter and situational video sketches on monitoring visits.

The committee responded to requests received from the Congress Bureau and the Bureau of the Chamber of Local Authorities on the situation of local and regional democracy in Finland and the Netherlands.

A high-level seminar was also organised in Sarajevo (Bosnia and Herzegovina) on 4 September 2012 with representatives from central, regional and local authorities, as part of the post-monitoring process undertaken for this Member State. It discussed the ways to implement the recommendation 324 (2012) adopted by the Congress on Local and Regional democracy in Bosnia and Herzegovina. National authorities asked the Congress to prepare a roadmap, which will be discussed during a second high-level meeting scheduled at the beginning of 2013.

At its meeting in Strasbourg on 16 October during the 23rd Session, the committee adopted the conclusions of a training seminar organised in July 2012 for members who will have the responsibility to act as rapporteurs. A handbook for rapporteurs will be prepared that will provide guidelines to improve the quality of the monitoring process. The committee also held a debate on the participation of national minorities in local and regional politics. The committee adopted a proposal to prepare a report on this issue in collaboration with the Governance Committee.

The work programme and the agenda of visits for 2012-2014 have been adopted.

ii. The Governance Committee

The Governance Committee was set up in October 2010 as part of the reform of the Congress structures. At its meeting on 16 October 2012 during the 23rd Session, the committee re-elected as its Chair Karl-Heinz Lambertz (Belgium, SOC) for a two-year term of office and elected also five Vice-Chairs: Britt-Marie Lövgren (Sweden, ILGD), Sevdia Ugrehelidze (Georgia, EPP/CD), Henry Feral (France, EPP/CD), Amrit Mediratta (United Kingdom, ECR) and Mustafa Aygun (Turkey, ECR).

The committee is responsible for affairs falling within the scope of the Congress' statutory mandate such as governance, public finance, cross-border and interregional co-operation and e-democracy as well as co-operation with the European Committee of Local and Regional Democracy (CDLR).

On 30 May 2012 in Innsbruck (Austria), the committee held a seminar on 'Multi-level Governance in Transfrontier Co-operation'. The seminar brought together experts and actors in transfrontier co-operation, there were presentations of case studies from Austria, Germany and the Ukraine and a roundtable was held on the prospects for transfrontier co-operation governance in Europe. This seminar will feed into a report on transfrontier co-operation, which is being prepared by the committee.

At its meeting during the 23rd plenary session, the committee was updated on the progress of reports currently being prepared by the rapporteurs on criteria for standing for local and regional elections, the definition of adequate financial resources, the development of regionalisation as well as on the levels of sub-national government in member states.

It was informed about the most recent developments concerning the follow-up to the Conference of Ministers responsible for Local and Regional Government (3-4 November 2011, Kyiv, Ukraine) and on the preparations for the 'Conference on Decentralisation', which took place in the framework of the Albania Chairmanship on 30-31 October 2012 in Tirana.

iii. The Current Affairs Committee

The Current Affairs Committee was set up in October 2010 as part of the reform of the Congress structures. At its meeting on 16 October 2012 during the 23rd Session, the Committee elected its Chair Farid Mukhametshin (Russian Federation, ILGD) as well as four Vice-chairs: Angelika Kordfelder (Germany, SOC), Ana Alos Lopez (Spain, EPP/CD), Snezhina Madzharova (Bulgaria, EPP/CD) and Enes Ozkarsli (Turkey, EPP/CD). The committee will vote for its fifth vice-chair at its next meeting.

Under its terms of reference, the committee is responsible for studying the role of local and regional authorities with regard to the major challenges of our society; preparing work on thematic issues such as social cohesion, sustainable development, education, culture and intercultural dialogue from the point of view of the Council of Europe's core values; and proposing action to respond to existing or emerging problems as well as to emergencies at local and regional levels.

Since its last meeting at the 22nd Session (March 2012), the committee has worked on the Congress's contribution to the Council of Europe ONE in FIVE Campaign. A Pact of Towns and Regions to Stop Sexual Violence against Children has just been launched, the aim of which is to mobilise municipal and regional councils and parliaments across Europe. The Pact provides a series of practical actions to be implemented at local and regional levels in order to develop child-friendly local and regional services, protect children and help prevent sexual

violence within the community. The Congress also adopted at the 23rd Congress session a report on “regional legislation and action to combat sexual exploitation and abuse of children”.

The committee also worked in the youth field by preparing, inter alia, a report on “Youth and democracy: the changing face of youth political engagement” which was also adopted by the 23rd Session. Furthermore, the committee has pursued its close co-operation with the Council of Europe Youth Sector on the “Enter! Project” to promote young people’s access to social rights. Given that local and regional authorities are often responsible for ensuring access to these rights, a joint seminar with committee members and young people was organised in September 2012 to prepare for a training course in 2013 on this same theme. Still on the theme of youth participation and access to rights, and in the frame of the follow-up to the Strasbourg Declaration on Roma, a report on “the situation of Roma youth” is being prepared and a consultation meeting with young Roma people is scheduled on 25 November 2012.

As a contribution to the Council of Europe’s policy towards neighbouring countries, a report on “the changes underway in the Arab countries – opportunities for local and regional democracy” was also adopted at the 23rd Session.

Work has begun on reports on the “impact of the economic crisis on local and regional authorities”, on “integration through self-employment: promoting local entrepreneurship of migrants”, and on “migrants’ access to regional labour markets”.

At its meeting of 16 October during the 23rd Session, the committee also examined a proposal for a report on the situation of LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender) persons at local and regional levels.

5. Action in the field

a. Roma inclusion

- **The European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion**

Since the Summit of Mayors on Roma in September 2011, the Congress has been working in close co-operation with the Special Representative of the Council of Europe Secretary General on Roma-related issues to establish a co-operation framework for cities and regions willing to promote Roma inclusion.

Based on consultations made – especially a questionnaire sent out in March 2012 to a large number of cities and regions to help identify their priority issues – the Congress and the Special Representative organised, on 25 September 2012, a consultative meeting of cities, regions and other stakeholders, in the presence, among others of European Commission representatives.

This meeting provided the participants with the opportunity to exchange experiences and practices from the field, discuss proposals for co-operation and ways to increase Roma participation in the democratic process. It concluded that the Alliance should be a collaborative and flexible space where exchanges, training and mutual learning can take place, where programmes and situations can be evaluated, where projects can be built and where the cities and regions can increase their capacities, especially for project implementation and for presenting integrated projects to European Union funds and other sources.

The Alliance is now drawing up its programme of action based on the outcome of the meeting and taking into account the needs and priorities expressed, as well as the resources available and seeking means of co-operation with the existing initiatives and programmes. Its first activities will be organised before the end of 2012.

b. Support of the democratic process in the Euro-Mediterranean region

- **Exchange of views between the Congress and members of the Moroccan Parliament** (Rabat, 11 July 2012)

At the invitation of the Moroccan Parliament, a Congress delegation held an exchange of views with members of both Chambers of the Moroccan Parliament. These discussions focused on the project of advanced regionalisation in Morocco and on the draft law that will reorganise Moroccan territories and which constitutes a major issue on the national agenda. The delegation also met with Karim Chellah, Speaker of the House of Representatives and Mohammed Cheikh Biadiallah, Speaker of the House of Councillors.

(see also “co-operation activities and partnerships in section 6.b.3 and 6.b.4 below)

c. Highlighting good practices

- **Best Practice Award for Coastal Towns**

The winners of this new Prize were announced on 26 April 2012 jointly by the President of the Parliamentary Assembly Jean-Claude Mignon and the President of the Congress at a ceremony during the Parliamentary Assembly session in Strasbourg.

Based on the evaluation of the 48 applications received, the First Prize was awarded to Yevpatoria (Ukraine), the Joint Second Prize to Bournemouth and Canterbury (both United Kingdom) and the Joint Third Prize to Heroy (Norway) and Zadar (Croatia). The winners and nominees were invited to the Award Ceremony, which took place in Blackpool (United Kingdom) on 9 May 2012.

This new initiative to reward best local practices for the regeneration of coastal towns was launched on 11 January 2012 in Strasbourg upon the initiative of the Council of Europe Centre of Expertise for Local Government Reform, in the framework of the UK Chairmanship and in partnership with the Congress and the UK Local Government Association.

- **The 2012 City for Children Award**

The Congress supports and takes an active part in the Cities for Children Network, which organised the 2012 edition of the European Award of Excellence "City for Children", to honour European cities for outstanding child-friendly projects. The 2012 edition held on 14 May was dedicated to child-friendly urban planning. The jury awarded innovative projects, which take the perspective of children and their families into account when conceptualising the qualities of urban areas with regard to development, architecture, free spaces and use.

d. Citizen participation: European Local Democracy Week

- **Ten Moroccan municipalities committed to ELDW 2012** (Rabat, 10 July 2012)

Elected representatives of fifteen municipalities, including the Mayors of Fes, Tetouan and Agadir met with the Congress with a view to starting practical co-operation in the local democracy sphere. During the meeting, chaired by Fathallah Oualalou, Mayor of Rabat, a presentation of the European Local Democracy Week (ELDW) and of its main theme for 2012: 'Human rights make for more inclusive communities' was made. Ten municipalities stated that they would participate in ELDW, committing themselves to take initiatives involving public participation as from October 2012.

- **New web platform** (Strasbourg, 8 August 2012)

The ELDW takes place every year during the week of including 15 October. The 2012 edition took place from 15 to 21 October. Local and regional authorities of the 47 member states of the Council of Europe are invited to take part and to organize events in their community. To make the task of the participating communities easier, several innovations have been included in the new ELDW internet platform.

- **Launching in Albania** (Tirana, 5 October, 2012)

An International seminar on the theme “Strengthening citizens’ democratic participation in decision-making at local level” kicked off the European Week of Local Democracy (ELDW) in Albania. The seminar was organised in the framework of the Albanian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers.

- **2012 Edition of the ELDW** (15-21 October 2012)

130 communities and partner organisations registered to participate actively in the ELDW - including 18 “12-star” cities - from 29 countries. They organised over 300 activities designed to bring together local elected representatives and their citizens.

e. Intercultural dialogue

- **SPARDA Conference** (Brussels, 13 June 2012)

The Conference in the framework of the Council of Europe and European Union joint programme SPARDA - “Shaping Perceptions and Attitudes to Realise the Diversity Advantage” – was co-chaired by the Committee of the Regions and the Congress. The Congress President praised the work done by SPARDA in communicating diversity and building dialogue on diversity issues with the local population. He called for a new model of participatory democracy, involving migrants and minority groups. In particular, he highlighted the need to take action to ensure that foreign residents have equal access to social rights and public services, to fight prejudice against migrants and to raise public awareness of their cultures and contribution to the local community

f. Equality between men and women

- **Conference on “The Political and Socio-Economic Empowerment of Women”** (Istanbul, 5 November)

The Congress was represented at this conference, organised by the North-South Centre, by its thematic rapporteur Dubravka Suica (Croatia, EPP/CD), who stressed the need for a legislative framework to ensure women’s participation in society in general and in politics in particular. She presented the Congress’ action in this regard, including its quota requirement introduced since 2008 for women’s representation in its 47 national delegations, as well as its resolution and recommendation on “Achieving sustainable gender equality in local and regional political life”, in which the Congress encourages women to run as candidates and stand for elections.

g. Children’s Rights

The action of the Congress in the promotion of children’s rights and the fight against the sexual exploitation of children is part of both the new strategy for the implementation of legal standards to protect and promote the rights of children, adopted in February 2012 by the Council of Europe, and the ONE in FIVE Campaign to fight sexual violence against children, launched by the organisation in 2010.

The strategy focuses on four main objectives: to promote systems and services appropriate for children, eliminate all forms of violence against children, protect the rights of vulnerable children and promote the participation of children. The Congress continues its efforts to achieve effective implementation of the strategy by local authorities. On 25 October 2012, the Congress participated in the first meeting of the Council of Europe Task Force on children, which was set up to coordinate the activities of various entities of the Council of Europe in implementing the strategy.

With the Pact of Cities and Regions entitled "Stop sexual violence against children", the Congress also continues to develop the local and regional dimension of the ONE in FIVE Campaign. The objective of this Pact, approved by the Congress Bureau in September 2012, is to mobilise municipal and regional councils and parliaments across Europe with regard to the Campaign. It provides concrete actions to be implemented at local and regional level to develop local services suitable for children, to protect children and to help to prevent sexual violence in the community.

The Pact was submitted to the national associations of local and regional authorities in the general meeting held in Strasbourg in September 2012 and to the Committee of the Parties to the Lanzarote Convention in October 2012.

The Pact is available for online signature by cities and regions on the Congress website. The Congress also plans to develop an outreach project of European cities and regions in order to engage in the implementation of the Pact in their communities.

As part of its contribution to the ONE in FIVE Campaign, the Congress also adopted, at its 23rd session (October 2012), a report on "Regional legislation and action to combat sexual exploitation and abuse of children" as well as Resolution 350 (2012) and Recommendation 332 (2012) calling upon parliaments and regional governments to implement the Convention of the Council of Europe on the Protection of Children against Sexual Exploitation and Sexual Abuse in the organisation of their protection, welfare and health services, and incorporating the provisions of the convention, where possible, into regional legislation.

6. Co-operation activities and partnerships

a. External partnerships

i. The Committee of the Regions of the European Union

The Congress has continued its co-operation with the European Union's Committee of the Regions (CoR).

The election observation missions allow the Congress and the Committee of the Regions to assess the electoral aspect of local democracy on the ground. The Congress invites representatives from the Committee of the Regions to join the pre-electoral and electoral observation missions that it organises.

The Congress invites also representatives of the Committee of the Regions to take part in the debates held during the Congress sessions on the adoption of the reports that follow observation missions.

The Congress' rapporteurs have been invited to take part on 4 December 2012 in Brussels in the meeting of the Committee on Citizenship, Governance, Institutional and External Affairs (CIVEX) that will examine the observation missions in Serbia, Armenia and Bosnia-Herzegovina chaired by the Congress with the participation of CoR representatives.

On 27 April 2012, the Congress Secretary General attended the 13th CIVEX meeting and on 22 May 2012 in Sarajevo, he presented, to the Working Group on the Western Balkans, the Congress monitoring activities in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

The Congress was represented at the Seminar on “Local Democracy and Good Governance” that took place in Dubrovnik on 21 June 2012 at the initiative of the CIVEX, in the framework of the EU Package on the Protection of the Licit Economy.

On 18 July 2012, in the framework of the 96th Plenary Session of the CoR, the Secretary General of the Committee of the Regions and the Secretary General of the Congress held an operational meeting for the on-going implementation of the co-operation between the two institutions.

On 17 September 2012, the Congress was represented at the Annual Meeting of CORLEAP (Conference of regional organisations and local authorities for the Eastern partnership) in Chisinau. The importance and benefits of the Congress texts were considered by the participants and incorporated in the final declaration of the Conference. The declaration unanimously adopted by the sixteen members of the CoR and the sixteen representatives of the associations of local and regional authorities of the six EAP-partner countries – many of them members of the Congress - paved the way for a deepened political dialogue and for the concrete activities to be undertaken in 2013. During the meeting, Emin Yeritsyan, (Armenia, EPP/CD) was elected co-Chair of CORLEAP for 2013.

The Congress position on access to justice was presented to the 4th Annual Dialogue on Multi-Level Protection and Promotion of Fundamental Rights that took place in Brussels on 24 September 2012.

Finally, the Congress presented its expertise and positions on electoral rights and election observation to the CIVEX on 24 September 2012 in Brussels.

ii. Networks

• The Association of Local Democracy Agencies (ALDA)

The Congress monitors very closely the evolution of ALDA and is regularly represented at its major meetings and in its decision-making bodies.

On 7 June in Udine, the Congress participated in the General Assembly of ALDA and in the International Conference on “Empowering Citizens and Strengthening Local Governance in Neighbouring Countries: Lessons Learned and Opportunities from East to South” The Congress President underlined the need for developing new initiatives in the South Mediterranean and in South-East European countries, aimed at strengthening the role of civil society and NGOs in promoting democracy at local level. He called for new co-operation programmes to enhance grassroots democracy, involving Local Democracy Agencies in South-East Europe and in the South Caucasus.

The Presidents of ALDA and the Congress participated in the meeting of the Board of Directors of the Association in Strasbourg on 17 October and had an exchange of views.

• The Network of Associations of Local Authorities of South East Europe (NALAS)

This network, created at the initiative of the Congress in 2001, continues to be a special partner of the Congress in its field activities in Southeast Europe.

At the annual meeting of the Presidents of member associations of NALAS, from 14 to 16 June 2012 in Tulcea, the key role of the Congress and NALAS in tackling the priorities envisaged for the Agenda in common, discussed at the Conference of Ministers responsible for local and regional governments in Kyiv, was discussed.

The Congress participated in the Conference organised by NALAS on the future of fiscal decentralisation in South-East Europe in Budva on 1 and 2 November 2012.

iii. European Associations of local and regional authorities

The Congress is paying great attention to co-operation with the associations representing cities and regions in Europe.

- **Conference of European Regional Legislative Assemblies (CALRE)**

On 31 May 2012, the President of the Chamber of Regions Herwig Van Staa held a meeting with the President of CALRE (and REGLEG) in Innsbruck to strengthen future co-operation. Regional institutional models and regional democracy were identified as key areas for co-operation.

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

On 21 September 2012, the Congress was represented at the Summit on “The Crisis and the Regions”, organised by the AER in Pescara.

Congress President Keith Whitmore attended the plenary meeting of the Regional Youth network of the AER on 8 October 2012 in Strasbourg.

Together with the AER and the Alsace Region, on 10 October 2012, the Chamber of Regions organised a Round Table on “Regionalisation and Democracy” in the framework of the Council of Europe World Forum for Democracy.

The Congress attended the General Assembly held in Strasbourg on 12 October 2012.

- **Conference of European Regions with Legislative Powers (REGLEG)**

On 31 May 2012, the President of the Chamber of Regions held a meeting in Innsbruck with the Presidency of the REGLEG (and CALRE) laid down the foundations for reinforcing co-operation in the future.

- **Association of European Border Regions (AEBR)**

On 8-9 November 2012 in Berlin, the newly elected President of the Chamber of Regions, Nataliya Romanova (Ukraine, ILGD), represented the Congress at the General Assembly and Annual Conference of the Association.

b. Targeted co-operation and partnership

One of the Congress’ priorities for 2011–2012 was the implementation of targeted co-operation programmes. To achieve concrete results, the Congress entered into dialogue with local and regional representatives and involved other institutional partners. Its aim is to support local and regional elected representatives in the improvement of their capacities and leadership.

In the framework of the new Council of Europe policy towards neighbouring regions, the Congress is also enlarging its action to non-member States, especially those from the Southern Mediterranean.

i. Action Plan for Ukraine

The Congress joined the Council of Europe action plan for Ukraine by adding to its local democracy component. These actions are intended to be complementary to those of the Centre of Expertise on Local Administration Reform and should support the European reform agenda of Ukraine in the field of local and regional democracy.

Mayors and Presidents of regions will be the main recipients of an inclusive process that will be conducted with the support of associations of municipalities and regions, as well as experts on local and regional democracy. The Ukrainian delegation of the Congress will play an essential role in this, and international networks of local and regional authorities such as the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR) and the Assembly of European Regions (AER) will also be associated with certain activities.

ii. A unified platform for local and regional elected representatives of Albania

The Congress wishes to support the development of dialogue between local and regional elected representatives, through concrete measures aiming at the implementation of a unified platform for dialogue based on political pluralism.

Since the end of 2011, the Congress has held consultations with the Albanian authorities representing the different political tendencies in Albania and taken part in the General Assemblies of the two main national associations of municipalities, notably on 12 June 2012.

The Mayor of Tirana, Lulzim Basha, addressed the Congress Bureau at its meeting on 14 June 2012 in Tirana, as part of the Albanian Chairmanship of the Committee of Ministers. Further meetings with the main Albanian authorities also took place in this context.

Moreover, the Congress and the Centre of Expertise have developed a joint project for 2012-2015 to strengthen local government structures and the co-operation of local elected representatives in Albania. Switzerland has made a voluntary contribution to the Council of Europe for the implementation of this project, which will start at the end of 2012.

iii. Co-operation with Morocco

The Congress started to co-operate with Morocco on the basis of peer-to-peer exercises and the application of the principles enshrined in the founding texts of the Congress such as the European Charter of Local Self-Government, the Reference Framework for Regional Democracy and the European Code of Conduct on the political integrity of local and regional representatives. It proposes assistance with regard to legislative activities, including the preparation of an organic law on regionalisation, assistance at various stages of the electoral process, the granting of a 'special status' to representatives of local and regional elected officials in the Congress and the participation of some Moroccan cities in the European Local Democracy Week.

At the April and June 2012 sessions of the Parliamentary Assembly, the Congress Secretariat met with a delegation of Moroccan parliamentarians who warmly welcomed the idea of a contribution of the Congress to the current discussions that will lead to the adoption of a new territorial organisation of Morocco.

Following this meeting, on 11 July 2012, a Congress delegation held an exchange of views with members of both Chambers of the Moroccan Parliament and representatives of the Venice Commission. These discussions focused on the project of advanced regionalisation in Morocco and on the draft law, which will reorganise Moroccan territories.

Furthermore, in addition to this institutional action, the Congress continued its *rapprochement* with the actors in the field. The elected representatives of several Moroccan local authorities announced that they would participate in the European Local Democracy Week, committing themselves to take initiatives involving public participation in October 2012 (see above under section 5.d. "citizen participation")

iv. Co-operation with Tunisia

The visit to Tunis by a joint delegation of the COPPEM (Standing Committee of Euro-Mediterranean Partnership of Local and Regional authorities) and the ATO (Arab Towns Organisation) conducted by the Congress President identified Tunisia's two main needs : emergency financial assistance towards infrastructure and institutional support to establish the necessary conditions for the development of genuine democracy.

The Action Plan of the Council of Europe will contribute at this level. The Congress will intervene in contributing to the work of the National Constituent Assembly in the field of local and regional democracy, offering a 'special status' in the Congress to local and regional representatives of Tunisia, by sharing its expertise with the future Parliament on electoral processes and developing co-operation with the national association and the newly elected representatives.

The Congress has also committed itself to supporting initiatives related to democratic governance carried out by other bodies of the Council of Europe and international organisations and European associations such as the Assembly of European Regions (AER) and the Council of European Municipalities and Regions (CEMR).

The Congress continued its contacts with the Tunisian authorities in the framework of the institutional support of the Council of Europe. It was invited to participate in a hearing of the Venice Commission by the National Constituent Assembly (ANC) of Tunisia, followed by a meeting of the ANC's Constituent Committee of regional and local public authorities in Tunis on 26 July 2012. This meeting followed a meeting in Strasbourg on 5 July 2012 between representatives of the same Commission, the Venice Commission and the Congress.

Co-operation continues with members of the ANC and the Venice Commission which has started to give an opinion on the draft Constitution. The Congress participated in the exchange of views which took place in this context, in Venice on 12 October 2012. Moreover, on 9 November the Congress sent the ANC an information note on Chapter 6 of the draft Constitution relating to "local power".

APPENDICES

1. New Congress leadership elected during the 23rd Session (15-18 October 2012)

PRESIDENT OF THE CONGRESS

Herwig VAN STAA (Austria EPP-CD)

CHAMBER LEADERSHIP

President of the Chamber of Local Authorities: Jean-Claude FRÉCON (France, SOC)

1st Vice-President: Anders KNAPE (Sweden, EPP-CD)

2nd Vice-President: Gaye DOGANOGLU (Turkey, EPP-CD)

3rd Vice- President: John WARMISHAM (United Kingdom, SOC)

4th Vice- President: Amy KOOPMANSCHAP (Netherlands, SOC)

5th Vice- President: Marc COOLS (Belgium, ILDG)

6th Vice-President: Emilio VERRENGIA (Italy, EPP-CD)

7th Vice-President: Dubravka SUICA (Croatia, EPP/CD)

President of the Chamber of Regions: Nataliya ROMANOVA (Ukraine, ILDG)

1st Vice-President: Michael O'BRIEN (Ireland, SOC)

2nd Vice-President: Helena PIHLAJASSAARI (Finland, SOC)

3rd Vice- President: Gunn Marit HELGESEN (Norway, EPP-CD)

4th Vice- President: Urs WÜTHRICH-PELLOLI (Switzerland, SOC)

5th Vice- President: Clemens LAMMERSKITTEN (Germany, EPP-CD)

6th Vice-President: Svetlana ORLOVA (Russian Federation, EPP-CD)

7th Vice-President: Ludmila SFIRLOAGA (Romania, SOC)

The 2 Presidents of the two Chambers and the 14 Vice-Presidents of these Chambers are Vice-Presidents of the Congress.

COMMITTEE LEADERSHIP

Chair of the Monitoring Committee: Lars O. MOLIN (Sweden, EPP-CD)

1st Vice-Chair: Devrim CUKUR (Turkey, SOC)

2nd Vice-Chair: Irene LOIZIDOU (Cyprus, EPP-CD)

3rd Vice-Chair: Jos WIENEN (Netherlands, EPP-CD)

4th Vice-Chair: Andree BUCHMANN (France, SOC)

5th Vice-Chair: Alexander USS (Russian Federation, EPP-CD)

Chair of the Governance Committee: Karl-Heinz LAMBERTZ (Belgium, SOC)

1st Vice-Chair: Britt-Marie LOVGREN (Sweden, ILDG)

2nd Vice-Chair: Sevdia UGREKHELIDZE (Georgia, EPP-CD)

3rd Vice-Chair: Henry FERAL (France, EPP-CD)

4th Vice-Chair: Amrit MEDIRATTA (United Kingdom, ECR)

5th Vice-Chair: Mustafa AYGUN (Turkey, ECR)

Chair of the Current Affairs Committee: Farid MUKHAMETSHIN (Russia, ILDG)

1st Vice-Chair: Angelika KORDFELDER (Germany, SOC)

2nd Vice-Chair: Ana ALOS LOPEZ (Spain, EPP-CD)

3rd Vice-Chair: Snezhina MADZHAROVA (Bulgaria, EPP-CD)

4th Vice-Chair: Enes OZKARSLI (Turkey, EPP-CD)

5th Vice-Chair: vacant

POLITICAL GROUP LEADERSHIP

There are four political groups in the new Congress, as well as 160 members with no declared political affiliation (NR).

European People's Party – Christian Democrats (EPP-CD) - 208 members
President: Artur TORRES PEREIRA (Portugal)

Socialist Group (SOC) - 154 members
President: Gudrun MOSLER -TÖRNSTRÖM (Austria)

Independent and Liberal Democrat Group (ILDG) - 83 members
President: Knud ANDERSEN (Denmark)

European Conservatives & Reformists Group (ECR) - 29 members
President: Halldor HALLDORSSON (Iceland)

2. Priorities 2013-2016

23rd SESSION
CG(23)5 AMDT
16 October 2012

Bureau of the Congress

Rapporteurs: Lars O. Molin, Sweden (L, EPP/CD*)
Karl-Heinz Lambertz, Belgium (R, SOC¹)

Summary

Since 2010, the Congress focused in particular on the development and promotion of local and regional democracy by strengthening its activities in the field of monitoring, election observation and promotion of human rights at the local and regional level. It also developed cooperation and partnership in relation to its monitoring activities. It intensified its political dialogue with the Member States and the Committee of Ministers and its relations with other institutional partners - Parliamentary Assembly, Commissioner for Human Rights, the Venice Commission.

But the adaptation of the Congress to change took place within a European context marked by a particularly serious economic and financial crisis, which also affects local authorities and their ability to fulfill their missions to the citizens. The magnitude of this crisis makes it necessary to consider the different levels of local and regional governance and how they work and needed to find answers to new challenges.

The priorities that the Congress has set for 2013-2016 are aimed at enabling it to continue to adapt to change while strengthening its activities in its areas of expertise, working closer to the needs of local and regional authorities and their citizens and seeking to provide visible and lasting results in the field.

Resolution 341 (2012)[†]

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities:

1. Is the assembly of local and regional authorities of the Council of Europe and helps to ensure the participation of local communities, their elected officials and citizens in achieving a Europe which respects democracy, the rule of law and human rights;
2. Has been reforming its political and administrative structures and its functioning which has enabled the strengthening of cooperation with the various institutional partners and dialogue with the Member States;
3. Has implemented its 2011-2012 priorities as part of its statutory functions, based on the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the Reference Framework for Regional Democracy, in line with the new priorities of the Council of Europe;

* L: Chamber of Local Authorities / R: Chamber of Regions
ILDG: Independent and Liberal Democrat Group of the Congress
EPP/CD: European People's Party – Christian Democrats of the Congress
SOC: Socialist Group of the Congress
ECR: European Conservatives and Reformists Group
NR: Members not belonging to a political group of the Congress
NPA: No political affiliation

[†] Debated and adopted by the Congress on 16 October 2012, 1st sitting (see document [CG\(23\)5](#), appendix), Rapporteurs: L. O. MOLIN, Sweden (L, EPP/CD) and K-H. LAMBERTZ, Belgium (R, SOC).

4. Defines its new priorities and the outline of its activities at each renewal session of the Congress;

5. Having considered the appended project on priorities for 2013-2016, fully endorses the general orientations on:

- raising the quality of local and regional democracy and governance, human rights and the rule of law in Council of Europe Member States,
- helping local authorities to rise to the new challenges resulting from the economic and financial crisis,
- developing cooperation and partnerships;

6. Adopts therefore the priorities and instructs its Bureau to implement them.

APPENDIX

1. INTRODUCTION

1. The Congress is the Council of Europe's assembly of local and regional representatives. It speaks on behalf of over 200 000 local and regional authorities and ensures the participation of their elected representatives and the citizens in building a Europe that respects democracy, the rule of law and human rights.

2. To adapt to the new challenges raised by the profound changes taking place in Europe, where there is not only an unprecedented economic crisis but also much questioning with regard to what it means to be European, the Congress has since 2009 been reconsidering its goals, its activities and its working methods, and this has led to a far-reaching reform of its Charter and its Statutory Resolution as well as its rules of procedures and secretariat.

3. By refocusing on its new priorities, putting new political and administrative structures in place and adopting an operational approach geared towards practical results, the Congress has established itself as a key partner for the issues concerning local and regional democracy within the Council of Europe.

4. At the same time, the Council of Europe has embarked on a more general reform, which has allowed the Congress to strengthen cooperation with the various institutional partners and improve dialogue with the Member States. The Congress will rise to the challenge of reaching the local and regional levels of government through its recommendations through a continuous follow-up and communication strategy with the national local and regional associations whose work is crucial for reaching the elected representatives.

5. These new orientations have triggered cooperation also with partners such as the European Union and authorities of countries of the neighbourhood policy

Implementing the priorities for 2011- 2012

6. The Congress focused on developing and promoting local and regional democracy and gave the monitoring process a fresh impetus – monitoring visits became more frequent, regular and systematic and more open to political dialogue on the ground with the States concerned. Follow-up to reports was given special attention to ensure impact of the Recommendations and Resolutions.

7. The election observation programme was expanded – observation exercises were extended to cover the entire electoral process and an election observation training programme was carried out.

8. Cooperation and partnership activities were also expanded, in particular to provide practical responses to the problems identified during monitoring and election observation activities. To

this end, relations with the other institutional partners – Committee of Ministers, Parliamentary Assembly, Commissioner for Human Rights and Venice Commission – and the Council's operational directorates were stepped up.

9. The Committee of Ministers lent its support to these developments and invited its rapporteur groups to engage in dialogue with the Congress whenever their work could benefit from Congress input.

10. Local and regional elected representatives have a major responsibility in terms of safeguarding the fundamental rights of their citizens and their participation in the democratic process. The Congress encouraged its members to protect the most vulnerable groups and to promote greater citizen participation in local and regional life.

11. It contributed actively to the Council of Europe campaigns to combat sexual abuse of children and stop violence against women and to the neighbourhood policy conducted with the countries of the Southern Mediterranean in particular. It stepped up partnerships and cooperation agreements and contributed actively to the work of other institutions, while taking care to perform its role in a complementary manner that ensured added value.

12. Building the capacity of towns, cities and regions, promoting good governance and ethics, implementing effective integration policies and helping to establish mutual understanding at the grassroots were the aims which the Congress pursued throughout the programme and which it will continue to pursue in the years ahead.

Renewed dialogue with the intergovernmental sector

13. The report by Manuel Chaves, former Spanish Minister for Territorial Policy and Public Administration, on multi-level governance at the Council of Europe was adopted unanimously at the Conference of Ministers responsible for Local and Regional Government in Kyiv in November 2011. It underlines the key role of the European Charter of Local Self-Government for all Council of Europe activities in this field and stresses that monitoring the Charter is part of the Congress' statutory mandate.

14. It also highlights the need to strengthen stable political relations between the Ministerial Conference and the Congress.

15. The Chaves report recommends that an Agenda in common be prepared, in a process also involving the Parliamentary Assembly and NGOs, in areas of common interest such as monitoring the impact of the financial and economic crisis on local and regional government, strengthening citizens' democratic participation, developing the concept of multi-level governance, promoting human rights at local and regional level and transfrontier cooperation.

16. The report has been fully endorsed by the Congress who has urged its partners to implement an Agenda in common and will make sure that the thematic proposals are central to its priorities for the coming years.

17. The priorities and actions described in this document could thus help to identify the future elements of the Agenda in common.

2. THE PRIORITIES AND ACTIONS OF THE CONGRESS IN 2013-2016

18. From 2013 to 2016, Congress activities will be based on three major objectives:

- i. Raising the quality of local and regional democracy and human rights in Europe
- ii. Helping local authorities to rise to the new challenges resulting from the economic and financial crisis
- iii. Developing cooperation and partnerships.

19. These activities will be regularly assessed and adjusted, in line with the priorities of the Council of Europe and on the basis of consultation with all the Congress' partners.

I. Raising the quality of local and regional democracy and human rights in Europe

20. Under its statutory competencies, the Congress has the role of improving the standard of local and regional democracy in the Member States. In the course of its reform in 2010 and 2011, the Congress has adopted a series of measures aimed at adopting a more operational, more concrete and more result-oriented approach. It has in particular started to recenter its action on more comprehensive and higher-quality monitoring of local and regional democracy, notably by reinforcing its dialogue with the governments.

21. It has better structured and codified the observation of local and regional elections and has undertaken a better follow-up of its recommendations. It has also introduced the local and regional dimension of human rights as a new priority.

22. These new orientations will stay at the heart of its mission and at the centre of its activities in the coming years and when it will have to make strategic choices.

a) Monitoring local and regional democracy

23. In the firm belief that the first response in times of crisis should be to strengthen democracy, in particular at local and regional level, the Congress will continue to ensure that the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the Reference Framework for Regional Democracy have a lasting and practical impact.

24. The principle of subsidiarity, which is a key element of the Charter and the Reference Framework, is of even greater importance in times of crisis. The Congress will thus pay attention to the consultation and dialogue established with national associations of local and regional authorities both by national governments and by international bodies, including the Congress itself. It will also foster exchanges between the national associations and contribute to enabling participation of local and regional authorities in the drawing up of national policies and international programmes.

25. In particular, the Congress will continue to improve its monitoring of local and regional democracy and to examine the problems encountered. The aim is to regularly monitor States and identify common problems, innovative activities and new solutions which could help States to frame local and regional democracy policies. Indeed, the Congress aims not only to identify problems but also to seek concrete solutions together with the States concerned. Developing good practices by comparing and learning from each other is both a money-saving solution in this context of limited resources and a means of taking into account past and current experiences.

26. To this end, the Congress will devise transnational procedures for evaluating its monitoring so as to identify problems which are common to or recur in several States. This will enable it to submit conclusions to the Committee of Ministers and propose cross-sectoral and/or thematic activities involving other Council of Europe entities.

27. It will also continue to urge member States to lift their reservations to the Charter of Local Self-Government when they are no longer necessary. It will encourage States to assess their national situations so that they can identify any remaining obstacles to full accession to the Charter and will offer to help them in seeking practical solutions. It will develop specific activities to this end (see Chapter III).

28. For the Congress, the idea is to turn the Council of Europe Member States into a unified "100% Charter" area where the Charter is observed and applied without discrimination and where local and regional self-government is exercised in an optimal manner with appropriate citizens' participation.

29. In order to continue to improve the quality of its monitoring work, the Congress will organise specific and regular training sessions for members who take part in its monitoring visits as rapporteurs.

30. Post-monitoring activities will henceforth be an important part of the Congress arsenal to make a concrete impact on local democracy. To ensure that its recommendations are implemented, the Congress will follow-up developments in Member States between monitoring visits, update its information and invite national authorities to give feedback.

b) Promoting Human Rights at local and regional level

31. With the aid of institutional partners within the Council of Europe – Commissioner for Human Rights, Committee of Ministers and its Steering Committee on Human Rights (CDDH) – and outside – European Union Fundamental Rights Agency – the Congress will also seek to promote human rights at local and regional level.

32. Due to the close relationship between citizens and their elected representatives, local and regional bodies are best placed to identify problems which arise and take action to solve them. Local authorities' responsibilities continue to increase along with their decision-making powers. Their awareness of relevant human rights issues and discrimination issues (such as gender parity, rights of the LGBT, disabled persons etc.) is therefore crucial. When, for example, mayors take decisions on events that may raise issues of public order, they may enter into conflict with fundamental liberties such as the freedom of expression and the right of assembly. The Congress has put on its agenda the task of raising awareness on human rights among elected representatives in Member States and, with this in mind, it is developing tools such as indicators for data collection and analysis.

33. An information note on human rights and local authorities is henceforth appended to each country monitoring report. It is also intended to prepare five-yearly reports based on a comparative analysis of the situation in the Member States in order to pinpoint common and recurrent issues, which can then be the subject of awareness-raising campaigns through events such as the European Local Democracy Week.

34. The Congress will convene an international conference on raising local authorities' awareness of human rights, in order to debate questions relating to the implementation of human rights at local level and to propose a Congress action plan on this issue.

c) Observing local elections

35. From 2013 to 2016, the scope of election observation exercises will be extended so as to make the Council of Europe's Member States a zone of free and fair local elections. To this end, the Congress will step up cooperation with its institutional partners within the Organisation, in particular the Venice Commission and the Parliamentary Assembly, and outside, in particular the EU Committee of the Regions, so that the activities are conducted in a concerted, complementary manner, thereby avoiding duplication of effort.

36. Implementation of the recommendations made following observation exercises will also be more closely monitored, both by systematically taking account of their conclusions in the monitoring of local and regional democracy and by means of increased dialogue with the Committee of Ministers and the Member States.

37. To make election observation more effective, the Congress will develop its observation training programme. These training courses may concern specific aspects of election observation.

d) Fostering citizen participation

38. The quality of democracy also depends on the trust that citizens place in their institutions and on their participation in the democratic process. As local authorities are closest to the

grassroots, they are best placed to take positive action and encourage participatory democracy.

39. The involvement of citizens and the development of dialogue with their elected representatives are vital at all levels of governance. This dialogue must include all local residents without exception, in particular groups which currently feel excluded – young people, migrants, foreign nationals, minorities, Roma, etc.,- in the best interests of both the majority and the minority of the population.

40. The Congress, with the help of various partners and civil society, intends to contribute to the development of local and regional initiatives for increased participation of all citizens. In this context, it will continue to promote the European Local Democracy Week which makes citizens aware of the importance of participatory democracy in a growing number of towns and regions across Europe. It will step up the involvement of towns and associations and foster interaction with other programmes, such as the European Union “A Europe for Citizens” programme.

41. The action taken by the Congress will also facilitate intercultural/interreligious dialogue at local level and make it easier for municipalities to devise intercultural policies. To develop active citizenship, the Congress will support education for democratic citizenship activities and human rights education.

II. Rising to the new challenges resulting from the economic and financial crisis

42. The Congress’ adjustment to changes has taken place in a European context which, since 2008, has been characterised by a particularly serious economic and financial crisis. The debt crisis which is affecting most European countries, toxic loans and budget austerity policies all also have consequences for local and regional authorities. In particular, they lead to budgetary choices which may affect local and regional authorities’ ability to discharge their remit. The greatest threat concerns social budgets and assistance to the most vulnerable groups.

43. The crisis is accompanied by other challenges – mistrust towards political leaders, increasing voter abstention, disaffection with public life, isolationism, increasing populism.

44. However, the crisis also provides an opportunity to review existing models and methods of operation and makes it necessary to find fresh responses to the challenges posed.

45. One way to support self-governance and help local and regional authorities face new challenges, is to ensure the sustainable development as well as social and economic modernisation of societies, especially in the field of new energies, information communication, green technologies and the environment.

46. The Congress will particularly concentrate, within its ambitious and proactive approach with respect to its future priorities, upon the evaluation of measures taken by member states to overcome the effects of the debt crisis to determine whether they are in line with the “European Charter of Local Self-Government” and the “Council of Europe Reference Framework for Regional Democracy” and whether a fair distribution of the financial burden between the levels of government according to the principle of proportionality is guaranteed.

a) Taking action in response to threats to local and regional funding

47. In times of economic crisis, budgetary choices are difficult and States may be very tempted to reconsider the way in which resources are distributed, often to the detriment of local and regional authorities. In accordance with its statutory responsibilities, the Congress must pay special attention to the consolidation of resources allocated to local and regional authorities, in order to counteract the negative effects of the crisis and to recognise those authorities’ essential role in democracy.

48. The Congress will continue to promote adequate funding of their missions and support the fair sharing and redistribution of funds both of national and international origin, thus

guaranteeing that the budgets enable them to continue fulfilling their duties in terms of providing services to local inhabitants.

49. It will also address issues concerning financial and budgetary decentralisation, decision-making autonomy and the means of making the best use of local resources.

50. The Congress will also help to promote solidarity between local and regional authorities in the same country or between different countries and at different levels of governance, so that they can seek joint solutions, particularly with regard to meeting their debts and dealing with the problem of toxic loans.

b) Contributing to discussion of local and regional authority reform

51. In many Council of Europe Member States, the crisis has increased the commitment to reform and restructuring of the different levels of local and regional authorities. While such reforms may in some cases prove to be necessary or useful, they should always be carried out in the interests of local inhabitants and in compliance with the commitments entered into by States under the European Charter of Local Self-Government.

52. The Congress will ensure that reforming and restructuring of local authorities are done in consultation and dialogue with the national associations in accordance with the Charter and the Reference Framework for Regional Democracy, and that these are aimed at strengthening local and regional democracy, not weakening it.

53. The Congress will undertake to reflect on the role of intermediate local authorities, the evolution of regionalisation and the reform of different levels of local and regional governance.

c) Promoting good governance

54. In response to the multiple challenges of economic and financial crisis, the Congress supports all initiatives to promote good governance, which rely on a transparent management of public goods. It is in this spirit that it will continue to support the establishment of organs of administrative and financial control (such as mediators and Territorial Court of Auditors).

55. Examples of good practices of functioning and management of local and regional institutions that will have been identified will be shared with interested national, local and regional authorities.

d) Fostering social inclusion

56. Local and regional authorities bear great responsibility for ensuring respect for their citizens' fundamental rights. Protection of this kind is particularly necessary for the most vulnerable groups, which require closer attention and greater efforts. It is especially important in a difficult economic situation, which involves severe financial restrictions and leads to community isolationism and rejection of others on the part of some citizens.

57. The financial and economic crisis may also increase rural exodus and step up problems linked to the uncontrolled development of cities. The Congress will support a balanced approach in the development of societies, while striving for a dynamism of rural regions on the one hand and creating the necessary conditions for social integration of new urban populations on the other.

58. Local and regional elected representatives' determination to develop or maintain good conditions for the integration of vulnerable groups, including Roma and Travellers, will have the Congress' backing and assistance too.

59. It is with this in mind that the Congress has launched a European Alliance of Cities and Regions for Roma Inclusion, the purpose of which is to form a framework for cooperation and exchanges to help cities and regions to strengthen their capacity in this area, implement effective integration policies and establish mutual understanding at the grassroots.

60. From 2013 to 2016, the Alliance will conduct a series of thematic and cross-sectoral activities supported by the Congress and its partners, including the Special Representative of the Council of Europe Secretary General on Roma issues, and designed to meet the priority needs of its members in the field. This activity will be followed up at political level by resolutions addressed to local and regional authorities and recommendations to national governments.

61. The Congress will also continue to actively contribute to Campaigns and actions of the Council of Europe, especially on sexual violence against children, trafficking in Human Beings as well as the integration of disabled people.

e) Strengthening elected representatives' commitment to ethical conduct and to combating corruption at local and regional level

62. One effect of the economic crisis has been to reveal and underline people's aspiration for greater transparency and integrity among political players and in the authorities which they run. It has therefore made it all the more necessary for local and regional representatives to act in accordance with ethical values and to combat corruption.

63. The conference held by the Congress in Messina (Italy) in 2010 confirmed the risks facing local and regional authorities in performing their duties and underlined the importance of combating corruption at local level. After the conference, the Congress launched a series of activities and studies on this topic.

64. From 2013 to 2016, the Congress will move on to the operational phase of the activity on integrity and corruption at local and regional level which is to be carried out in conjunction with the Committee of the Regions.

65. The Congress will propose various measures at grassroots level, taking into consideration the results of the studies carried out, in particular a survey on good practices for fostering transparency at local and regional level.

66. In this activity, the Congress will adopt a cross-sectoral approach and involve other international organisations such as the OECD and specialised bodies of the Council of Europe (Group of States against Corruption (GRECO)) and the European Commission (Anti-Fraud Office (OLAF)).

III. Developing co-operation and partnerships

67. With its reform, the Congress decided to strengthen its partnerships and to establish new forms of cooperation and action directly related to its statutory competencies. Under these new, more targeted and more practical arrangements, the Congress will draw on its members and the potential for peer-to-peer work which they offer. It will seek to provide practical solutions to specific or cross-sectoral problems identified during its monitoring and election observation activities.

68. It will also take part in the programmes and action plans developed by the Council of Europe, by providing specific local and regional democracy activity input.

69. At the same time, it will focus on trans-frontier and inter-regional cooperation and assisting reforms in countries of the southern Mediterranean and the Eastern Partnership, under the Council of Europe policy towards neighbouring countries and access extra-budgetary funding for these activities.

a) Targeted cooperation

70. Local and regional authorities have become major political stakeholders in shaping democratic political systems. Their elected officials must act as facilitators of democracy

within their local areas and regions. The action of the Congress will therefore mainly concern the quality of local governance and the consolidation of reforms in this field, the improvement of the leadership capacities of local elected representatives and their ability to engage in constructive dialogue with both central government and local inhabitants.

71. The Congress will work in close cooperation with the different Council of Europe bodies, in the context of the programmes and action plans of the Organisation as a whole.

72. Its programmes will cover Member States such as Ukraine, Moldova and those from the South Caucasus and the Balkans.

b) Local and regional democracy in Europe's neighbouring countries

73. The Congress adopted, during its 23rd session, a Resolution and a Recommendation on the "the changes underway in the Arab countries - opportunities for local and regional democracy" as well as a Resolution on "the Council of Europe new policy towards neighbouring regions: role of the Congress". These texts take a close look at the way in which the Congress can contribute to the development of local and regional democracy in countries of the Southern Mediterranean, in particular Morocco and Tunisia. The Congress thus decided to take the necessary administrative and regulatory steps which will allow it to adopt a special "Partner for local democracy status" that may be granted to elected representatives of local authorities in those neighbouring countries.

74. On the basis of these texts and in the light of the dialogue engaged with these countries, the Congress will propose activities aimed at promoting the principles enshrined in the European Charter of Local Self-Government and the Council of Europe Reference Framework for Regional Democracy. Extra-budgetary resources shall be made available for these activities.

c) Inter-territorial cooperation

75. The Congress has many years' experience in the field of trans-frontier and inter-regional cooperation. The Seminar held in Innsbruck in May 2012 outlines the future framework of its activities on the subject.

76. In the follow up of the Seminar, the Governance Committee will prepare, in 2013, a report on trans-frontier cooperation, capacity building, knowledge sharing and networking, which will also establish the main thrusts of future activities.

77. The Congress will continue to promote the implementation of the 1980 European Outline Convention on Trans-frontier Cooperation between Territorial Communities or Authorities and its additional protocols, in particular Protocol No 3, which opens the way for trans-frontier cooperation between EU and non-EU local authorities. It will also continue its discussions in this area with the EU Committee of the Regions, with which it has established an active cooperation.

78. The Congress will continue to contribute to the development of various forms of inter-territorial cooperation.

d) Cooperation with the European Union

79. The Council of Europe has, over the past few years, intensified its cooperation with the European Union, particularly through joint projects and programmes. The Congress is also contributing to this process by adding a dimension of local and regional democracy and governance.

80. It will continue to hold regular exchanges and to organise joint activities with the Committee of the Regions in the context of its Statutory Resolution, the Memorandum of Understanding signed between the Council of Europe and the European Union and the revised Cooperation agreement with the Committee of the Regions signed in 2009. The

cooperation will be based on reciprocity and complementarity and will seek to optimize efforts, ensure efficiency and avoid duplications.

81. The two institutions will coordinate their respective positions and work on issues of common interest, with the main objective of improving local and regional democracy. They will, in particular, co-operate in the fields of local elections observation, law enforcement and counteracting corruption in local and regional administrations. The Congress will give visibility to its partnership with the Committee of the Regions and will seek to increase the impact of common actions.

82. The Congress will play an active role also within the Conference of the Regional and Local Authorities for the Eastern Partnership (CORLEAP), in which the Congress holds observer status. On Euro-Mediterranean cooperation, the Congress will take part in the Euro-Mediterranean Regional and Local Assembly (ARLEM) organised by the Committee of the Regions.

83. Finally, building on the know-how of the Fundamental Rights Agency in the area of analyses, surveys and questionnaires, the Congress will carry forward its work on human rights indicators designed to help elected representatives who wish to conduct policies which genuinely respect human rights.

The Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe

The voice of Cities and Regions in Europe

- The Congress is a political assembly composed of 636 elected officials - mayors, governors, councillors, etc. – representing the 200 000 local and regional authorities of the 47 Council of Europe member states.

It speaks for Europe's local and regional elected representatives.

- The Congress promotes devolution through transfer of political powers and financial resources to the municipalities and regions.

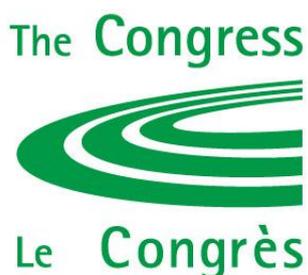
It ensures that policy decisions are made at a level closest to the citizens.

- The Congress guarantees civic participation and fosters a positive perception of local identities.

It strives for living grassroots democracy in an ever more globalised world.

- The Congress reinforces local and regional democracy by permanently monitoring the due application of the European Charter of Local Self-Government, observing local and regional elections, and issuing recommendations to the governments of the 47 Council of Europe member states.

It upholds local self-government, together with democracy and human rights at local level.



Congress of Local and Regional Authorities of the Council of Europe
Avenue de l'Europe – 67075 Strasbourg Cedex France
Tel : + 33 (0)3 88 41 21 10 – congress.web@coe.int – www.coe.int/congress